

How To Be A Christian

(Br. Ralph Gaunt, Fort Collins Convention, 1970)

It's a real pleasure for us to be here. We bring you the love and greetings from your brethren in Jackson, Michigan. We're frankly enthused and excited about this convention. We hope to share with you some of our enthusiasm and some of our excitement. One of the brethren asked me this morning if we were going to mention about a good old fashioned convention. "A good old-fashioned convention!" Do you know what I thought about? I thought about the primitive church, way back in the first century—this is what I thought about—this kind of a convention. And my mind has been in this frame of reference for some little time, and I wish you would continue this frame of reference in connection with our talk and our remarks now. The gentle simplicity of primitive Christianity! And if this is an old-fashioned convention, this is the kind of simplicity we want—a gentle convention—gentle simplicity—primitive Christianity—primitive doctrines—doctrines of the apostles—the doctrine of the ransom—the doctrine of looking forward to the kingdom—these are the things we get excited about! So if this is an old-fashioned convention, we hope it is just old-fashioned enough to resemble the conventions of the first century A.D.—this old-fashioned!

Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We claim this precious promise at this convention. We're met together as Christians! We're met together under the banner of Christ! We have the promise that he would be here at this convention, and give us the same spirit that actuated the church back in the first century. We claim this precious promise that our Lord is here with us in spirit. We desire to be with our Lord in spirit. We desire our Lord to direct and guide this convention. But to properly claim this promise we must comply with the conditions. There's something for us to do! It's not completely passive—we don't just sit back and say "Lord fill me with thy spirit." It just doesn't work that way. So what are the conditions? In my name! Do we truly claim His name? Are we really true Christians? That's a searching question! Are you true Christians? and am I really a true Christian? If the testimony of our hearts and lips are that of a true Christian, then we have a right to claim this promise. Are we really met together in His name? Remember, the promise is to those who are meeting together in His name—the name of our present Lord. Are we a credit, are we an honor to our present Lord?

Let's examine some of the aspects of what it means to really be a Christian—and remember, I'm asking myself these questions. Rom. 8:9, "But ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." The inference in this scripture is that if we have the spirit of the Lord, then we are his. If we have the spirit of Christ we will manifest it in our words and actions. Likewise, if we have the spirit of the world it will be manifest in our words and actions. Truth will show out! What characterizes the spirit of the world?

—envy, strife, backbiting, slander, selfishness—not very nice things to mention—these are things which seemingly make the world go around. The spirit of the world operates on the principle of building one up by contrasting our superior qualities to the weaknesses of others. This is so simple a principle that it hardly needs to be mentioned. This is the thing, to make somebody look bad so the person doing the talking can look good by contrast. In contrast to these qualities, the spirit of the Lord is manifest by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness (here’s the gentle simplicity we spoke about), goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Which of these qualities will be manifest at this convention? Just who are we? What kind of a convention will this be? Will the spirit of the Lord reside here? If so, then we can rightly claim the promise that the Lord will be in our midst—it’s just that simple.

Often we have heard brethren testify that it’s easy to be a Christian while at a convention, but when they have to go home and live in the world, they have problems living up to what they desire. We wonder if this is really accurate. We have observed sometimes at conventions the spirit of getting together in little groups, and talking about the other groups—and some of the categories involved seem to come under the spirit of the world rather than under the spirit of the Lord. This is sad to behold, but these are the facts. Talking about our brethren, to their downgrading, is not Christian fellowship! Have you noticed that talking about our brethren is usually derogatory—usually of a down-grading nature? Let us at this convention not permit ourselves to indulge in this type of conversation! The spirit of the world, envy, strife, backbiting, slander, should find no lodging in our hearts as Christians—it should find no expression on our lips—it should find no dwelling place in the mind!

There is an interesting observation by Bro. Russell on Reprint page 5274. In reference to our brethren, he says, “Their flesh, justified by the redeemer and consecrated, becomes His flesh. Who therefore is a fault finder and busybody in the affairs of the brethren, is doing this against the flesh of Jesus. ‘I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.’”

If we have been wrongfully used by our brethren, how do we react? And some of us have been so used. There are two ways to react! One way is to spread the word all around that Bro. X was unjust and unkind because he was against us. The other way is to realize that if we are part of the body of Christ, we should rejoice to be a part of his suffering. Granted, this is easier said than done. I’m not about to say that when somebody shamefully uses us or shamefully speaks about us that it’s easy to just keep our mouth shut and not say anything in retaliation—it hurts, and when we’re hurt sometimes we tend to bite back. But remember, this is the spirit of the world! We should not think it strange when fiery trials come, even if they come from our brethren. Remember, it was Jesus’ own Jewish brethren who crucified him. Right from the beginning it was a brother that killed a brother, and it’s no different today, so we shouldn’t think it strange and we

shouldn't think it unusual that this is the situation. Cain killed Abel—our Lord's very brethren crucified him.

We would like you to make a silent affirmation to yourself—"I will try to be a true Christian at this convention."

We are aware that some of our brethren do not see things as we do. Let's let the Lord be the judge. Let us, at this convention, so concern ourselves with Jesus Christ and him crucified, and the blood of Christ, and his carcass of truth, that we can get excited—that we can get enthused—that we can take pleasure in the truth. Think how good we'll feel next week if we do this! When this convention comes to an end, think how good we'll feel. This is what gets me excited because I visualize this kind of a convention—where Jesus Christ and him crucified is spoken of, and the blood of Christ is emphasized—where the doctrines of present truth are emphasized—and it's done in love, in gentleness, in simplicity, and in kindness. And may we remember also that some who violently disagree with us on some doctrines, pray to the same heavenly father that we pray to, and that they are our brethren and may need our prayers and love. Let's consider that they need our fervent Christian love. Let's fulfill our responsibility as brethren. Remember that one of the principles in physics is that nature abhors a vacuum. A vacuum is one of the most difficult things to form in physics that there is. So in this principle, if we rid our hearts and minds of the spirit of the world—let's say we clean out the bad thoughts—what do we put in? We must replace these thoughts with the spirit of the Lord: with love, and joy, and peace, and longsuffering, and gentleness, and goodness, and faith, and meekness, and temperance—these qualities and these traits will make us fit for the master's use. These are not just beautiful phrases! Let's give them two feet to walk with, and two hands to work with!

LOVE: Why did we come to this convention—why? That's a good question! We believe that it was love! We believe that it was love for the truth, for the brethren, and for our Heavenly Father's character. May this love be fervent; may it be warm; may it draw us closer to the Lord in a deeper appreciation of His infinite goodness to us. May our love of truth and righteousness be increased. You remember the intimate love and friendship of David and Jonathan, because they loved a third thing—truth and righteousness and our Heavenly Father. So by our love of truth and righteousness and by our love of our Heavenly Father we will love as brethren. May our love for the brethren be deepened! May we, at this convention, get to know our brethren better, and this will come through our love of the truth. The truth is going to be emphasized and the doctrines are going to be emphasized over and over again—which is the only way that we can understand about the loving Heavenly Father's character and the plan that he has for us.

JOY: Have you ever met a person who was afraid to be happy, afraid to really and truly experience some joy and satisfaction in the plain simple pleasures of life? There are

people like that. We believe that the truth is meant to make us joyful—the doctrines of the truth—the “magic” of the truth (and I use the word in the full meaning) “magic” of the truth that comes only through the Holy Spirit. This should bring us joy and gladness of heart. It should inspire us and stimulate our minds, that when this convention is over, the expression of our hearts would be “praise the Lord, thank the Lord, for he hath dealt bountifully with us.” We should also try to impart this joy to others, for happiness is possible only when it is shared. We realize that there are some who will be critical of a report of this convention. If they shut us off and don’t want to hear us give them a good report, then here again, that’s their business—our business is to have the proper attitude.

PEACE; Can we forget the cares back home and can we forget our business and whatever our pressing cares are, and have inward peace and inward joy? Can we have peace here at this convention? Can we have peace from the pressing cares of life? Our troubles and problems should be left at home, and also our Ecclesia problems—they should be left at home also. Let’s have a primitive convention of gentle simplicity. Let’s have an old-fashioned convention!

LONGSUFFERING: When we think of how longsuffering our Heavenly Father is with us and with our weaknesses, surely we can be a little longsuffering with our brethren. If our loving Heavenly Father, who is a perfect, divine, immortal being, can be so long-suffering with us, who are we to demand or even expect perfection from our brethren? And sometimes we’re so critical! It’s good, up to a point, if constructive, helpful criticism is given, but when it goes over the boundary (and too often it does), then it becomes hyper-criticism and hyper-sensitiveness—just looking for flaws and looking for little things.

GENTLENESS: Gentleness is such a precious quality! Are we gentle? Are we gentlemen? Are the sisters gentle-ladies in their talk with one another? Could we be called ladies and gentlemen—is that a true-nomer for us? Oh how we love it when the brethren are gentle with us! Don’t we love it? Isn’t it wonderful when our brethren are gentle with us? But what about it when we’re with them? Wouldn’t it be just as nice if we could be just as gentle with them. You remember when the Lord fed Elijah under the juniper tree after he ran away from Jezebel—the Lord didn’t use harsh treatment with him; no, he fed him with an angel. We’ve often thought this is a good lesson for us. It is much easier to take a rebuke or a correction when it is given in gentleness. Let us deal gently with our brethren!

GOODNESS: Goodness is a basic quality for the Christian. Goodness has the thought of doing for our brethren; seeking ways of being of service to them.

FAITH: This can be developed in many ways at a convention. We have found one way to develop faith is in close fellowship with our brethren. When we see how the Lord has

led our brethren through trying experiences, we are led to look back at our own experiences and see the guiding hand of our Father—this builds faith. Let us share some of these experiences with our brethren. We were discussing back home the other day about Thomas, doubting Thomas. Some of us can sympathize a little bit with Thomas because some of us might not be as strong in faith as we desire. One thing our faith should realize, that with all the problems among the Bible Students today, we should have a gentle faith, and a strong faith, and realize that in these very experiences the Lord is going to bless us, and bless us richly, if we let him. He has all the means in his storehouse of truth. The riches of our Heavenly Father belong to us, and if we let him, he will bless us—this comes by faith.

MEEKNESS: This is a quality which is most valuable to us—it means meekness to understand and appreciate the other person's point of view. This does not mean that we will necessarily agree with him, but often if we take the course of meekness we will learn and comprehend things which we have never noticed otherwise. Let us seek meekness in our fellowship together. Let us use meekness in listening to the discourses from this platform. Sometimes the Lord is trying to tell us something, if we will listen.

TEMPERANCE: This is discipline, or self-control. We believe that this is very important. Just plain disciplining ourselves—here is where we all have a chance to really work on leaving the propensities of the flesh at home, and putting in its place the spirit of the Lord. Self-control is something that we have to work out by ourselves. No one can give us self-control on a silver plate. We must do it ourselves. We must control the old nature with its desires. People are usually good at what they work at! If people will concentrate their energies on something, no matter what it is—husbands, on being good husbands; wives, on being good wives—they'll become good at it. (Husbands, being good husbands—you know it took me a while to get that through my head—one of the sisters in Jackson helped me with that.) But people are good at what they work at! So what we're trying to inculcate is the control, the absolute control of our fleshly propensities—make the old flesh do as the New Creature wants to do. We are really desperately in earnest as New Creatures! It is a very, very real battle, a very real fight, it's a fight of life or death—just as simple as that! So let's work at it? Let's really and truly do some plain old hard work if you please. To be a true Christian is to keep our flesh under control, and let the New Creature tell the flesh what to do; not vice-versa—we're not to let the flesh tell the New Creature what to do.

There is a way to the common human flesh which is common to most people. It is the desire for an interest in something bad. Think for a moment! If an accident happens down on the corner, what happens? Almost immediately a crowd of people gather. They didn't come to see if they could help. They came to look at someone else's plight and misfortune. Now we hope we're not this way. If a bad storm or a tornado goes through an area, what happens? People come from all over to see the death and destruction.

They have to get out the National Guard just to control the mobs that come to see someone else's misfortune. If there is a bad story to tell about someone, the news of it travels like wildfire. It's sad to relate that this is even true among Bible Students. Let something bad happen and the news travels from coast to coast with almost the speed of light. But what about something good? It goes very very slow, if at all. But this is the way of the flesh. As New Creatures in Christ Jesus we should think just the reverse of this. Think of the good news of the Fort Collins convention that will go all over the country—that it was a good convention—that would really be something wouldn't it? It is so easy for a person to fall into this temptation and begin spreading tales about other brethren or other Ecclesias or other conventions, or the activities and services or other groups. When we analyze it, most of it is uncomplimentary. Most of it is downgrading. Why? Why? Are we living after the flesh or after the spirit? If we have put on the mind of Christ we should seek to know the good things about our brethren. We should be desirous of hearing of the success of our brethren and of their Ecclesias in their activities. We should be desirous of learning of the victories of other brethren. We should be desirous of hearing of the blessings received at a convention. The same mercy that we desire for ourselves, we should give to others. Now I use the word "mercy" in its absolute sense, because sometimes the brethren need our mercy. If we have the proper degree of love for our brethren we will desire to know of their victories, we will desire to aid them in attaining those victories. When we say "the proper degree of love for our brethren," just what do we mean? Now I realize that in some minds this may have a sickly connotation—but this is the final test, believe it or not—love for the brethren. This is what is meant to be a Christian: the proper degree of love for our brethren—that we would be willing to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Our lesson is HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN—so let's look to Jesus to see what kind of love he had for his brethren. Those whom he called brethren were not all perfect—in fact none of them were, yet why could he call them brethren? Peter even denied him, but Jesus still loved Peter. It was said of Jesus that he was not ashamed to call them brethren. Would you and I call those who deny us and backbite us our brethren? Are we ashamed to call them brethren? These are good heart-searching questions.

1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." John here is laying great importance on love of the brethren. We do not believe that John is saying that if you love the brethren you will have eternal life—this is not the thought. The real meaning is just the other way around. If we were of the world, and worldly minded, then we would love the things of the world. If we are dead to the world, and have become New Creatures in Christ Jesus, then we should love our fellow New Creatures. One of the evidences that we are New Creatures is that we love other New Creatures. We can appreciate New Creatures as New Creatures, and we can love them as such. The worldly minded certainly do not love them, nor appreciate them. They think we are rather strange; we are misfits in the world. But if we are New

Creatures we should have this witness that we love our brethren, our fellow New Creatures. We should seek to have the fellowship of fellow New Creatures. In fact it is vital that we do.

We were interested while looking through the Reprints to find the story of the Canary and the Sparrow. It goes something like this: A story is told of a gentleman who had a beautiful singing canary. A friend who owned a sparrow wanted to see if the canary could teach the sparrow how to sing by keeping the canary in the cage with the sparrow. So he borrowed the canary. Instead, however, of teaching the sparrow to sing, the poor canary got so timid being in the company of a strange bird, that it stopped singing altogether, and did nothing but chirp like the sparrow. The owner then took it back but still the canary would not sing. It then occurred to him to put the canary beside another canary that sang well. This had the desired effect, and, regaining the old note, the canary sang as beautifully as ever. Many Christians, like the canary, go into the strange atmosphere and company of the worldlings, and, like the canary, they not only do not teach the world to sing their happy song of praise, but they cannot sing the old song of praise themselves, and soon they sing the sorrowful note of the world. The best thing for such is to go back again into the more genial society of happy rejoicing saints from whom they will learn to sing the more glorious notes of praise again, making melody in their hearts. And this is what we're here for at this convention. We want to be in the happy rejoicing society of genial Christians. And we trust that this convention is just that. We want to have an old-fashioned convention that goes all the way back to the first century, and remember the gentle simplicity of primitive Christianity—that's the kind of old-fashioned convention we want to have—have the same spirit that actuated those conventions back then.

In Eph. 4:1-6 Paul gives us a good basis for Christian unity, "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

This is the same truth that was taught back in the early Church. So this is the connecting link—the spirit of God—one spirit. It's the only way we can get the truth out of the bible. Those truths were put there under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God, and there's no way to get those things out—no way under the sun to get those things out—except by the Holy Spirit. And if we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in our midst, you can't keep us apart. And this is so where the doctrines of the Lord are held high. The doctrine of the ransom, the doctrine of the resurrection, the doctrine of restitution, the doctrine of the Lord's presence, the blessings through Israel, and all of the things that we know to be the truth—when these things are held high, then we are drawn together. Paul

is here teaching us that the true Christian unity is a possibility, it's an ideal. But let us note the conditions under which it is obtained—this beautiful ideal. You know, we have on this college campus, as well as all other campuses all around the country, groups called activists. There are idealists and there are activists, and they are both good words. We are idealists—don't we have high ideals? I remember one time of being accused of being an idealist. That doesn't bother me any more, nor would it bother me to be called an activist. If we have proper ideals, if we are active in the Lord's work, then we can properly be called idealists and activists. Paul is defining the basis of unity, but first he suggests that all so united must have lowliness of mind. Lowliness of mind is good to see in the brethren. It is good to see someone who would desire his brother to receive the honor—preferring one another. It is a blessing to us to see true humility and true lowliness of mind, because sometimes the brethren lose that. We pray that none of us ever lose this—this is an ideal that we have. Paul suggests that we have meekness and a mutual bearing with one another's weaknesses, covering all such things with a mantle of love, and a constant watchfulness, lest we grow weary in so doing. But then he lays down the primal basis for this unity—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope—and these are the doctrines of present truth—these are the things that we will hear at this convention. That's the reason we came here to this convention, because we love the truth and we want to be built up in love, love of truth, love of these doctrines.

We hear so much about unity these days. We not only hear it among our brethren, but the cry of the Ecumenical spirit is heard throughout Christendom. On the surface it sounds like the right thing, but when it is analyzed it goes contrary to Paul's analysis of real Christian unity. The Ecumenical spirit says that you believe anything you want, but let's all get together, put our money into one pot, forget our doctrines, present a common front, and we will be strong. Let's get so busy doing something that we will forget that we are enemies of each other. This sounds all too plausible, and appeals to many, many people. This is dangerous—this is a very dangerous attitude for a Christian. We are not free to believe and teach anything we want! Where this condition prevails we do not find real Christian unity. If the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope are preached, and believed, then you don't even have to talk about unity—it comes automatically. In fact you can't keep the brethren apart. These are the facts! Where the Truth is emphasized (and it will be emphasized at this convention) love and unity come automatically. So we believe this will bring about a great deal of love and unity at this convention, because the doctrines of the truth will be preached here.

If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. This spirit is promised for the guidance of the entire church, and it is impossible to think that the spirit would lead some into truth, and others into the exact contradiction of the truth. Let us seek (I'll make that a little stronger), let us pray to be guided by the spirit of the Lord, and not for our own desires for honor and leadership among the brethren. Where the spirit of the Lord is honestly and truly sought after, we believe that truth and love and unity will be found.

On the contrary, where the spirit of self enters in, where a selfish spirit enters in, there is always the possibility of being led away from truth and from love and from unity. And this is exactly what has happened we believe, in some cases—and yet, we are not the judge. Let the Lord be the judge.

The apostle Paul offers us some excellent advice on how to be a Christian. We have been dealing somewhat with the negative aspects of it—what not to do. Now let's turn to Rom. 12 and get some good positives—things we should do. And remember, that our thinking is pervaded by an old-fashioned convention.

Rom. 12:9-21, “Let love be without dissimulation, without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil [have an intense hatred for that which is not true, not pure, sinful], cleave to that which is good [at the cost of all hazards—and sometimes to the cost of our own prejudices—it's amazing what we can do sometimes if we really work on our prejudices.]. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love. [This would cause us to look for ways to be a blessing to our brethren, helping them, and not just cutting them down if we disagree with them.] In honor preferring one another [not always trying to set up our views as the standard—but when any opportunity comes up for honor, we should sincerely desire that our brother receive it instead of ourselves. Really, the important thing is not who performs the service, but that the service is accomplished. No jealousies should arise because someone else received a blessing and we didn't.] Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. [When an opportunity comes to be of service to the Lord, or to the brethren, let us enter that service fervently, with loving hearts. The Lord is not pleased with a “do I have to do it” attitude—the Lord is pleased with a “here am I, send me” attitude.] Rejoice in hope [we have a precious hope of glory, honor and immortality, and the Lord gives us ample help in attaining it. Rejoicing in hope—hope of an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven]. Patient in tribulation. [Peter said that if we suffer wrongfully and take it patiently, it is acceptable with God. And this is the hard part. If we are misrepresented by our brethren, let us take it patiently. As footstep followers of the master, we can be assured that we will be misrepresented—let's not be surprised at it, but let us take it patiently.] Continuing instant in prayer. [We should feel this close a communion with our heavenly Father that we can go to him at any time of the day or night and know that he will hear us.] Distributing to the necessity of saints. Given to hospitality. [All that we have belongs to the Lord, so what difference does it really make if we use it or if our brother uses it? Paul said that the house of Stephanas was addicted to the ministry of the saints. You know we hear so much nowadays about addiction, and it's usually in a bad sense, but here's an addiction in a good sense. Wouldn't you like to be addicted to doing good to the brethren and to ministering to the saints?]

Being a real Christian involves a lot, and there is much more that we could say, but we've only had time to touch a few points. We want this to be an old-fashioned convention. We

want the spirit of the Lord here. That gives us a responsibility to behave ourselves as Christian gentlemen and Christian ladies in the full sense of that term—true Christian gentlemen, and true Christian ladies.

There's one more aspect of being a Christian which we feel is important; and it's a matter of our worship. Just how do we worship and what we worship? We are reminded of the experience of the Apostle John when receiving the vision in Revelation. He was so awe inspired with the vision that he fell down to worship the angel that showed him these glorious things. Do you remember that the angel told him "see thou do it not"—"see thou do it not, for I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them that keep the sayings of this book, worship God." Rotherham is even stronger. Let's read Rotherham—Rev. 22:8, (and the angel in Rotherham is translated messenger) so let's take the advice of the messenger, "And I John am he that was hearing and seeing these things, and when I had heard and seen I fell down at the feet of the messenger who had been pointing out unto me these things, and he saith unto me, see thou do it not. A fellow servant am I of thee and of thy brethren the prophets and of them who keep the words of this scroll—unto God do homage." There is a very real danger that, after having read and studied and accepted the Volumes as the harvest message, we try to fall down and worship the messenger. We should remember that he was only the instrument that the Lord used. The harvest message really came from the returned Lord—we worship him, worship the returned Lord. Let's take the advice of the messenger—don't worship the messenger. The very messenger himself told us, don't worship me, worship God, worship his truth, worship the Lord. If we are real Christians we will be very careful to place our worship in the one whose name we claim. Are we true Christians? Are we real Christians? We believe that there has been somewhat of a backlash action among the brethren that because some are laying aside portions of the harvest message and attempting to minimize the work of that servant, that it has given rise to the danger of swinging too far the other way, and placing more stress on the messenger than is advisable. Sometimes we hear more about Bro. Russell than we do about the Lord. We believe that the harvest message was given to us by that wise and faithful servant, Bro. Russell, and that it is a true message—and we honor the messenger by taking his advice—"Don't worship me, worship God." You know, sometimes we're accused of being Russellites. We might mention that there are worse names to be called. But wouldn't you rather be accused of being a Christian? It doesn't bother us to be called Russellites—but let us be called Christians! If we bear the name Christian, then we should worship the one whose name we bear!

Let's return for a moment to the text with which we began. Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We sincerely desire to claim this promise at this convention—to be met together in His name, that He can be in our midst—for the Lord has lovingly extended it to us. Let us be worthy of the name "Christian."