

“<sup>16</sup>Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf . . . . <sup>23</sup>‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is constructive. <sup>24</sup>Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others . . . . <sup>31</sup>So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10).

What is a Christian? In a letter written to Diognetus in the second century, an anonymous writer described a strange people who are in the world but not of it.

Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect . . . They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food and the other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the unusual form of their own citizenship.

They live in their own native lands, but as aliens . . . Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.

They marry and have children just like everyone else, but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws and go beyond the laws in their own lives.

They love everyone, but are persecuted by all. They are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor. Their names are blackened, and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others.

When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being give new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility.

The letter written to Diognetus was written over 1700 years ago. So, how accurate is it for us today. When non-Christians look at us, what are they seeing? Are they seeing someone who is living in this world as an alien—as a stranger on earth longing for a better country—a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:13-16)? Are they seeing someone who behaves respectfully to others no matter how outrageously they are treated (Romans 12:17)? Are they seeing someone who loves everyone—someone who loves his neighbor as himself, even if he or she is persecuted for it (Mark 12:31)? Or are they seeing someone who belies that second century observation of Christianity?

Unfortunately, because of our sinful nature, many who call themselves Christians today are guilty of killing babies and sharing beds outside the estate of marriage, thereby identifying themselves more with society than God's Word. Many professing Christians today give ample reasons to cause non-Christians to hate them and treat them with hostility.

No matter how one cuts it, describing what a Christian is by how they act in society will always come up short because of sin. There is only one way to describe what a Christian is that is accurate at all times and in all ages. It is a description that is true because it has nothing to do with the person himself, but with God! It is He who made us and we are His (Psalm 100:3). The only truly accurate description of a Christian, therefore, is that a Christian is a "gift". Being a Christian is a gift from God who chose us in Christ before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). How a Christian can be described in this life is in direct correlation as to how that gift is seen. The more value we put on the gift, the more we will be seen in the description in the letter to Diognetus. The less value put on the tremendous gift we have been given, the blurrier the lines get between society and ourselves.

What value do you put on the gift of eternal life—of being a Christian? In reality, it was a gift God gave us against our will. Before His gifting us with faith in baptism, we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We were incapable of wanting the gift. So, how much value do you put on giving thanks that we can participate in the body of Christ in Holy Communion? How much value do you put on meeting with your Savior in Divine Worship every week? How much value do you put on the God-given ability to distinguish between what is permissible and what is not beneficial or constructive in this decaying world and also for those under our care? What kind of value on being made a Christian is reflected in your own monetary gifts returned to God from what He has first given you? Do you see enough value in your personal gift of being a Christian that whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you do it all for the glory of God?

You see, the gift God gave us in being a Christian is the reason behind Christmas, and Good Friday, and Easter. It's the motivation behind remembering Reformation Day and All Saints' Day and Thanksgiving. God gave us a pure gift of being heirs of eternal life that cost Him His Son's life on the cross of Calvary. It was a cost that included Christ enduring God's wrath against sin as our substitute. It is included in the fact that God loved us even when we were His enemies (Romans 5:10). As we finish out this church year and enter a new one, God grant all of us to take seriously the gift He gave us in naming us Christian, for without Him, our name would be Condemned!