

I REFUSE TO ACCEPT A WATERED DOWN VERSION OF CHRISTIANITY

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I refuse to believe that what passes for Christianity in many western nations today is what God planned for His people. I refuse to believe that it is the God-intended norm. The Word of God is against it. Church history is against it. What the Spirit is doing around the world is against it. What I have experienced in my own life is against it. Everything inside of me is shouting, "There must be more! We must go deeper!" Is that same voice shouting inside of you? If the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus are real-and they are-there must be more. If the outpouring of the Spirit is real-and it is-there must be more. If the promises of God are real-and they are-there must be more. If the requirements of the Lord are real-and they are-there must be more.

It's high time that we quit trying to drag the Word of God down to our level of experience and commitment, trying to conform Scripture to our ways rather than conforming our ways to Scripture. Instead, we need to take hold of everything He has promised and everything He has called us to, and, by His grace, pursue and obey Him until His reality becomes our reality. What does God's reality look like? What is normal according to the Word? As I have said for many years, what the world calls fanaticism and most of the church calls extremism, God calls normal. In the words of Leonard Ravenhill, "Christianity today is so subnormal that if any Christian began to act like a normal New Testament Christian, he would be considered abnormal."

What does normal look like according to Jesus? "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:37-39, ESV). What does normal look like according to Paul? (Let's remember that Paul told us to follow his example; see 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 4:9.) "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21).

Unfortunately, as expressed by Watchman Nee, "By the time the average Christian gets his temperature up to normal, everybody thinks he has a fever." I say it's time we burn-in fact, the Word commands us to be fervent (which means red-hot) in spirit in Romans 12:11-so that others can catch fire as well. They can call us crazy, judge us as religious extremists and put us out of their company. But if we walk in humility, if we bless and don't curse, if we honour those in authority while determining to obey the Lord no matter what, the fruit of our lives will be the proof of God's goodness. And people will come flocking to us saying, "I need what you have. How can I experience more of God in my life?"

Missionary C. T. Studd once said, "If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." This is the reality we must live by. The glorious Son of God shed His blood on our behalf, dying for our sins so we could belong to God, bringing us into His family as brothers and sisters. His Father is now our Father, and we are joint heirs with Him. (See Romans 8:14-17.) And that's only the beginning. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32) All things! That is the glorious gospel. How should we respond?

Jesus says to us, "Follow me"-and that means that all that we have, all that we are and all that we ever could be belongs to Him. We now live to do His will, our eyes set on Him, and our life goal to know Him and make Him known, regardless of cost or consequence. That is normal according to the New Testament. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, Jesus died for all so that "those who live might no

longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15). Or as he said to the Colossians, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

Or as expressed by Peter, we are to live "for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:2). This is beautiful, not binding, our act of gratitude as recipients of grace, not our futile effort to receive His grace. And because of that grace and mercy, we belong totally to Him: "Therefore," Paul writes, "I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice-alive, holy, and pleasing to God-which is your reasonable service" (or "your spiritual worship"-Rom. 12:1, NET). So let us crucify every distraction, let us count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, let us ask the Spirit to work afresh in our lives and let us take hold of the challenge that fuelled the fires of D. L. Moody's life, spoken to him by revivalist Henry Varley: "Moody, the world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to him."

Isn't it time that our nations see what God will do with a man or woman fully consecrated to Him? Isn't it time that our generation has a true demonstration of the gospel? Join me in striving to be normal in the Lord's sight, by the grace and power of God. In celebrating the birth of our Saviour this Christmas let us recommit our lives in serving a living God with the passionate enthusiasm of a true believer. It's time.

Source: by Michael Brown