

Christian Solutions to Modern Problems

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INTRODUCTION:

On October 25, 1949, Dr. F. W. Mattox spoke at the regular daily chapel service at Harding College. Many of the men attending the fourth Freedom Forum were present, several of whom requested the speech in printed form.

Believing that the true objectives of labor and management are identical; that there is desperate need for a better understanding of this fact; and that the application of Christian principles to industrial problems offers the only hope of long preserving our present standard of high wages, Harding College readily consented to print the message for the benefit of a wider audience.

-George S. Benson President

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In modern literature, there are many criticisms of attempts to apply first century principles to 20th century problems. Yet many of us are convinced that the solution to our modern problems is to be found in the application of the teachings of Christ.

Our purpose here is to examine briefly the applications of Christianity to the pressing problems of today in the light of its critics.

The conclusions are of vital importance to our concept of government, society, business management, and labor.

1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF AMERICANISM

There exists in America today a strong influence designed to revamp the American way of life. Its purpose is to exalt the state and mold society according to a visionary concept. In order to accomplish these ends there must be a change in the philosophy that supports American society.

No institution exists without an underlying philosophy. Whether stated or not, there is a concept that supports each institution as a foundation does the superstructure of a building and as roots support a tree. If this basic idealism is not harmonious the institution can stand no better than can a building on a faulty foundation. This means that the reason given for doing a thing affects the way the thing is done. If men do not agree upon the *why*, one cannot expect them to agree upon the *how*.

The cause for the chief problems in America is a lack of agreement in regard to this underlying philosophy. With the encroachment of naturalism and relativity, the spiritual concepts of the Bible that gave unification to America in its formative period are being challenged. This has resulted in confusion of ideals and purposes, not only in regard to religion, but also in sociology, economics, and government.

Americanism is a word that denotes such ideas as freedom, progress, enlightenment, scientific know-how, mass production, invention and change. To many, this concept is entirely contrary to the ideas of the Christian religion. For the Bible is thought of as supporting the status quo. Its principles of permanent truth and uncompromising idealism are looked upon to support the heritage of the past and are expected to resist change.

That we are living in a world of change is not denied. Professor Whitehead was correct in reminding us that before 1914 there was in the world more of constancy than of change, but since the

First World War, there has been more of change than of constancy. Let it be clearly understood, however, that the Bible is not a defender of the status quo. The ideals of the Bible have never been achieved in any society and every student of Church History has thrilled with the heroic fight of the saints of old in their struggles for social change.

It is the contention here that change in the right direction must grow out of timeless principles of truth. There must be a firm base for a great building and fertile soil for luxuriant growth. The Bible provides this base, the soil of which greatness grows. This is clearly seen by the following examination.

What are the requirements for a permanent and progressive society?

First there must be a feeling of brotherhood. A stable society cannot exist without its members working closely together. That man's native gregariousness is not sufficient to provide this need is seen through a glance at class strife and human selfishness. The Bible develops this cohesive need by emphasizing the brotherhood of man. It is being claimed that Communism also emphasizes a brotherhood of man, but such claims are soon seen to be without foundation in fact. Brotherhood presupposes equality. Not equality of possession, as the Communists strive for, but a recognition of the equal worth and dignity of each member. Americanism is based upon this concept but apart from the Bible the concept itself is without foundation.

The second requirement for a permanent progressive society is in regard to production. Each member must contribute his fair share. Communism, finding that work is not cheerfully given, attempts to force this contribution through the existence of a police state, with its exile and forced labor camps the motivating influence. Where the state controls the production of each worker, incentive and initiative are killed and force and fear are the only alternatives.

In the American system, production is held to the highest level found anywhere in the world, by the principle of individual freedom. This freedom to plan, to work and to enjoy the fruits of labor, rests upon the requirement that each member of society assumes responsibility. This is the key to the problem. How can men be taught to assume responsibility? The Bible has the only answer. Obligation to God requires the assumption of personal and social responsibility. The Christian religion requires one to be loyal, dependable, honest, trustworthy, and unselfish. The degree to which these principles are accepted is the degree of responsibility assumed.

America has done well under this philosophy. Her present greatness is its result. To return to an earlier figure, any tree bearing abundant fruit should not have its roots molested. An attempt to replace the roots of a tree would unavoidably result in disaster. Accordingly, would it be reasonable to suppose that we could change the basic philosophy of our national life and maintain the same desirable ends? It would not. Different roots will produce different fruit. And the fruits so far produced by non-Christian roots are all of the undesirable variety.

2. CHRISTIANITY AND GOVERNMENT

Our spiritual heritage is the root out of which the American system has grown. This is evidenced by recalling that our national documents are permeated with both Bible ideas and Bible language. The Bill of Rights which guarantees our freedoms is an outgrowth of the Christian emphasis upon the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Furthermore, the American form of government presupposes that the governed are not only intelligent in being able to make wise decisions, but can be relied upon to assume the responsibility for government. Those who would change our form of government are saying that this is expecting too much from the masses. To them, society does not consist of enlightened, responsible individuals, but of ignorant, contriving self-seekers that must be controlled by force. When one looks at certain members of society this latter view seems to be correct

and certainly no one would claim that all members of society are all they ought to be. My contention is that the great majority of American citizens are enlightened and responsible—capable of self-government—and that if this group will become more vocal in regard to its present rights and privileges under our free system, the system itself will not only be preserved, but the non-cooperating members of society can be brought to an appreciation and support of the system. Accordingly, every American should appreciate his religious heritage and work for its preservation.

3. CHRISTIANITY AND GOVERNMENT ECONOMY

In what way does Christianity affect government spending?

First of all government officials have an obligation to the governed. They are trustees—stewards with responsibility, and the first requirement of stewards is that they be found faithful. The present trend of bureaucratic expansion, inefficiency in office and valueless expenditures in every department is a national disgrace. Every Christian receiving a government check should look squarely at himself as he ponders whether the government could do without him. He should then either quit his job or work so hard it would become apparent that others were not needed. We must no longer deceive ourselves about government money. It is our money. No Christian father would place indebtedness upon his family to such an extent that it would take three generations to lift it. Coming generations will have problems of their own without our placing a mortgage upon their heads. Thrift, good management, hard work, and frugal economy are Christian principles our government officials need to consider.

This is no criticism of our governmental system. In spite of these defects we have more blessings than any other people on earth, but Christianity is not satisfied with such defects. Why should we be? With economy in government, our national debt can be paid, taxes reduced, and standards of living raised. It is time that all re-

alize that “Federal Aid” is a deceptive term. The Federal government has no money. It can create no wealth. By taxation it takes our money and the small part of it given back to us is called “Federal Aid.” Christianity cries out against all waste.

4. DOES CHRISTIANITY OFFER A PLAN FOR SOCIETY?

Karl Pollanyi, the Austrian economist, has criticized Christianity on the basis that it presents no over-all plan for society. He calls this the greatest blind spot in Christianity. His criticism is that it is entirely too individualistic; that it might have worked in former periods, but since there are so many people living in large groups, the Christian individualistic idealism does not apply.

I would answer this charge by saying that while Christ did not give us a detailed blueprint for the ideal society, which could have been applicable in only given localities, he instead left us underlying principles which will take root in any society and bring it to a more ideal state. All who have looked into the matter of law and studied its value are impressed with the fact that no system of regulations is more effective than the majority of the members of the society will support. In other words, laws and regulations, to be effective, must be supported by the majority of the members of the society involved. This means that had Christ given the ideal social order, it would never have been effective until the majority in any society would support it as individuals.

Instead of approaching it from this angle, Christ gave plans that will build in the individual social responsibility and ideals of conduct that would make him the ideal citizen in any form of society. Not only does Christianity build into each individual heart the highest social responsibility; it requires that each individual be a missionary of these ideals to such an extent that each will use his power and influence in developing in others the same responsibility and noble principles of conduct. This plan is far more effective than any attempt would have been to require a perfect social order.

Not only is this a better plan ideally, but it is the only plan that could work from the practical point of view. If Jesus had advocated a perfect social order, it would have meant there would be outward opposition by his followers against all opposing orders and thus have caused social upheaval in the Roman Empire as well as in all subsequent times. But by working through the individual, each order is gradually improved as the principles of Christ are accepted.

5. DOES CHRISTIANITY ENDORSE COMMUNISM?

As Pollanyi has criticized Christianity for having no over-all plan for society, others have claimed that Christianity endorses Communism. Accordingly, the adherents of such an idea say that the Communistic philosophy is in harmony with the Christian religion. This definitely is a mistaken idea. The passages of scripture that are used to prove such a claim are passages in the Book of Acts telling of the church in Jerusalem.

In Acts, 2:44, the scripture says, "And all that believed were together and had all things common and they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all accordingly as any man had need." Again in the 4th chapter, and the 32nd verse, it reads, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common . . . for neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any had need."

These passages of scripture in no way endorse the Communistic philosophy, but rather, are statements of the unselfishness that Jesus taught in regard to Christians sharing with others when occasion demanded.

There is a great difference in Christian sharing and Communism. In Communism, the state takes over all of the property, even by

force, and it is controlled by a small minority, theoretically for the good of all. Communism would take all wealth from all individuals. This is not what we have read in the above passages of scripture. Those who sold lands and possessions, sold them voluntarily and gave their money voluntarily to the apostles and this money was distributed, not equally to all who were Christians, but only to those who were in need.

Not only is this true, but we have the record of those who did not sell their possessions in the church at Jerusalem.

An outstanding example of this is Mary, the mother of John Mark, who owned a large home in the city of Jerusalem, which was used as a meeting place for many of the Christians. (Acts 12:12-14.) Further evidence is the fact that the Apostle Paul in his instructions to Christians in their giving, laid down the plan that each is to give as he has prospered. (I Cor. 16:2.) This clearly indicates that there were differences in prosperity.

This also indicates that the New Testament scripture does not demand equality of possession. Jesus said, "The poor will be with you always." This, by no means, however, should be taken as a sanction of poverty but rather it is an indication that no matter what a person's financial status, he is responsible for helping his fellow man. The conclusion is very strong that the New Testament scripture does not sanction in any of its plans, a Communistic set-up such as is being advocated today. The scripture does set forth very strongly the idea of individual responsibility and one of the greatest weaknesses of any Communistic development is the elimination of responsibility on the part of the many and the assuming of complete direction in the hands of the few.

6. DOES THE BIBLE TEACHING WHICH CONDEMNS USURY CURTAIL BUSINESS?

The critics of Christianity have left no stone unturned to bring it into discredit. It is being stated that the Bible opposed collecting interest on loans, and since the American system is based upon

investment of capital for which a return is expected, the Bible is against the American system.

This criticism is based upon the following scripture quotations. In Psalm 15:5, the man that pleases God is described as a man who “putteth not out his money to interest.” In Ezekiel 18:8, the just man is spoken of as “he that hath not given forth upon interest, neither hath taken any increase.” These passages, upon first thought seem to prove the contention, but upon examination it is clearly seen that this prohibition is against taking interest from the poor to whom a loan has been granted in order to sustain life. In Ezekiel 8:17 it is stated that this just man, “hath given bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; that hath not withdrawn his hand from the poor, that hath not received interest or increase.” In Leviticus 25:35, this idea is even more clearly stated: “And if thy brother is waxed poor, and his hand fail with thee; then shall thou uphold him ...Take thou no interest of him or increase....Thou shalt not give him thy money upon interest, not give him thy victuals for increase.” This same principle applies to the passage in Nehemiah 5:3-13 which condemns the practice of some of the Jews who were taking away the lands of their poor and starving brethren through usury.

There is, however, another type of loan. The loans so far discussed were for subsistence purposes. There was no consideration here given to capital loans—or loans for the purpose of capital investment. This type of loan is made for the purpose of creating greater wealth, and justice would require that the person furnishing the money should share in the increase which his money makes possible. In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus tells the story of the master who distributed talents to his servants. In this story the men who properly invested the money were rewarded and the man who did not was condemned for his failure. Although the story teaches a spiritual lesson the approval of Jesus for interest on capital investments is clearly seen. The language is as follows, “Wherefore givest thou not my money into the bank, and I at coming should have required it with interest.” Criticisms of the

Bible are made by those who do not see the whole picture and accordingly, fail to make distinctions that alter completely premature concepts.

7. DOES CHRISTIANITY DISCOURAGE WEALTH AND ENCOURAGE POVERTY?

It has just been suggested that Christianity might be misunderstood to such an extent that the charge would be made that Christianity discourages the accumulation of wealth and sanctions poverty. It is unfortunate that any would so misinterpret the teachings of the New Testament. The statement of Jesus to the rich young ruler, "Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow me," has been used as a proof text for such an idea. In this case, Jesus is not approving poverty but was dealing with a young man who had a love for possessions that was stronger than his devotion to God. It was this love of money (which the Apostle Paul tells Timothy is the root of all kinds of evil) that was the sin of his life. Evidence that this is correct is seen in the statement that Christians should "Maintain good works (honest occupations) for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." (Titus 3:14.)

Another criticism stems from a statement in the 5th chapter of the Book of James where the rich are condemned. The passage reads, "Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten." This passage has been used to prove that God is displeased with the rich. Such thinking overlooks entirely the 4th verse which gives a clear explanation of why the condemnation is given. It continues by saying, "Behold the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out." This is the key to the passage. The rich have a responsibility not to use their power as means of oppression. The passage in no way indicates a condemnation of wealth as such, but rather the un-Christian means used for making the money.

In this connection, some have misunderstood the commendation of Jesus for the widow who gave her last penny into the treasury.

In this case, Jesus made the statement that she had given more than they all. But this cannot rightly be interpreted to mean that Jesus is approving poverty and condemning wealth, but rather he is commending the deep devotion of one who was poor. One does not need to be rich to be covetous; neither does one need to be poor to be liberal. Jesus is here commending one who assumes responsibility and this is a keynote of the Christian religion.

8. CHRISTIANITY AND BIG BUSINESS

There has been too much misunderstanding in regard to the place of big business in American life. Too long has it been pictured as a monster of evil. There is no ulterior motive for my defending it. I don't own a penny's worth of stock in any company. I have no special friends in the management of any big company. I'm just an ordinary college professor with a smaller than average income, but I listen to a fine radio— produced by big business. My food is preserved in a fine refrigerator. I drive my own car, take a trip on the train, or on occasions I travel the airlines, all made possible by big business. Last year I built a home. It contains a modern kitchen, automatic furnaces and three bath rooms. Where else in the world can a fellow like me enjoy such conveniences? And why can I afford it? Only because it is all inexpensive—thanks to the big business corporation, the American method that allows all of us to pool our strength. The keynotes of big business are economy of operation, maximum production and improvement of techniques so that lower selling costs will result. Most big business is owned by many stockholders who share in its profits. Stockholders invest money for tools that make the products all of us use. There is no reason for it to be corrupt just because it is big. There is no reason for it not having a heart. In fact it has.

In general, it works for the welfare of employees as well as stockholders. And in many companies, employees are also stockholders.

The effort that some labor leaders and social planners are making to destroy harmony between management and labor is un-

Christian. Big business will bring us increasing conveniences if those so engaged recognize they are a part of a great team. This mutual interest is the result of brotherhood and Christianity builds the most cohesive brotherhood known to man. The law of supply and demand regulates the type and quantity of production. Competition results, not only in better products at cheaper prices, but also in new products, expanded plants and more jobs. The results add up to a higher standard of living for all and this, too, is Christian. The government should serve only as a referee, and allow these natural laws to operate.

9. DOES CHRISTIANITY APPLY TO LABOR-MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS?

There is no limit to the practical applications of Christianity to modern life. No matter the sphere of activity in which one finds himself, he will be impressed with how accurately the Christian principles apply.

Let us consider the case of management in business. Christianity demands that modern management in business assume responsibility for the welfare of its employees. The manager of a business that employs a thousand men must say in his heart, "I am responsible for these families. I must see to it, if possible, that there is enough profit in this business to maintain continuous salaries at a living wage. This means that I must replace worn-out machines, and develop a backlog of capital that will see this business through recessions or depressions and take care of any adjustments made necessary by increased competition. I must not only provide for employees today, but look out for their future."

This is a serious responsibility. It is a responsibility that labor has apparently failed to understand. Too many workers have the attitude that management is their enemy. This is truly unfortunate.

The gulf that has developed between management and labor is eliminated by the application of Christian principles. Management has the responsibility of assuring labor that both are friends and that the business is being operated in their behalf as well as in the

behalf of stockholders and that the accumulation of “venture capital” is for their good.

Management has the responsibility of informing labor of the necessity for profits. From the Christian viewpoint, any business management that does not make profits sufficient to replace machines and provide a backlog of capital to care for plant expansion and enlargement so that sons of present employees might have some opportunity for employment, has not assumed its full Christian responsibility.

Christianity, therefore, demands that management assume responsibility for sound management. It is a serious matter to have a great number of human beings looking to you for food, clothing, and shelter. Christianity will cause this responsibility to be taken seriously. In view of these ideals, wages will be increased as much as is possible in the light of the above mentioned responsibilities. Working conditions will be improved in every manner possible, motivated by a feeling of brotherhood and mutual sharing of responsibilities.

10. THE CHRISTIAN DEMANDS UPON LABOR

Christianity gets down into the lives of every human and improves conditions and attitudes of all. The laborer must assume his share of responsibility, also. He must understand that if he receives \$1.00 per hour for his work that he must create in that one hour, not only \$1.00 in value that would come back in the form of reimbursement to his company, but he must create enough more than \$1.00 in that hour to provide for the upkeep and replacement of his machinery, the upkeep and expansion of his plant, and additional value that will be stored back to provide for further emergencies in the time of depression or financial recession. This must come into the understanding of modern labor if there is ever to be harmony between labor and management. Christianity requires that labor assume these responsibilities.

In this, we see a formula for success that applies to every young man who wants to get ahead. Christianity would say to such a

young man, "Your income can depend only upon the value that you create minus replacement of machines, required supervision, and a small deposit for insurance against future calamities." The more a young man creates in value, and the more responsibility he assumes, the better care he takes of the machines, and the less supervision that is required to keep him on the job, the more income he can receive. In this way, a greater share of his creation of value belongs to him. Christianity gives one this feeling of responsibility.

CONCLUSION

There is no end to the applications of Christianity to modern life. The principles of honesty, fair dealing, sympathy, humility, as well as responsibility are applicable to every human being in every walk of life. A husband is a better husband for being a Christian. He is dependable, loyal, sympathetic, understanding, and kind. A wife is a better wife because of being a Christian on the same basis. Children are better children because of being Christians. Christianity lessens the harshness, the unkindness, and ill-will that has so marred human relations in the past and replaces these negative qualities with positive principles which improve human relations on every hand.

In society under the Caesars, human life was very cheap. Even those motivated by the very highest form of pre-Christian philosophy had not learned the value of a human life. The Roman Stoics, in their practice of slavery, would have no consideration for a slave who had become old and useless. There was no provision for his welfare and the only suggestion he would receive would be to take his own life. With the coming of Christianity into the world, every human institution felt its impact and through the years, society has come more and more into harmony with its idealism. Not only has the Christian idealism proved itself in practical applications, but stands ever ready to take humanity to still greater heights.

If modern society with its scientific know-how would work seriously to make Christian application to its social and economic problems, we would experience the dawn of a new day in which standards of living and human satisfactions would reach levels undreamed of in past generations. The challenge is to you to apply Christianity where you are today.