

An Ancient Description of Christians

The following quotation is from a letter written by a Christian who lived sometime in the second or third centuries:

"For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life. Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvelous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life. They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened to life. War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason for their hostility."

This quotation is taken from "The Epistle to Diognetus," paragraph 5. It is accepted as authentic, and its author is classified as a Christian. It is obvious that it was not easy to be a Christian in his day. Count your blessings, and daily ask yourself if you are really being a Christian.

- by Bill Crews

For The Lack of Wood

"For lack of wood the fire goeth out; and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth. As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife. . ." (Proverbs 26:20-21).

Slander and gossip are said to be like a fire; they heat up the spirit and cause us to speak inflammatory things. This kind of speech burns up all that is good. It will inflame and embroil families, friends, work associates, and brethren -- as well as enemies. All of our society bears the marks of fires that have raged out of control, destroying what is good and precious. And where does the fire start? It is the whispering gossip or slanderer, according to Solomon, that is often the one who fuels the fires of contention.

In the New Testament, James writes about the evils of the tongue and says: "Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire! And the tongue is a fire; a world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell . . ." (James 3:5-6).

Brethren, what we must all do is put an end to the fueling of these fires! We must stop the talking that hurts and destroys others. When the whispering and gossiping stop, the fire will go out. When the rumors, evil reports, and tale-bearings cease, the contention will cease.

- by Bob Dickey

Repentance

Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Repentance - true repentance - is surely one of the hardest things God has commanded us to do. It is important that we understand true repentance.

Repentance is not:

- Simply quitting your sin. A man might stop drinking because he can no longer afford it, or stop beating his wife because she has him arrested, or stop cursing because he lost his voice. The sin has stopped, but no repentance has taken place.

- Hiding your sin. The fact that a person tries to conceal his sin does not prove he has repented. Remember how David tried to hide his sin with Bathsheba?

- Being sorry. Many are sorry for the consequences of their sin, the results of their sin, the pain their sin has caused for themselves or for others. But this sorrow is not real repentance.

Repentance is:

- A change of heart that leads to a change of action. Jesus illustrated repentance perfectly in two of his parables. In one He described this situation: "A certain man had two sons; and he came to first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not but afterward he repented, and went" (Matthew 21:28,29). Do you see it? Clearly there was a change of thinking followed by a change of conduct. Again, Jesus told of the prodigal son who had ruined his life but "came to himself" and "arose and came to his father"(Luke 15:11-32). His obvious change of attitude prompted him to return to his father's house and confess his unworthiness. This is repentance.

What about you? Have you had this important change of heart that has caused you to turn to God in obedience? Remember, God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Act 17:30).

- by Greg Gwin