

CONCERNING THE NOMINAL CHRISTIAN

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by Thomas John Dexter
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Colored text is used in this transcription to distinguish Holy Scripture from the present writer's commentary.

What I am presenting tonight stems from two individuals that I know personally who claim to be Christian. One of them being an individual I stood in the waters with at [her] baptism. And the other is an individual that I attended church with back in the late '90s. And yet by the words they use and the lifestyle they declare publicly on the internet[, i.e.,] on Facebook, they show themselves to be, in reality, dead in their sins, in a state of not ever having been saved at all. And I am grieved about that. What they are declaring publicly is an utter denial of their profession. And so this study stems from that heartache of mine that I have for these individuals.

So there are two key points I want to look at tonight.

Number one, the nominal Christian is a biblical fact. There *is* such a thing as a person who claims to be a Christian, but is only a Christian in name. There has been no regeneration by God in their heart. They still have that old, dead heart; it's just that the name of "Christian" is tacked over it.

The other point, and the more unpleasant point, is that more abundant judgment will be rendered against the nominal Christian. All nominal Christians are unbelievers. All who claim to be of Christ and yet by their life and their works they deny Him, even though they bear the name of "Christian," they are lost. They are unbelievers regardless of whatever protest they may have against it.

John chapter 8 beginning at verse 39:

. . . [T]hey [Abraham's descendants who were seeking to kill Jesus] answered and said [to] Him [Jesus], "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father."

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

A few points I want to make on this passage of Scripture.

Verse 39, and I'm reading from the *New King James* by the way, verse 39: "[t]hey." Well, who's the "they"? The "they" refers back to verse 37 and it is referring to the people that are seeking to kill Christ.

These people who seek to kill Christ said unto Christ, "Abraham is our father." And literally and physically, yes, they were as we see in verse 37. Jesus says, "I know that you are Abraham's descendants" and also in verse 56 where Jesus says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced." So, yes, these people literally and physically were the descendants of Abraham.

"Jesus said to [these descendants of Abraham], 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.'" So Jesus here is speaking to the literal, physical descendants of Abraham; but yet He is speaking *of* the figurative, spiritual children of Abraham.

True children of Abraham, the figurative, spiritual children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham. Good works are the manifestation of the living faith we read of in James chapter 2 [verses] 17, 20, and 26. The works we do, the works we all do, give proof or evidence of our origin, of where we come from, out of which we are. Whether our origin be of God or of the accuser. Whether our origin be from beneath or from above as seen in John 8:23. Whether our origin be of the world or not

of the world as seen in John 15:19.

Jesus continues [in John 8:40-41a], "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father." These people needed to be born again even though they were the literal, physical seed of Abraham. They needed to be born again.

But [these descendants of Abraham who were seeking to kill Jesus] said to Jesus [in verse 41b], "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God." And this is one of the key things I want to focus on. Here these people were just told by the Son of God that they were not in the right with God. But these people protest the fact.

Left to one's own self, self-deception over your real and true standing with God the Father will grow into such a blindness of the eyes, such a deafness of the ears, such a hardness of the heart to the truth of the matter that even if the truth of the matter were to be spoken directly to you by the Lord Jesus Christ you would still reject it.

These [descendants of Abraham who were seeking to kill Jesus] claimed to have a relationship with God, but their works were all the evidence needed to disprove the existence of that relationship.

Jesus continues [in verse 42], "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me." Again, "If God were your Father." Well, He was not.

Verse 43: "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word." Some translations will render this as "you are not able to hear My word" and in this context this is talking about listening with favor or compliance.

Verse 44[a-b]: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him."

"You are of your father the devil." This may seem like a harsh word from Christ, but it is actually true of all descendants not just of Abraham but of all the descendants of Adam. All are of their father the devil and remain the spiritual and figurative children of the devil until we are born again, or born from above, or begotten by God.

[Verse 44c:] "He was a murderer from the beginning." And you see this? Just like father, just like the sons. What were his children trying to do in verse 40? "But now you seek to kill Me."

[Verse 44c-d:] "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." Again, like father, like son. In verse 55 Jesus says, "Yet you [the Jews in verses 52-53] have not known Him [God], but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you." The spiritual, figurative descendants of Satan do the works of Satan. They are murderers and liars.

"But because I tell . . . the truth (verse[s] 45[-47]), you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell . . . the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." Again, in this context "hear" means "listen to with favor or compliance."

"He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" despite their claim in verse 41: "[W]e have one Father—God." And Jesus again refutes that claim [with], "[Y]ou are not of God" [verse 47]. God knows the true standing of us all. Our claims have nothing to do with it. The claims of a nominal Christian mean nothing to God. If anything, they just increase the judgment that will be rendered against [him or her].

Let's flip over to Titus chapter 1. Titus chapter 1 and, really, just one verse, maybe two verses. Chapter 1 verse 16: "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." Just like back in John [8:39] let's find out who these people "[t]hey" are. We'll find out by going up one verse, to verse 15: "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God." So who are the "[t]hey"? The defiled and the unbelieving. This is what the nominal Christian really is. The nominal Christian is polluted, defiled, contaminated just like we all once were. The nominal Christian is no Christian at all; the nominal Christian is polluted and unbelieving.

An individual who professes to stand in some positive relation to God, but by his or her works he or she denies God, that is to say, one who professes one thing but acts another is giving proof or evidence that he or she is actually polluted and unbelieving.

Professing Christian, the grace of God does not teach us to deny God. Look over in [Titus] chapter 2 verse[s] 12[-14]: "teaching us," the grace of God [verse 11] teaches us "that, denying"—God? no, denying—"ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify," purify those who were[, or rather] who *are*, polluted and unbelieving, and to purify "for Himself His own special people, zealous [for]"—works? no, zealous [for]"good works."

If a person claims to be Christian, and they may appear outwardly to be righteous, morally righteous, what if that individual is not zealous for good works? The person claims to be a Christian but has no burning desire to do God's will? That person is at least suspect because those whom Christ has purified are filled with or characterized by a zeal for good works.

Turn to the book of 1 John, 1 John chapter 2 verses 3-6. First John chapter 2 verses 3-6: "Now by this we know that we know Him," or perhaps better, "by this we can know *right now* that we have come to know Him." This is how: "if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,'"— Now look at this. This is what we saw back in John and what we saw in Titus. "We have one Father—God" [John 8:41]. "They profess to know God" [Titus 1:16].

[1 John 2:4:] "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is"—what?—"a liar, and the truth is not in him." Is this not the description we had of Satan back in John chapter 8 [verse 44]? This is saying: "One that claims to know God but does not keep God's commandments is a child of the devil." A bitter truth, particularly if we have loved ones, dear and cherished friends of ours, who identify themselves as Christian but there's no zeal for good works, no habitual keeping, no habitual observance of the commandments of God, just an empty, lifeless profession.

Someone will say, "This is legalism, Thomas. You are emphasizing obedience to the commandments of God for the Christian."

Well, the point is, is that grace does not excuse sin. Look what it says in verse 1 of [1 John] chapter 2. . . .: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins"— The text does not say "when you sin," it says *if* you sin. This is not teaching perfectionism, but that [acts of] sin in the Christian's life [are] the exception, not the rule.

[1 John 2:4:] "He who says, 'I know Him,' [and] does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

If a professing Christian feels restricted by God, or feels that God is getting in the way of his life, that God's way . . . is just a bit too demanding, that one had better ask himself, "Am I really His? Or am I illegitimate?" Anyone. Anyone bearing the name of "Christian" whose tendency of behavior and normal manner of conduct is indistinguishable from that of the unregenerate is at the very least suspect, if not a liar altogether.

The one who says he knows God but does not keep His commandments is a liar. Nominal Christians, in reality, are liars. They are, in reality, the figurative, spiritual children of their father Satan.

[1 John 2 v]erse[s] 5[-6]: "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. And by this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him[, that is, God,] ought himself also to walk just as He [Jesus] walked." So, if we claim to love the Lord, if we claim we know God, we better be demonstrating it. We ought ourselves walk just as Jesus Christ walked. We owe Him that much at least.

The nominal Christian. I was one. I (and you folks have heard me say it before) . . . I claimed God was number one in my life, . . . I went to church every Sunday and went to communion and prayed and . . . I stood up for God . . . when others around me would attack Him . . . and attack His Word and—

But my works— I did nothing that glorified God. See, I thought I could do the things I was doing *and* have a positive standing with God at the same time. I thought I could have my cake and eat it too. Though I never thought of it like that, I just thought that's what Christianity was. Christianity was: "You know what the Bible says about Christ and you don't reject it." All I had was a mental assent to it. I didn't argue with the facts of Scriptures; I just accepted them: "Yes, I believe this. This is true." It had no impact on my life at all. It hadn't penetrated my hardened heart. I hadn't been purified at *all*. And by the songs I would write and the way I would talk, the way I would treat my parents— I was no Christian at all. I was this individual in 1 John 2:4! "I know God!" I knew what sin was, I knew the Ten Commandments; but I had no guilt over sin at all. No sense of guilt at all. But I claimed to know God.

Only by His mercy am I able to stand before you today because God had every right to destroy me.

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 10 and take a look at the fact that the nominal Christian will receive more abundant judgment. And these are uncomfortable passages, I think, when we consider the grave implication they carry; but, nonetheless, let us forge ahead with the truth from God.

Matthew chapter 10. Let's take a look at verses 14 and 15 and I'll comment on the context after I read [them]: "And whoever will not receive you [the twelve apostles] nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I [Jesus] say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" Now, the interpretation is to whatever city, village, house, or individual of the lost sheep of the house of *Israel* that did not receive this message from the Messiah; however, by application it can extend to anyone anywhere who rejects the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us turn to Matthew chapter 11 (flip over maybe a page or two) and look at verses 20-24:

. . . [T]hen He [Jesus] began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you [Capernaum] that it [shall] be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

The implication these verses carry is terrifying. Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and the lost sheep of the house of Israel we saw in [Matthew] chapter 10 were given privileges which Tyre and Sidon and Sodom were not given; consequently, these people, these cities, these villages, these households, these individuals will be held to a greater accountability and bear heavier judgment than

Tyre and Sidon and Sodom! Those who set aside the greater privilege of grace in these days of the New Covenant will be held to a greater accountability and bear heavier judgment than those who set aside the lesser privilege of the Law in the days of the Old Covenant. This is— It's terrifying.

"O, we live in the age of grace." Do we realize that living in the age of grace carries more accountability before God because we have the fuller revelation of God? Do we understand that living in the age of grace, to reject Christ in the age of grace, to die at enmity with God in the age of grace, consequently will bring heavier judgment than [on] those who died under the Law, those who were not given the privileges that God has graced us with today? O, the accountability before God! O, how we—

Back to [Matthew] chapter 10 verse 15, let's look at that once again: "**Assuredly,**" Christ is not kidding here! Truly, assuredly, this is most certainly true, "**I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city**" that rejects the message sent from the Messiah to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

In 2 Peter 2:6 and Jude 1:7 we find that Sodom and Gomorrah had been appointed to serve and are set forth as an example of the future doom of *all* the ungodly, and Christ says, "**Assuredly, I say to you,** you people who reject the message that I send, even though Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as an example of the ultimate and final doom of all the ungodly, the judgment *they* are going to be condemned to at the Great White Throne Judgment is going to be more bearable than your judgment!"

The more an individual is exposed to the truth of God and rejects it, the more abundant judgment that individual will receive.

Now before I go further, let us remember that this study is about the nominal Christian. As we have learned, the nominal Christian is polluted and unbelieving. The nominal Christian is denying Christ by [his or her] works.

Nominal Christians fill the churches. Keep that in mind with what I am about to say.

The more an individual is exposed to the truth of God and rejects it, the more abundant judgment that individual will receive. [That] is a most severe warning to the unsaved within the local church. Aside from refusing to repent and come to Christ, the worst thing the nominal Christian can do is to continue to sit in church with their impenitently hardened heart because as they sit in the local church week after week, they are being exposed directly to the Word of God week after week; and the more privilege one has to God's Word, the greater their accountability and, consequently, the greater their judgment. If the nominal Christian will not repent, then, nominal Christian, please get out of the church because all you are doing is storing up more abundant judgment against yourself.

Let's tie this all together now. These may be things that we have not heard before; these may be things that we have not heard very often. But I believe these things are God's truth.

Is the one who lives nowadays in the age of grace, and if [he or she] reject[s] Christ, is [his or her] condemnation is going to be greater, [less]bearable than the condemnation that will come to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah? Is this really true? Is this the loving God of Scripture? Would a loving God really do this especially after He sent His Son to die on the cross?

Turn to Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10, let us begin at verse 28:

[Anyone.] **Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a [terrifying] thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot?

This is the book of Hebrews, so the statement, "[the LORD will judge His people](#)" is most fitting because the LORD is certainly going to judge the Hebrews, His people Israel, every last one of them. Just like those we saw in John chapter 8 [verse 41], even today there are those out of the literal, physical descendants of Abraham who claim to be standing in a positive relation with the Eternal God of the Torah and yet reject Jesus the Messiah. Such descendants of Abraham are in anything but a positive relation with the Eternal God of the Scriptures. The LORD will judge them and find them worthy of worse punishment than their fathers who rejected the law of Moses.

Likewise, there are many today who claim to be of Christ, who identify themselves as "Christian," and yet by their life and their works they deny Him. As you will find in Luke chapter 6 verses 46-49, all [that] these people are, are hypocrites. They say one thing but keep on doing another. This figurative, spiritual offspring of the devil God will judge and find them worthy of worse punishment than the enemies of the LORD who died in the age of the Old Covenant.

Let us now take a look at our final passage for the evening, Matthew chapter 7 verses 21-23. There are a few points I wish to make from these pertinent verses. Matthew 7:21-23. The Lord Jesus Christ states, "[Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'](#)"

In verse 21: "[Lord, Lord.](#)" We have individuals who are expressing, individuals who are claiming a saving attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ. These people were making that profession. It was on their lips, but, tragically, it was never truly in their heart. In reality, these people never possessed genuine love for the object of their profession, for the Lord said in John chapter 14 verse 15, "[If you love Me \[Jesus\], keep My commandments.](#)" These people in Matthew 7 verses 21-23 are the same people we saw in 1 John chapter 2 verse 4. They are representative of all who claim to stand in a positive relation to God but bear no mark of obedience to His commands, for as we see in Matthew 7 verse 23 Christ dismisses these people as lawbreakers.

Genuine regeneration by God always brings about regenerated behavior. The individual will no longer think like he used to think. She will no longer talk like she used to talk. He will no longer act like he used to act. She will no longer live like she used to live. Altogether unlike the nominal Christian, the actual Christian does *not* lead a life that denies Christ by his works. For the Scripture says, "[Depart from unrighteousness, everyone who names the name of the Lord](#)"¹ (2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 19).

Matthew 7 verse 22: "[Many will say to Me \[Jesus\] in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'](#)" The Lord replies in verse 23, "[I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!](#)"

Notice that Christ does not dispute their claims, it's just that while they professed to be joined to Him, He never professed to be joined to them. "[I never knew you](#)" [emphasis added]. As one lexicon put it, "I have never had a true and personal connection with you."² These people were never, not ever among those described in Romans chapter 8 verses 29-30.

"But, Lord! We prophesied! We, we cast out! We did wonderful things!" These are all *external* things. The outside may have been clean, but the inside was not. Outwardly righteous in speech ("[Lord, Lord](#)"; "[we . . . prophesied](#)"), outwardly righteous in appearance (they "[cast out](#)"; they "[\[did\] many wonders](#)"), but certainly not righteous in the heart. And if one's heart is far away from God, it doesn't matter how much that one may claim or appear to honor God with his lips or with her works.

Regardless of what one does, regardless of the name in which they claim to do it, regardless of

what it looks like, regardless of what effect or success it may have, it is *impossible* to please God without faith [Romans 8:8; Hebrews 11:6], faith that has been implanted divinely in the heart; faith that demonstrates itself in obedience to the Father and His Son; obedience which flows out of love for and reverential fear of God.

Self-deception over one's true standing with God *is* a reality. And so I plead with you to examine yourself in the light of Scripture to see whether you actually are a Christian as described by God in His holy Word because many—many—are going to stand in utter and inexpressible horror when they learn all too late that the "relationship" they professed to have with the Lord Jesus Christ was never—*never*—reciprocal.

1. A translation of the Greek of 2 Timothy 2:19 by the present writer.

2. Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament together with An Index of Greek Words, and Several Appendices* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), s.v. "KNOW" 2. γινώσκω.