

Why Genuine Christianity Improves The World

Robert L. Waggoner¹

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2, N-KJV).

In 1789, John Adams was one of those sailors who mutinied on H. M. S. *Bounty*. Not long afterward, he came with other mutineers to the then uncharted island of Pitcairn. The sailors were generally riotous and disorderly. In time, they either killed one another or died. John Adams was the last survivor. Once, after coming out of a drunken stupor, he found a Bible in the bottom of a chest that had been taken from the ship before it was burned. As he read it, the Bible transformed his life. He began to teach the islanders what he was reading from the Scriptures. Their lives were also changed. The islanders became peaceable, industrious, and more concerned about each other. When the British finally found John Adams, they discovered to their amazement that his teaching had unexpectedly produced a very orderly and moral society.

This is but one of many examples of how the teachings of the Bible have led uncivilized societies into orderly and loving ways. What accounts for it? That’s the subject of this message. Before answering, however, it must be observed that whenever Christians are true to their religion, then Christianity improves the world. When Christians do not rightly practice their religion, then Christianity may become good for nothing.²

In his book, *A History of Christian Missions*, Stephen Neill observes that only three of the world’s major religions are missionary in nature - Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. He then declares that

Christianity alone has succeeded in making itself a universal religion. . . . It is a fact that this . . . religion . . . has now found a home in almost every country in the world; it has adherents among all the races of men, from the most sophisticated of westerners to the aborigines of the inhospitable deserts of Australia; and there is no religion in the world which has not yielded a certain number of converts to it. This is something which has never happened before in the history of the world. . . . Christianity alone has acclimatized itself in every continent and in almost every country.³

Moreover, Christianity has done more to improve the world than any other religion. One scholar has said, “There can be no question that the establishment of Christianity is the most memorable event in the history of our race; that which has produced the greatest and most permanent effects upon the character and condition of men.”⁴

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²“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” *Matthew 5:13*.

³Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 14-15, 559.

⁴J. W. Monser, *An Encyclopedia on the Evidences*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 562, quoting Norton’s “*Genuiness*,” 554.

Our concern here is to identify why this is so. Our procedure will be to quote some leading historians and thinkers and to specify some particular factors noted within these quotations by elaborating upon them.

The first quotation comes from Will Durant. When writing *The Story Of Civilization*, he noted that

All in all, no more attractive religion has ever been presented to mankind. It offered itself without restriction to all individuals, classes, and nations, it was not limited to one people, like Judaism, nor to the freemen of one state, like the official cults of Greece and Rome. By making all men heirs of Christ's victory over death, Christianity announced the basic equality of men, and made transiently trivial all differences of earthly degree. To the miserable, maimed, bereaved, disheartened, and humiliated it brought the new virtue of compassion, and an ennobling dignity; it gave them the inspiring figure, story, and ethic of Christ; it brightened their lives with the hope of the coming Kingdom, and of endless happiness beyond the grave. To even the greatest sinners, it promised forgiveness, and their full acceptance into the community of the saved. To minds harassed with the insoluble problems of origin and destiny, evil and suffering, it brought a system of divinely revealed doctrine in which the simplest soul could find mental rest. . . . Into the moral vacuum of a dying paganism, into the coldness of Stoicism and the corruption of Epicureanism, into a world sick of brutality, cruelty, oppression, and sexual chaos, into a pacified empire that seemed no longer to need the masculine virtues or the gods of war, it brought a new morality of brotherhood, kindness, decency, and peace. So molded to men's wants, the new faith spread with fluid readiness. Nearly every convert, with the ardor of a revolutionary, made himself an office of propaganda. . . .⁵

The second quotation comes from the well-known church historian, Philip Schaff. When comparing Christianity to other religions, he observed that

If we apply to Christianity the maxim: 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' if we judge of its origin and character by its moral effects, we find it not only the purest and best of all religions, but absolutely the only true and perfect religion. It alone makes genuine morality possible, and brings it to perfection. The pagan religions embosom a great mass of immoral principles and practices, and even sanction them by their opinions concerning the gods, in whom we find the concentrated essence of all human passions. We discover, indeed, in Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, and other ancient sages a multitude of most beautiful precepts and most exalted moral maximums. But they have neither improved the world nor saved a single sinner. They are isolated flashes of light which cannot make day. They lack an all-pervading principle; they lack unity, completeness, and vital energy. Action is the most powerful preaching. Life alone can kindle life. On far higher grounds stands Judaism, which is not the offspring of unaided, erratic fancy and speculation, but a divine revelation, and has constantly in view the glory of God, and the holiness of man. Yet it is but the shadow of a future substance, a preparation for Him who has fulfilled the law and the prophets, presented in his life the ideal of holy love, reconciled man with God, and thereby opened the only pure fountain of true virtue. . . . Christianity,

⁵Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from their beginnings to A.D. 325*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. III, 602-603.

therefore, is literally a new moral creation, not, however, annihilating the old, but delivering its energies from the corruption and bondage of sin, and raising them to perfection.”⁶

The last quotation comes from James Orr, general editor of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. When discussing Christianity, he noted that

The influence of Christianity is paramount in all the great advances that have been made in the moral and social amelioration of the state of mankind. . . . The world into which Christianity came was one fast sinking into dissolution through the weight of its own corruptions. Into that world Christianity brought a totally new idea of man as being of infinite dignity and immortal worth. It restored the well-nigh lost sense of responsibility and accountability to God; breathed into the world a new spirit of love and charity, and created that wealth of charitable and beneficent institutions with which Christian lands are now full, . . . set up a new moral ideal and standard of integrity which has acted as an elevating force on moral conceptions till the present hour; restored woman to her rightful place as man’s helpmeet and equal; created the Christian home; gave the slave an equal place with his master in the kingdom of God, and struck at the foundations of slavery by its doctrines of the natural brotherhood and dignity of man; created self-respect, and a sense of duty in the use of one’s powers for self-support and the benefit of others; urged to honest labors; and in a myriad other ways, by direct teaching, by the protest of holy lives, and by its general spirit, struck at the evils, the malpractices, the cruelties of the time. . . . These ideas . . . lie at the basis of our modern assertion of equal rights, of justice to the individual in social and state arrangements, of the desire for brotherhood, peace and amity among classes and nations. It is Christian love which is sustaining the best, purest and most self-sacrificing efforts for the raising of the fallen, the rescue of the drunkard, the promotion of enlightenment, virtues, social order and happiness. It is proving itself the grand civilizing agency in other regions of the world. Christian missions, with their benign effects in the spread of education, the checking of social evils and barbarities, the creation of trade and industry, the change in the status of women, the advance in social and civilized life, generally, is the demonstration of it.⁷

Although Solomon said that “there is nothing new under the sun,” and asked, “Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been in ancient times before us”(Ecclesiastes 1:9-10), Christianity, which came eight centuries after Solomon, brought some new ideas to the world’s attention. At least five of these ideas, presented in the above quotations, are mentioned by more than one writer, and are therefore worthy of special elaboration.

These ideas may be stated as follows: First, Christianity considers every individual person of great worth. Second, Christianity produces a sense of universal brotherhood and equality, which, among other things, abolishes slavery and elevates womanhood. Third, Christianity’s message of love overcomes sin, produces salvation and transforms humanity. Fourth, Christian love produces self-sacrifice for both humanitarian efforts and evangelism. And fifth, Christian love produces a higher moral standard of life for individuals and civilizations.

⁶Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), 433-434.

⁷James Orr, “Christianity” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955) I, 625.

While other effects of Christianity might also be mentioned, these will more than adequately demonstrate the fact that genuine Christianity improves the world. Upon origination, these ideas were peculiar to Christianity – that is, unknown to other world religions, although some of them were partially inherent in ancient Judaism.

Surely everyone will agree as self-evident that attributing great value to human life is better than considering human life cheap; that brotherhood and equality are better than division and inequality; that love is better than hate; that selflessness is better than selfishness; and that morality is better than immorality. When therefore these better concepts are implemented in the world, everyone will surely agree that the world is improved by them.

Each of these concepts will now be considered individually by noticing just how these new concepts of Christianity improve the world. ***First, Jesus taught that each individual has tremendous value.*** He asked, “What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26). The gospel story declares that God loves sinners so much that he gave his only begotten Son to die on the cross to pay for their sins.⁸ The teaching that every person is of great value was a revolutionary message in a world where gladiatorial combats, slavery, and other inhuman practices in the ancient world demonstrated that life was cheap. In Rome, gladiatorial combatants “were put on display in horrible excess and in unblushing gratification of a brutal delight in the thrill of witnessing agony and bloodshed. On some occasions, as high as ten thousand combatants took part in the ghastly performance. So profuse was the flow of blood that the sand in the arena had to be changed several times in the course of a single exhibition. The greater the amount of bloodshed the more popular was the performance. One of the highest achievements of the gospel was the abolition of this brutal pastime.”⁹

In that world, slaves, which may have constituted about a third of the population,¹⁰ could be treated harshly or even killed at the whim of their masters or mistresses. William Barclay, in his Daily Study Bible commentary on *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, describes what it was like to be a slave.

A slave was not a person: he was a living tool. Any master had the right of life and death over his slaves. The master had absolute power over his slaves. “He can box their ears or condemn them to hard labour – making them, for instance, work in chains upon his lands in the country, or in a sort of prison-factory. Or, he may punish them with blows of the rod, the lash or the knot: he can brand them upon the forehead, if they are thieves or runaways, or, in the end, if they prove irreclaimable, he can crucify them.” Pliny tells how Vedius Pollio treated a slave. The slave was carrying a tray of crystal goblets into the courtyard; he dropped and broke one; on the instant Pollio ordered the slave to be thrown into the fishpond in the middle of the court, where the savage lampreys tore him to pieces. Juvenal draws the picture of the mistress who will beat her maidservant at her caprice, and the master who “delights in the sound of a cruel flogging, deeming it sweeter than any siren’s song,” who is never happy “until he has summoned a torturer and he can brand someone with a hot iron for

⁸“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” *John 3:16*; “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” *1 Corinthians 15:3*

⁹H. E. Dana, *The New Testament World*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1937), 227.

¹⁰Abraham J. Malherbe, “Life in the Graeco-Roman World,” *The World of The New Testament*, ed. by Abraham J. Malherbe, (Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1967), 10.

stealing a couple of towels,” “who revels in clanking chains.” The slave was continually at the mercy of the caprice of a master or a mistress. What made it worse was that the slaves were deliberately held down. There were in the Roman Empire 60,000,000 slaves. They inevitably formed a constant danger. No doubt they could be crushed, but if they did ever revolt, there would have been serious trouble. A rebellious slave was promptly eliminated.¹¹

From ancient times, most non-slaves also had lives of drudgery and great poverty. In ancient Egypt, many people died in building the pyramids. When ancient China started building its great wall, one person died for each three feet of advancement. In the Roman world, most non-slaves had little of this world’s material blessings, although some had tremendous excesses of wealth and splendor. Into this world of hardship, the idea that each person had great personal worth had a telling effect.

Second, Jesus and his apostles taught the universal brotherhood and equality of mankind. The teaching of Jesus transforms individuals and nations, not by an appeal to the wealthy, the powerful, or the famous, but by an appeal to the masses of common humanity. The common people heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a manger. The apostles were men of lowly positions in life. The appeal of Jesus throughout the centuries has been to common humanity.¹²

Wherever genuine Christianity exists, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” (Colossians 3:11). It is this aspect of the Christian message that, throughout history, has become the basis for the removal of human slavery. Christianity gave dignity to the humblest person. In his book, *Christ in Modern Life*, Stopford Brooke declares that

The conception of an equal and universal brotherhood of the race . . . is the foundation of all effort to civilize barbarian peoples; it is the root and end of all noble legislation, of all just government. It is the inspiring impulse of the theory and practice of national education; it is the mainspring of all charity; it is the fountain from which flow all redemptive measures for the outcast and the criminal; it is the principle on which all the relations of capital and labor should be based; it is the idea which overthrows all tyrannies, all oppression, all slavery, all exclusive castes, all class denomination, all attempts to concentrate all the land and all the money of a country in the hands of a few. It has been the war cry and the watchword of all noble revolution.”¹³

Throughout history, the Christian idea of the equality of humanity has also been the foundation for freeing womanhood from ignorance, bondage and obscurity and for elevating females to the rational, useful, and amiable companionship of males. In Christianity, there is neither male nor female,¹⁴ but both sexes are one in moral, religious and social privileges. Christianity introduced a far greater sense of appreciation and respect for the female sex than was typical among Greeks and Romans, or even among the Jews. The plight of womanhood in ancient times, and also the benefits

¹¹William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 310.

¹²“you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” *1 Corinthians 1:26*.

¹³Monser, 557-558, quoting Stopford Brooke: *Christ in Modern Life*, 85-6.

¹⁴“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is ***neither male nor female***; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” *Galatians 3:28*.

derived to womanhood as a result of the Christian religion, are well described by Alexander Campbell in his book on *Evidences*.

In all pagan lands, and even among the Jews, she has been made little else than a slave to the passion and to the tyranny of man. The Jews rather exile her from the synagogue, as altogether animal in her nature; and the rude savage makes her more a beast of burden than a companion for man; doomed to incessant toils, to all the real drudgeries of life. Paganism, in its most improved forms, leaves her without a taste for rational enjoyment, and without a taste of it. The Jews and Pagans, for ages back, have scarce recognized that she has any claims upon man, more than for food and raiment, and these, indeed, are often dispensed to her without a smile. But some half dozen of female names have come down to us in the annals of Grecian and Roman story, as having attracted much attention from their contemporaries, or deserving much admiration from posterity. Natural affection, in defiance of pagan darkness, superstition, and cruelty, did, in some few instances, snatch some individual females from the empire of night, and gave them a place among the reputable characters of antiquity. But the sex, *as such*, were almost universally neglected. But from the time that Gabriel visited the cottage of *Mary*, the mother of our Lord, down to the present, wherever Christianity has found its way, the female sex has been emancipated from ignorance, bondage, and obscurity. It has been the aim and the glory of Christianity, my female friends, to elevate your sex from the degradation of Paganism, and to make you the rational, the useful, and the amiable companion of man. . . . Let me remind you that there are more individuals of your sex honored in the New Testament, more of their names, more of them applauded, and more true courtesy shown them, than is to be found in all the other works of the Augustan age; and let all the world know that in the New Testament it is a maxim that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, but that both sexes are one in all moral, religious, and social privileges and enjoyments of which either sex is susceptible.¹⁵

¹⁵Monser, *Ibid.* quoting Alexander Campbell, *Evidences*. Further descriptions of the plight of womanhood before the time of Christianity may also be noticed. "In general, the position of woman in the Graeco-Roman world was relatively low. This was especially true among the Greeks and Orientals. . . . [I]n the Jewish home the wife and mother held a place of honor and respect. It is also true that in the Roman home she was accorded high consideration, though the relation between the Roman and his wife lacked that element of genuine affection and mutual sympathy which distinguished the Jewish home. But the typical Jewish or Roman home was exceptional in the world at large. The average man of the first century looked upon his wife as little more than a necessary possession in life. She was expected to yield uncompromisingly to his will, to serve his pleasures, to stay in the home and rear his children, while he moved about in the circles of society with some "mistress" of physical and intellectual charms, whom he had chosen as his real companion. . . . [S]uch was not the status of the wife in every home, though we may be sure that it is correctly presented as the average." H. E. Dana, *The New Testament World*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1937), 211-212.

"In every sphere of ancient civilization, women had no rights at all. Under Jewish law a woman was a thing; she was owned by her husband in exactly the same way as he owned his sheep and his goats; on no account could she leave him, although he could dismiss her at any moment. . . . In Greek civilization the duty of the woman was "to remain indoors and to be obedient to her husband." It was the sign of a good woman that she must see as little, hear as little, and ask as little as possible. She had no kind of independent existence and no kind of mind of her own, and her husband could divorce her almost at caprice, so long as he returned her dowry. Under Roman law a woman had no rights. In law she remained forever a child. When she was under her father she was under the . . . father's power, which gave the father even the right of life and death over her; and when she married she passed equally into the power of her husband. She was entirely subject to her husband, and completely at his mercy. Cato the Censor, the typical ancient Roman, wrote: 'If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial.' Roman matrons were

While these two factors - the great worth of each individual, and the brotherhood and equality of humanity – have had and continue to have great influence in improving the world, ***the third factor – God’s love in overcoming sin and transforming humanity – is the greatest concept of Christianity for improving the world.*** It is the concept upon which these first two factors are based. Love is the central feature of the Christian religion. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

An understanding of love within Christianity begins by acknowledging two things – that humanity is sinful¹⁶ and that God is love.¹⁷ God loves humanity, not because sinful humanity merits love, but because it is God’s nature to love. The greatest love story of all time is that of God’s working throughout history to redeem humanity from both the temporal and the eternal consequences of sin which began with Adam and Eve. In the fullness of time, God brought his efforts to a climax, when God’s love was demonstrated through the loving life of Christ and his death upon the cross to redeem humankind from their sins.¹⁸ The gift of God is that by Christ’s death on the cross, believers

prohibited from drinking wine, and Egnatius beat his wife to death when he found her doing so. Sulpicius Gallus dismissed his wife because she had once appeared in the streets without a veil. Antistius Vetus divorced his wife because he saw her secretly speaking to a freed woman in public. Publius Sempronius Sophus divorced his wife because once she went to the public games. The whole attitude of ancient civilization was that no woman could dare to take any decision for herself.” William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 258-259.

“In Jewish eyes, women *officially* had a very low position. It is true that no nation ever gave a bigger place to women in home and in family things than the Jews did; but officially the position of woman was very low. In Jewish law a woman was not a person; she was a thing. She was entirely at the disposal of her father or of her husband. A woman was forbidden to learn the law; to instruct a woman in the law was to cast pearls before swine. Women had no part in the Synagogue service; they were shut apart in a section of the Synagogue, or in a gallery, where they could not be seen, and were allowed no share in the service. A man came to the Synagogue to learn; but, at the most, a woman came to hear. . . . A woman was exempt from the stated demands of the Law. It was not obligatory on her to attend the sacred feasts and festivals. Woman, slaves and children were classed together. In the Jewish morning prayer, a man thanked God that God had not made him “a Gentile, a slave or a woman.” In the *Sayings of the Fathers* Rabbi Jose ben Johanan is quoted as saying: “‘Let thy house be opened wide, and let the poor be thy household, and talk not much with a woman.’ He said it in the case of his own wife, much more in the case of his companion’s wife. Hence the wise have said: ‘Everyone that talketh much with a woman causes evil to himself, and desists from the works of the Law, and his end is that he inherits Gehenna.’” A strict Rabbi would never greet a woman on the street, nor even his own wife or daughter or mother or sister. It was said of women: “Her work is to send her children to the Synagogue; to attend to domestic concerns; to leave her husband free to study in the schools; to keep house for him until he returns.” We must remember that it was out of a Jewish background like that that the Church arose. . . .The respectable Greek women led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly, still less did she ever speak or take any active part in such an assembly.” William Barclay, *The Letters of Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, 75-76.

¹⁶“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” *Romans 3:23*; “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’” *Romans 3:10*.

¹⁷“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” *I John 4:8, 16*.

¹⁸“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” *John 3:16*; “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” *John 5:13*; “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” *Romans 5:8*; “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has

can not only be accounted righteous in God's sight,¹⁹ but also have assurance of eternal life.²⁰ God's love seeks human fellowship, both in this life and in the world to come. Will Durant's words regarding the impact of the concept of salvation on people during New Testament times are worth repeating. "To the miserable, maimed, bereaved, disheartened, and humiliated, ... [Christianity] brightened their lives with the hope of the coming Kingdom, and of endless happiness beyond the grave. To even the greatest sinners, it promised forgiveness, and their full acceptance into the community of the saved. To minds harassed with the insoluble problems of origin and destiny, evil and suffering, it brought a system of divinely revealed doctrine in which the simplest soul could find mental rest."²¹

The Christian model of love is that of God's son, Jesus Christ. "Christ is the model not only for God's love for man, but also for man's love for God. When Jesus urged that man love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, he was doing more than quoting an OT teaching; he was describing his own relation to the Father (Matt. 22:37). This relation involved affectionate, undivided devotion issuing in radical submission to the Father. The result was a spiritual, joyful obedience to the Father's will regardless of the sacrifice."²²

Jesus noted that love and obedience are tied together. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). While the law of Moses had required that Jews love their neighbors,²³ many Israelites were not certain that Gentiles were their neighbors. Christian love was new, not just because it applied to all races and nationalities – even to one's enemies,²⁴ but especially because it required that Jesus' disciples love others to the degree that he had loved them.²⁵ That

sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." *I John 4:9-10.*

¹⁹"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned; ¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) ¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." *Romans 5:12-19.*

²⁰"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 6:23.*

²¹Durant, (same source).

²²Robert A. Traina, "Love," *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry. Grand Rapids: Canon Press. 1973, 397.

²³"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." *Leviticus 19:18.*

²⁴"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you," *Matthew 5:44.*

²⁵"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." *John 13:34.*

means that Christian love requires self-denial.²⁶ That means that Christian love requires bearing one another's burdens.²⁷ When human beings realize the magnitude of God's love, they respond by loving God and one another.²⁸

The last two features to be noticed, about how Christianity improves the world, are produced directly by Christian love. One is that Christianity is the source of self-sacrifice. It turns individuals from serving self to serving others. The other relates to the transformation of individual character, and its improvement of moral standards within society.

The fourth feature is that Christian love is the source of and motivation for self-sacrifice. Recognition of Jesus' atonement for human sins produces obedience to the Lord, character qualities of trust, hope, love, and joy, and results also in a life of sacrificial service.²⁹ Only love can prompt human beings to deny themselves to serve others through humanitarian efforts and for the preaching of the gospel. One scholar has remarked that

[t]he genius of Christianity is love. Its tendency is peace on earth and good-will among men – and it will eventuate in glory to God and man in the highest heaven. It contemplates the reformation of the world upon a new principle. It aims at conquering men by love. . . . Love has a transfiguring or transforming efficacy upon the human mind. To impress the image of God upon the human heart, it is necessary that the love of God should be exhibited to the human mind. Men cannot be made to love by commands and threats – that would be most *unphilosophic*. If we would have men to love, we must present an amiable object. This is God's method. To fill men with love to Him, He shows them that He loves them. They say, "*we love Him because He first loved us.*" That system which promotes, or is calculated to promote, the greatest degree of love among men, is the most philosophic plan for purifying and reforming the world. . . . If men were to rack their ingenuity to eternity, to invent a scheme for promulgating love and good-will among men, they could find nothing half comparable to the Christian scheme. It finds men hated and hating one another, full of bitterness and wrath, yet all in the same calamity. It teaches them that they are all shipwrecked, bankrupts, miserable, and wretched. It makes them feel this; and then presents them with the love of God, sealed by the death of His Son.³⁰

Napoleon once remarked that "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him."³¹

Christians are taught to do good to everyone.³² As Jesus demonstrated God's love by healing the sick, so also his disciples have cared for the sick, the weak, the poor and other unfortunates of

²⁶"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." *Matthew 16:24-25*, See also *Mark 8:34*; *Luke 9:23-24*.

²⁷"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." *Galatians 6:2*.

²⁸"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." *I John 4:11*.

²⁹"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" *Romans 12:1-2*.

³⁰Monser, 571-572, quoting A. Campbell: *Evidences*, 34.

³¹Geikie, C. *Life and Words of Christ*, 1922, 2.

this world. Since the time of Christ, the Christian worldview has been the major motivation for building hospitals for those needing medical treatment. Christianity introduced compassion as a virtue. Prostitutes and drunkards have been assisted in turning from their waywardness. Orphans, unwed mothers, widows and other elderly have been given homes. Since Christianity was introduced into the world, societies, including cannibals, have ceased their cruel and inhumane practices, and have turned with compassion toward helping the poor and the unfortunate. Christianity has produced a greater and more permanent effect upon the character and condition of humanity than any other religion in the world.

The history of self-sacrifice during the past eighteen hundred years, has been mainly the history of the action of Christianity upon the world. Ignorance and error have, no doubt, often directed the heroic spirit into wrong channels, and have sometimes even made it a cause of great evil to mankind; but it is the moral type and beauty, the enlarged conceptions and persuasive power of the Christian faith, that have chiefly called it into being, and it is by their influence alone that it can be permanently sustained.³³

Not only does the spirit of Christian love demonstrate itself through self-denial for humanitarian efforts, it is also evident in evangelistic efforts far and near.

We talk of the apostolic mission as a matter of course; we say that the apostles were ordered to go and plant churches, and so we dismiss the great fact. But we forget that the command was rather the result of a spirit working from within, than of an injunction working from without. That spirit was Love. And when that new spirit was in the world, see how straightway it created a new thing. Men before that had traveled into foreign countries: . . . But the spectacle of an Apostle Paul crossing oceans, not to conquer kingdoms, nor to hive up knowledge, but to impart life – not to accumulate stores for self, but to give, and to spend himself – was new in the history of the world. The celestial fire had touched the hearts of men, and their hearts flamed; and it caught, and spread, and would not stop. On they went, that glorious band of brothers, in their strange enterprise, over oceans, and through forests, penetrating into the dungeon, and to the throne; to the hut of the savage feeding on human flesh, and to the shore lined with the skin-clad inhabitants of these far Isles of Britain.³⁴

The fifth, and last factor discussed here, by which Christianity improves the world is that Christianity elevates humanity to practice higher moral standards. Jesus' teachings constitute the greatest moral code ever presented to humanity. That code is based upon the holiness of God's character."³⁵ Godliness requires abstinence from sin.³⁶

The world into which Christianity came was a very immoral world. Moreover, [c]onditions in the Roman Empire for the last two centuries before the Christian Era were far from conducive to the improvement of morals. Indeed the very opposite was true. The almost perpetual warfare by which Rome extended her conquests and settled internal disputes gave dominance to the spirit of militarism, which is always destructive of moral

³²“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” *Galatians 6:10*.

³³Monser, 554-555, quoting Lecky: *Rationalism*, Vol. II, 354.

³⁴Monser, 572-573, quoting F. W. Robertson: *Vol I.*, 274-5.

³⁵“As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” *1 Peter 1:15*.

³⁶“Abstain from every form of evil.” *1 Thessalonians 5:22*.

fiber. . . . A few people acquired wealth and oppressed the poor. The love of luxury and ease increased among the rich, and the recklessness of despair degraded the poor. . . . In their conquests the Roman legions took multitudes of prisoners, who were sold into slavery. Strabo reports that on the island of Delos, which had become a center of slave trade, as many as ten thousand slaves were sometimes sold in one day. . . . In light of all the evidence we can but conclude that society of the first century was frightfully corrupt. Indulgence was taken for granted, license was condoned, and greed was the accepted rule of life. The birth-rate decreased, marriage became infrequent, and the home became the instrument or occasion of lust.”³⁷

There runs through all the Gospels a consciousness of sin and a longing for salvation. Every heathen sage, like Cyprian and Justin, went through what had previously been the experience of every Hebrew apostle, such as John or Saul. . . . And the aged and beloved disciple, always a minister of love, and always sorrowing to give even necessary pain, approaches the bedside of his [sin-sick] patients with looks and words of unusual pity, as fearing to uncover the wound which he must probe. His desire is for their holiness; “My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not.” This is the great and blessed end, sinlessness, like that of the Sinless One. “This,” says Calvin, “is not only a summing-up of what goes before, but, so to speak, a *recapitulation* of the whole Gospel, that we *should cease* from sin.”³⁸

Into the corrupt world of shameless sin that existed during New Testament times, Christianity came and turned lives around. The Apostle Paul could say even of the Corinthians, “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”(1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Christians heard the apostolic injunction, “that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

And generally, they also listened to, and followed, the apostolic exhortation, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor,

³⁷H. E. Dana, 229-231.

³⁸Monser, 570, quoting J. W. Alexander, *Faith*, 17-18.

and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:25-32).

“And how were the Christians seen to carry out this divine morality?” Charles Merivale, in his book *The Conversion of The Roman Empire*, declares that

[T]he Apologists may answer; Justine and Tertullian and the rest; who writing on the spur of the actual exigency, replied to the current calumnies of the day, and retorted upon the slanderers of the Christian Church with truths manifest to all, and which could not be gainsaid. The lives of the believers were for the most part exemplary amidst the seething corruption of the times. The heathens, whose conscience, as we have seen, was roused to feel the enormity of their own conduct, and of the familiar vices which had become ingrained in them, but who had not courage or constancy to reform themselves, to expel the devil who had taken possession of their own hearts, might behold in the Christians the example and pattern which they sighed for. They remarked among them sobriety in the midst of moral and sensual intoxication; chastity in the midst of flagrant and allowed licentiousness; good faith, where to betray a trust and deny a deposit was the rule and habit of society; forbearance, where hate and vengeance were commonly approved and sanctioned; kindness and charity one towards another; almsgiving and collecting for the necessities of the saints; tending in sickness, even to the foundation of charitable hospitals, an institution unknown to the selfishness of the heathens; redeeming of captives; burying of the dead; courage in the midst of pestilence and contagion; the fostering care of the community extended to the infants and the aged; regard for the sanctity of human life, as the image of the source and parent of all life; love to man as the child of God the Father. And more particularly they might remark that parental affection, too often violated in those selfish days, which shrank with horror from the custom of exposing children, and devoted itself with resolution and industry to the task of providing for the pledge of God’s love in marriage, instead of fleeing basely from the burden imposed by it. And further, the heathen might remark with admiration the firmness of the brethren in relinquishing many modes of profitable employment which were deemed incompatible with the Christian profession; their boldness in the confession of their faith in the face of persecutors; in refusing compliance with the forms and usages of the heathen religion, with the demand for sacrifice to idols, to swear by the name of the Emperor, to wear the chaplet of the triumphant soldier, to bear the banner of the Pagan army. And finally, they might regard with awe the patience of the Christian martyrs; their constancy under torments, their self-devotion unto death, their implicit reliance on the spiritual promises of their Master, who seemed even in death and torments to impart to them a portion of His own divine endurance.

Such was the outward bearing of the individual Christian, such the character of his society, patent to the observation of the incredulous world around it. And such the heathen, proud and incredulous as he was, himself acknowledged it, in the well-known letter of Pliny, - the first Christian apology, as it has been called; when with every wish to find reasonable ground for the complaints advanced against the Christians, he could on the strictest inquiry discover none; when the slanders of the wicked resolved themselves on examination into a confession of their innocence, and the curse was changed into a blessing. They used, it was found, to meet together on certain days; they joined in a hymn of praise to Christ their God; they bound one another, not to the commission of any crime, but to refrain from theft, from adultery, to keep their promises and hold their pledges sacred; they partook of a simple meal

in common, a meal of charity and sobriety. And hence the crowning eulogium which another heathen was constrained to pass upon them: ‘See how these Christians love one another.’³⁹

And what about the history of Christianity since New Testament times? One scholar has written that

the great characteristic of Christianity, and the great moral proof of its divinity, is that it has been the main source of the moral development of Europe, and that it has discharged this office not so much by the inculcation of a system of ethics, however pure, as by the assimilating and attractive influence of a perfect ideal. The moral progress of mankind can never cease to be distinctively and intensely Christian as long as it consists of a gradual approximation to the character of the Christian Founder. There is, indeed, nothing more wonderful in the history of the human race than the way in which that ideal has traversed the lapse of ages . . .”⁴⁰

This then is a brief statement of why genuine Christianity improved the ancient world. As it improved the world then, so it can also do now. What must be remembered, however, is that it was not just those ideas of Christianity which then “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6), but that it was those ideas translated into practice by believers. When Christians now look around and find themselves seemingly unable to improve their world, the fault lies not with those Christian ideas, but with those of us who believe but do not sufficiently practice those ideas. What we Christians now need to do is to examine ourselves in the light of these ideas to determine whether our personal practices make improvements in our own worlds, or whether our practices are inconsistent with the ideals established by Christianity.

When Christians act like we are better than others or when we become cliquish, we are acting like others are not worth as much as we. We are acting against the principles of universal brotherhood and equality of humanity. When we Christians fail to seek our neighbor’s welfare or act immorally, we are acting like God does not love us and has not redeemed us, we are acting as though this world is all there is, that we are unaware of our sins and are not conscious of the potential for eternal life. When we Christians act against these influential ideas of Christianity which have many times demonstrated their ability to improve the world, then our brand of Christianity is either powerless to make our world better, or at the very least, is not as powerful as it might otherwise be.

³⁹Merivale, Charles, *The Conversion of The Roman Empire*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866), 172-174.

⁴⁰Monser, J. W., *An Encyclopedia on the Evidences*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961) 554-554, quoting Lecky: *Rationalism*, Vol. 1, 311-12.

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