

Christian and Non-Christian

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

The Apostle Paul emphasizes the contrast between the Christian life and the non-Christian life, highlighting the Christian's separation from the world and their role as a light in the darkness.

Scripture: Matthew 25:6, Acts 28:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Topics: "Eschatology", "Christian Hope"

Description

Greek Word Studies for an aid_number 34441 preaches about the significance of the term 'apantesis' in Greek culture, which describes a ceremonial meeting with a person of position. The term is used in the New Testament to depict believers meeting the Lord in the air. The sermon delves into the technical meaning of 'apantesis' and its implications for believers meeting the Lord in the air, emphasizing the importance of being prepared and comforted by the hope of this meeting.

Transcript

HERE WE COME TO A dramatic and almost an abrupt statement. The Apostle has been describing the kind of life which is lived by the "other Gentiles", the kind of life that these Ephesians Christians themselves used to live - the life still being lived by those of their compatriots and fellows who had not believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. And having finished his description he suddenly turns, and uses this word But. Now to get the full force of this, let us look at the statement again as a whole. "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ"; and then Paul goes on to say, "if so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus".

We come, then, to this extraordinary, dramatic, vivid, almost, I say, abrupt statement which the Apostle makes here. And it is obvious that he put it in this form quite deliberately, in order to call attention to it and to shock them, and in order to bring out the tremendous contrast that he has in mind. And therefore the emphasis must be placed both upon the but and upon the you. "But you" - "you have not so learned Christ": the you in contrast with those other Gentiles; and the but standing here as a great word of contrast to bring out this marked antithesis. What then do those two words suggest to us?

The first thing, surely, that they should convey to us is a feeling of relief and of thanksgiving. I start with this because I think that it is the thing that we should be conscious of first of all. We have followed the Apostle's masterly analysis, his psychological dissection of the life of the unbeliever, the pagan, the man who is not a Christian, and we see how it goes from bad to worse because his mind is wrong. He is in a state of darkness, the heart is affected, and he is alienated from God. We have also seen men giving themselves over, in their foulness and lasciviousness, to work all kinds of iniquity and uncleanness with greediness. We have been looking at it all and seeing it. And then, Paul says, "But you"! And at once we say, Well, thank God! we are no longer there, that is not our position. And this, I repeat, is the thing that must come first; we must feel a sense of relief and profound gratitude to God that we are covered by this. But, that Paul is here turning from sin to salvation, and that we have experienced the change of which he is now going on to speak.

I emphasize this point because it seems to me that there is no better test of our Christian profession than our reaction to these words "But you". If we merely hold the truth theoretically in our minds this will not move us at all. If we have looked on at the description of sin merely in a kind of detached, scientific manner, or as the sociologist might do; if we have put down groups and categories of people, and have done it all in an utterly detached way, then we will have no sense of relief and of thanksgiving as we come to these words. But if we realise that all that was true of us; if we realise that we were in the grip and under the dominion of sin; if we realise that we still have to fight against it, then, I say, these words at once give us a sense of marvellous and wonderful relief. It is not the whole truth, of course, there is more to be said. But as we respond to these words, in our feelings, in our sensibilities, as well as with our minds, we are proclaiming whether we are truly Christian or not. We read these words of Paul, and then we read our newspapers, and as we look at what is going on all around us, we say, Yes, it is absolutely right and true, that is life in this world. And then we suddenly stop and say, Ah! but wait a minute, there is something else - there is the Christian, there is the Christian Church, there is this new humanity that is in Christ! The other seems to be true of almost everybody in the world, but it is not, for "there is yet a remnant according to the election of grace"! Thank God! In the midst of all the darkness there is a glimmer of light. Christianity is a protest in that sense; something has happened, there is an oasis in the desert. Here it is; thank God for it! And therefore I am saying that we test ourselves along these lines. Here we have been travelling in this wilderness, in this desert, and it seems to be endless. There seems nothing to hope for. Suddenly we see it - "But you"! After all, there is a bridgehead from heaven in this world of sin and shame. I But you! Relief! Thanksgiving! A sense of hope after all!

The words, "But you", of course, also mark the entry of the gospel. And I must confess that I am increasingly moved and charmed by the way in which this particular Apostle always brings in his gospel like this. We see him doing it in the fourth verse of his second chapter. He always does it in this way. There we read that terrifying passage in the first three verses, then suddenly, having said it all, Paul says, "But God"! - and in comes his gospel. And he is doing exactly the same thing here. This but, you see, this contrast, this disjunction, this is the Gospel, and it is something altogether different, it has nothing to do with this world and its mind and its outlook; it is something that comes in from above, and it brings with it a marvellous and a wonderful hope.

The Gospel always comes as a contrast. It is not an extension of human philosophy, it is not just a bit of an appendix to the book of life, or merely an addition to something that men have been able to evolve for themselves. No! It is altogether from God, it is from above, it is from heaven, it is supernatural, miraculous, divine. It is this thing which comes in as light into the midst of darkness and hopelessness and

unutterable despair. But it does come like that; and thank God, I say again, that it does.

The position we are confronted with is this. We are looking at the modern world in terms of this accurate description of it, and we see that everything that man has ever been able to think of has failed to cope with it. Is political action dealing with the moral situation? Is it dealing even with the international situation? Can education deal with it? Read your newspapers and you have your answer. Hooliganism is not confined to the uneducated. Take all your social agencies, everything man has ever been able to think of. How can it possibly deal with a situation such as that which we have been considering in verses 17, 18 and 19? When you are dealing with a darkened mind, with a hardened heart, with a principle of lasciviousness controlling the most powerful factors in man, all opposed to God, all vile and foul, what is the value of a little moral talk and uplift? What is the power of any legislation? You cannot change men's nature by passing Acts of Parliament, by giving them new houses, or by anything you may do for them. There is only one thing that can meet such a situation; and thank God it can! "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," says this great Apostle, as he looks forward to a visit to the imperial city of Rome with all its grandeur and its greatness, as well as its sin and its foulness. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ", he says, and for this reason, "it is the power of God unto salvation". And because it is the power of God it holds out a hope even for men and women who have given themselves over, abandoned themselves, to the working of all uncleanness with greediness.

I have often said that there is nothing so romantic as the preaching of the gospel. You never know what is going to happen. I have this absolute confidence that if the vilest and the blackest character in this city of London today hears this message, even if he is the most abandoned wretch in the foulest gutter, I see a hope for him, because of the gospel, this but that comes in, this power of God! The gospel comes into the midst of despair and hopelessness; it comes in looking at life with a realistic eye. There is nothing, apart from the gospel, that can afford to be realistic; everything else has to try to persuade itself like a kind of self-hypnotism. Here is the only thing that can look at man as he is, at his very worst and blackest and at his most hopeless, and still address him. Why? Because the power of God is in it. And this is a power that can make men anew and re-fashion them after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle is about to tell us. It is the work of the Creator. So the Gospel comes in this way, and the words "But you" remind us of the whole thing.

But even more, and this is the point in particular that the Apostle himself is stressing here - these two words But you at once provide us with a perfect and a comprehensive description of the Christian. Paul has described the "other Gentiles"; he is now describing the Christian. What does he tell us about him? Obviously, in the first place, he tells us that the Christian is one who by definition has been separated from and taken out of that evil world. The "other Gentiles"? - that is how they are living. "But you"! There has been a separation, the Christian has been laid hold of, he has been dragged out of that, and he has been put into another position. He was once like others, but he is no longer like them. Clearly, becoming a Christian is the profoundest change in the world. That is where, I suppose, the final enemy of the Christian faith is morality. And that is why I sometimes feel that Thomas Arnold, of Rugby fame, was perhaps of all men in the last century the one who did the greatest harm. His teaching and the teaching of his followers has obliterated this particular point, this complete change, this translation, this movement. But it is this truth that is emphasised everywhere in the Bible about God's salvation. You find the Psalmist speaking of it; he talks about being lifted up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and his feet being established upon the rock. He has had to be hauled up out of the slime, the horrible pit! the miry clay! taken hold of, lifted up, and set upon a rock, while his goings have been established on a different level. Now that is

Christianity, and it is only as the Church comes back to the realization of it that there is any hope for revival at all.

To establish the point I am making, let us hear Paul, at the beginning of his Epistle to the Galatians. He is thanking God for His wonderful grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he puts it like this: "Who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world" (1 :4). That is why Christ died. The first object of His dying on the cross was that He might deliver His people from this present evil world; He takes hold of them and pulls them out of it. Listen to the Apostle again as he writes to the Colossians: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." When you become a Christian you change your realm, you belong to a new kingdom; you are no longer in the kingdom of Satan, you belong to the kingdom of God and of His Christ; you are no longer in the kingdom of darkness, but you are in the kingdom of light. These are Paul's terms and every one of them emphasizes this movement, this translation. You are not simply improved a little bit just where you are; that is never the business of Christianity; it never does that. It is something new. And it is going to end in a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The business of Christianity is not to improve the world. No! it is to take men out of the world, to save them from it, and to form this new realm, this new kingdom, and this new humanity. We must get hold of that idea. It is not a kind of Christianisation of the world that is taught in the Bible. People are to be taken out of it, to be separated from it, and to be translated into a different position. Peter puts it like this in the second chapter of his First Epistle: "Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." The Lord takes us out of Egypt, and puts us into Canaan! It was not an improvement of the conditions in Egypt that happened under the Old Testament dispensation: on the contrary, the Israelites were taken out of Egypt, taken on their journey, and brought into Canaan. Peter very rightly goes on to address Christians as "strangers and pilgrims". "Dearly beloved", he says, "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." We are only strangers in this world if we are Christians. Paul says the same thing to the Philippians in his third chapter: "Our citizenship is in heaven." Someone has translated it, "We are a colony of heaven", which amounts to the same thing. It means that our polity, as it were, our homeland, our seat of government, is there; our citizenship is in heaven! We are in this world still, but if we are Christians we do not belong to it; we do not belong to its mind, its outlook, its organisation; we are strangers and pilgrims, we are people away from home, we are people who are simply living here on a passport; we do not belong here. Our Lord has said it clearly for us in His great high-priestly prayer; He says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

We must be clear about this. I am not saying that because of all that I have been quoting a Christian should not take part in politics or anything like that. It does not mean that at all, but it does mean that he is entirely separated in his being, in his essence and in his outlook. Because the Christian knows that this is still God's world which God is finally going to redeem, he believes that sin and evil must be controlled. In his view, politics and the whole of culture are negative and are simply designed to keep sin and evil within bounds, and to keep their manifestations from running riot. But what he does, he does as a stranger; he does it as a man who belongs to another realm, but who has pity upon this realm; and thus he gives his time and energies in an endeavour to keep evil within bounds. He does not put his faith in earthly things, he does not think that you can bring in a new Jerusalem by Acts of Parliament, as so many foolish people thought at the beginning of this century. He has no use for the (social' gospel, because it has always failed and always must fail: for it is based upon the fallacy of not realising that man's heart is hardened, and that his whole outlook is darkened. It is of all teachings the most fatuous. But the Christian has been separated

from all such hopes. He has been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son.

But these words of Paul show us another thing about the Christian and his character. Because of this translation that has taken place, the life of the Christian is to present a complete contrast to that other life. "But you; you have not so learned Christ." Paul puts the emphasis on the word so. It is not thus that you have learned Christ, says the Apostle. You have not learned Christ in such a way as to say, Well yes, I believe in Christ but I still go on living as I did before. Impossible! he says, Out upon the suggestion! He again uses litotes, one of his favourite figures of speech. "You have not so learned Christ" - that is a negative, is it not? What he means is something very positive. Litotes is a very good figure of speech to employ if you are anxious to bring out emphasis. Let me give you another familiar example of it. Take the one I have already quoted from in Romans 1:16 where the Apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." What he means is that he is tremendously proud of it, that he has absolute confidence in it, and that he makes his boast in it. But he expresses it by an emphatic negative, not ashamed. Similarly, he says here, "You have not so learned Christ." By which he means that the very suggestion is utterly impossible; it is unthinkable; the thing is ludicrous, he says, you cannot possibly hold it for a moment if you have really understood these things. The Apostle is emphasising that the life of the Christian is to be altogether different from that of "other Gentiles". It is to suggest and to present the most complete and striking contrast to everything that is represented by that kind of worldly life. The life of the Christian is not to be something vague and indefinite, not something which is difficult to define, and difficult to recognise. According to Paul's teaching, and the teaching of the entire Bible, it is clear-cut and obvious - it stands out, it is perfectly definite, and anybody should be able to recognise it at a glance.

Let us look at some of the terms which are used in the Scripture to bring out this very point. Take the words that were used by our Lord Himself. He says that the Christian is to be the "salt of the earth". He says also that Christians are to be "the light of the world". The Apostle Paul uses similar words in writing to the Philippians. In the second chapter he tells them that they are to "shine" as "lights in the world" (A.V.). The picture is that the whole world is in darkness, absolutely dark, and would be universally dark were it not for the occasional star here and there shining. Lights in the heavens! The contrast between Christians and people who are not Christian is the contrast between light and darkness. Again, Christ says that when a man lights a candle he does not put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick that it may light the whole house. And He also says that His disciples are like "a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid". It is there for all men to see. A Christian should be as impossible to hide as a city set on a hill. The whole terminology is designed to bring out these very contrasts. The whole thing is put again so perfectly in the passage in 2 Corinthians 6, where Paul writes, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever? Or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" So the Christian is one who stands out in society because he is a Christian. This does not mean that he will be angular or delight in being odd or make himself eccentric or foolish, but it does mean that as we read about our Lord that "He could not be hid", it is equally true about the Christian. When purity appears in the midst of impurity there is no need for it to exaggerate itself or to send a trumpeter before it to announce its presence, as the Pharisees did, as they made broad their phylacteries. No! Purity advertises itself: the contrast does it all.

Now this is the kind of thing that the Apostle is here stressing and impressing upon the Ephesians. He says, as it were, to them: It is unthinkable that you should live as the unbelievers do; your whole life and

behaviour, your demeanour and deportment should suggest something which is marvellously and strangely different. I am emphasising, you see, that it should not be difficult for people to know that we are Christians. But I wonder whether it is? I wonder whether sometimes they are surprised when they are told that we are Christians? Is not this one of the tragedies of the age in which we live, that the line of demarcation between the church and the world has become so obscured and ill-defined and uncertain? I know that there is undoubtedly a reaction against a false Puritanism and I am not here to defend a false Puritanism; God forbid that I should! You notice that I call it a false Puritanism - a mere morality that has really lost contact with the truth.

It was much in evidence at the end of the Victorian era, and God forbid that we should have that mechanical religion back! But I am suggesting that in our reaction we have gone altogether too far to the other extreme and we have obscured something that is absolutely vital in the New Testament, namely, this line of demarcation between the world and the Church.

At one time it was customary for Protestantism to criticise Roman Catholicism on the ground that it mixed the two, and it undoubtedly does; but alas Protestantism has followed suit and has done the same! The modern Christian seems to think that he is doing something wonderful when he behaves very much like the man of the world; he tries to argue that this is the way to win him. But he is not winning him! Our Lord could mix with publicans and sinners, but He was never mistaken for one of them; He was called the friend of publicans and sinners, but the contrast was there even in the criticism. And the point is that the true Christian, because of what has happened to him, because of this regeneration, because of the work of the Spirit, because he has been made anew, is of necessity a different man, and should show himself to be a different man.

But I will go further. Not only does the Christian know that he is different, the non-Christian also knows it. At once the Christian and the non-Christian are aware of a difference between themselves. They are aware of a lack of affinity. I want to press this, because it seems to me to be one of the most thorough-going tests we can ever apply to ourselves. Unless we are conscious of a lack of affinity with people who still belong to the world I cannot see that we are Christians at all. That does not mean that we cannot share certain things with them, that we cannot be pleasant, that we cannot pass the time of day with them, as it were. But it does mean that we are aware of a difference, of a barrier, that we belong to different realms and to different positions entirely. We can have social relations with non-Christians, but the whole time we are aware of this difference, we are not at home in that atmosphere. We may, for various reasons, have to be with them occasionally, but we are aware that we do not belong to their world. And they too are equally aware of the fact that we do not belong to it. And that is the thing that is so valuable, that even the non-Christian, the man of the world, expects the Christian to be different.

One of the greatest fallacies I have ever encountered in this respect was one that came in during the First World War. I describe it without mentioning the man most responsible for it; the individual as such does not matter, for we are not concerned with personalities but with principles. There was an outlook propagated by this particular man who argued like this. "Take those men in the trenches in the first world war; now" he said, "if we are going to influence those men when we go back into civilian life, we must show them that we really belong to them; so the way to do that, the way to win men to Christ, is to sit down and smoke Woodbines with them, and to use their language. If they curse and swear, let us curse and swear too; we are doing it for a good object, with a good intention; we will fraternise with them, we will show them that we are, after all, all of the same bunch, we belong together; and then if we only do that with them they will come crowding to our churches to listen." But, you know, they did not! And thank God

they did not! The man of the world, the man who is still a sinner, expects the Christian to be different, and he does not respect very much the kind of Christian who is not different. We read the Gospels and we find that the most desperate cases drew near to the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because He was so different! I am not suggesting that there is a spark of divinity in fallen human nature, but I am suggesting that there is always a hopelessness in the life of sin, which somehow or another pays its tribute to purity and holiness and Christ-likeness. It knows it is different. And so you will often find in novels and stories that when certain brutal men are trying to make fun of a Christian, perhaps the greatest bully of all will come along and stop them and say, You must not do that, he is a good fellow. There is the difference, and I say that it is recognised on both sides.

But what are the things which thus differentiate us? Let me give you John Bunyan's answer to my question. I am saying that the Christian, because he is a Christian, is altogether unlike the man of the world and that he and the man of the world are aware of it. Let John Bunyan say it in his Pilgrim's Progress.

"Then I saw in my dream that when they were got out of the wilderness, they presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity"; (Paul speaks of men walking in the vanity of their minds!) - "and at the town there is a Fair kept, called Vanity Fair; it is kept all the year long; it beareth the name of Vanity Fair, because the town where it is kept is lighter than Vanity; and also because all that is there sold, or that cometh thither, is vanity; as is the saying of the wise, "All that cometh is vanity".

"This Fair is no new-erected business, but a thing of ancient standing. I will shew you the original of it" (and he then quotes Ecclesiastes 1:2 and certain particular verses) "Almost five thousand years ago, there were Pilgrims walking to the Celestial City, as these two honest persons are; and Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, with their companions, perceiving by the path that the Pilgrims made, that their way to the City lay through this Town of Vanity, they contrived here to set up a Fair; a Fair wherein should be sold all sorts of vanity, and that it should last all the year long. Therefore, at this Fair, are all such merchandise sold, as houses, lands, trades, places, honours, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts; as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not. And, moreover, at this Fair, there is at all times to be seen, juggling, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of every kind." (This is wonderful literature, is it not? It is still more wonderful spiritually.) "Here are to be seen too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false swearers, and that of a blood-red colour.

"And, as in other Fairs of less moment, there are several rows, and streets, under their proper names, where such and such wares are vended; so here likewise you have the proper places, rows, streets (viz. countries and kingdoms), where the wares of this Fair are soonest to be found. Here is the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row, where several sorts of vanities are to be sold. But as, in other Fairs, some one commodity is the chief of all the Fair, so the ware of Rome and her merchandise is greatly promoted in this Fair; only our English nation, with some others, have taken a dislike thereat." (That was, remember, three hundred years ago!)

"Now as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this Town where this lusty Fair is kept; and he that would go to the City, and yet not go through this Town, must needs go out of the World. The Prince of princes himself, when here, went through this Town to his own Country, and that upon a Fair-day too. Yea, and as I think, it was Beelzebub, the chief Lord of this Fair, that invited him to buy of his vanities; yea, would have made him Lord of the Fair, would he but have done him reverence as he went through the

Town; yea, because he was such a Person of Honour, Beelzebub had him from street to street, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a little time, that he might, if possible, allure that blessed One to cheapen and buy some of his vanities: but he had no mind to the merchandise, and therefore left the Town without laying out as much as one farthing upon these vanities. This Fair, therefore, is an ancient thing, of long standing, and a very great Fair.

"Now these Pilgrims, as I said, must needs go through this Fair. Well, so they did; but behold even as they entered into the Fair, all the people in the Fair were moved, and the Town itself, as it were, in a hubbub, about them, and that for several reasons; for,

'First', The Pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that Fair. The people, therefore, of the Fair, made a great gazing upon them. Some said they were fools; some, they were bedlams; and some, they were outlandish men.

'Secondly', And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said: they naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the Fair were the men of this World; so that, from one end of the Fair to the other, they seemed barbarians each to the other.

'Thirdly', But that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was, that these Pilgrims set very light by all their wares; they cared not so much as to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity'; and look upwards, signifying that their trade and traffic was in Heaven."

Notice Bunyan's three reasons. I believe they are as true and as valid today as they have ever been! The Christian is careful even in the matter of dress and appearance. He is not governed by Vanity Fair, with all its sex appeal so-called, and all its enticements to evil and all the inflaming of the passions. The Christian is careful and modest in dress. And likewise in speech: not only in the things he talks about, but the way in which he talks about them. And thirdly, the Christian is not interested in the vanities and the trinkets that are being sold still in Vanity Fair. He is interested in the merchandise of heaven. His treasure and his heart are in heaven. "But you have not so learned Christ!" Thank God for the gospel of salvation that delivers us from the enticements of Vanity Fair!

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