

Conference for Missionaries-1986 - Part 1

by William MacDonald

Christians must strive to live like Jesus Christ, practicing their faith without adulterating it and emphasizing love, in order to shape the world and bring glory to God.

Duration: 39:23

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, John 13:35, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:1-2, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 3:10, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Conference", "Christian Character", "Christ Likeness"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of becoming Christ-like in character, asserting that this is the highest goal for Christians. He argues that true Christian character is defined by conformity to the image of Jesus, which should be the ultimate ambition of every believer. MacDonald warns against the inconsistency of many who profess faith yet fail to live it out, highlighting that our lives should reflect Christ to the world. He encourages believers to strive for a life that embodies the love and character of Jesus, as this is the most powerful testimony to the gospel. Ultimately, he calls for a transformation that aligns our actions with our faith, so that we may accurately represent Christ to others.

Transcript

The Lord Jesus was praying that his people might be morally and spiritually like himself, that his people might be godly, that his people might be Christ-like. That's what would shape the world, conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus. The highest description of Christian character is found in the word Christ-like.

You cannot go higher than that. When applied to a believer, it's the ideal tribute, the ultimate honor. There's no ambition higher than to be like Jesus.

We talk about long-term goals, and we talk about short-term goals. The greatest goal of all is to achieve Christ-likeness in life. Henry Drummond said, to become like Christ is the only thing in the world worth caring for.

The thing before which every ambition of man is vanity, and all lower achievement vain. I'm sure it must be a very satisfying experience to be greatly gifted, to be able to teach or preach in such a way that you'd have the audience, as it were, in the palms of your hands. It must be wonderful to be able to preach, so the heart abounds beneath the influence of the word.

But Christ-likeness is better than great gifts. A man might be very gifted on the platform, at a perfect crouch at home, and the two don't go well together. Gift is a sovereign favor of God bestowed upon us, but grace is something in which our responsibility is involved, in which we have to develop by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many people today aspire to be great personal soul winners. They rush around breathlessly, witnessing for Jesus Christ, and racking up souls at the end of the day, cutting the notches on their guns. But oftentimes their lives are an embarrassment.

Oftentimes their lives don't back up what they're doing. They forget those words of the Lord Jesus, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Sometimes I think we develop such familiarity with a verse like that, that we don't stop to think what it says.

What does that mean, follow me? It means live as I live, get into Christ's life. Oftentimes their lives don't back up what they're doing. They forget those words of the Lord Jesus, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

Sometimes I think we develop such familiarity with a verse like that, that we don't stop to think what it says. What does that mean, follow me? It means live as I live, get into Christ's life, get into Christ's life, and I will make you to be fishers of men. That's the proper order, and our responsibility is to talk and give, and give is to make us fishers of men.

So is the natural outcome of Christ's life according to those words of the Lord Jesus. And God's great purpose for his people is that we must become more and more like the Lord Jesus, who heard, he felt pleased with his Savior, that he wants to fill heaven with others just like him. Certainly when we see the Savior we're going to be like him, aren't we? We shall be like him, and we shall be in heaven.

That will be an automatic transformation, but it's more glory to God if we're becoming like him down here. That will be an act of power and grace. I think Carol Mayvall has given us a good illustration of the process of becoming Christ's life.

She tells about this lady who was concerned about her weight, and she went to a reduced-use salon, and the first thing the supervisor did was go to a small mirror and with crayons, she drew a syllabus of what that woman wanted to become, and every week the woman would go home, and she would do away with chocolate milkshakes and strawberry cream pie, and then she'd come back and stand before the mirror, and maybe she was still overflowing the syllabus, but she kept on coming, and she kept on coming, and finally she fit the pattern. That's it. God has a pattern for us.

We must work on it until we fit the pattern. Another lovely illustration to use is this of the stilt-servant, and he took an ungainly piece of granite, and he had a mallet, and he had a chisel, and he started chipping away with the granite, and before he was through, a beautiful lion emerged, breathtaking, and somebody came and said, I think it was Michelangelo, something seen to Michelangelo, and he said, how did you ever do that? And he said, I just chipped away everything that didn't look like a lion. He got the point.

God is trying to chip away everything that doesn't look like a lion in your life, and in mine. At the following moments, we want to describe how God's goal is to chisel away on our lives until the image of the man appears, and as we do, may our prayer be, let it be seen that with thee I have sinned, Jesus my Lord and my Savior, let it be known I am only thine by all my speech and behavior. Every one of us is expected to

be a role model of Jesus.

I find that very, very encouraging. We're to show the world what Jesus is like. It's an awesome responsibility.

We are members of the body of Christ. The body is the vehicle by which the Lord Jesus expresses himself to the world today, isn't it? The body of Christ. You and I are members of the body of Christ.

We want to express himself to the world. That raises a very certain question which I wrote in front of my Bible years ago. If of Jesus Christ there only be, may be what they see of him in you, and Ronald, what do they see? If of Jesus Christ there only be, may be what they see of him in you, and Ronald, what do they see? Like it or not, Charles Swindoll says, the world watches us with the scrutiny of an eagle watching a shrimp in shallow water.

For believers under constant surveillance, that's our number one occupational hazard. When we speak of our Savior and the life he offers, everything we say is filtered through that which has been observed. The sad fact is that the Lord Jesus has suffered greatly from the hands of some people.

He's been wounded in the house of his friends. James thinks that more evil is done to the cause of Christianity by its adherents than by its opponents. Do you believe that? More evil is done to the cause of Christianity by its adherents than by the world's often-confined obsessions with his Christ.

They argue rightly that if Christianity is what we claim it is, it ought to make a difference in the life of the world. Now, just pay attention when we talk to you and your non-Christian friends. The greatest argument that they use is simply the product of the inconsistent life of their believers.

How do you answer that? Well, the world brings it up. Let me read you what he said. Many of us have said that we are predestined to live our lives while pretending to believe they are viable.

The fact is that there were no such people. That has been one of the strongest arguments of my skeptical opinion. Let me give you some examples of four role models of people that will be part of your cultural shock coming back to the United States soon.

I was over in Alabama a year or two ago, and I had a Christian friend who I part-timed, so I didn't want to be a part of his cultural shock, but at the time he did have a problem, and it had some problems. On the left side of the bumper, there's a person who just said, I. There's also a person who just said, I. On the right-hand side of the bumper, there's a person who said, you put an icon on a national building. Now, here in Alabama, here's an interesting scene.

What an inconsistent text on this right-hand side of the world. Who? So, on Sunday night, on a religious broadcast, Monday morning, he's back in the office, and things are not going well at all, and he took it out on his secretary. They really let her have it, and as she was going out the office, the week, to the ladies room, he passed another girl, and she said, yep, come to Jiva from Sunday night, and go to hell on Monday.

Breaks your heart, doesn't it? Breaks your heart that if the church weren't a divine institution, it never would have survived. Would never have survived blows like that. The inconsistency in the life of Christian people.

All the time we hear of famous actors and actresses, and they have recently been born again, and the news is blazing from coast to coast. The Christian community suffers from an intense inferiority complex, and gloats over anyone who professes to be born again. The trouble is that they don't make a plea right with the world.

They go on living the same lifestyle that they have always lived, and sometimes you hear of them starring in a low-rated movie, and it's very evident that Christ has not made a change in their life, and all of this in the name of the lovely Lord Jiva. That's the sad part about it, that it's associated with Christ. Or, it could be Christian musicians with their theatrical performances.

The body language, the imitation of the world, and all of its styles, and oftentimes the questionable lyrics. A young woman within the last two years, heralded as a great gospel singer. Next thing she's coming out with statements that are slightly less than pornographic in the paper.

She says, that's Christianity? Thanks very much, I don't know. You remember a gangster who professed to be saved in one of the great crusades in this country, but his life didn't change at all. The news spread like wildfire that he was now a believer, but he continued to carry on his underworld activities, and when somebody confronted him with this caricature of Christianity, he said, nobody ever told me that in coming to Christ I hadn't changed my life.

He said, you have Christian cowboys. He said, you have Christian politicians. He said, you have Christian football players.

Why can't you have a Christian gangster? And he went back into the world. You never heard from him again. Nothing all may be one, but the world may believe that thou hast sinned.

Then there are the Christian TV personalities, sporting costly costumes, makeup put on their fingers, dripping with jewelry made up like Jezebel. And this is the way Jesus is presented in the 20th century by tenuous friends from Nazareth. And don't forget those radio and TV creatures who carry on a begging, money-making raps.

And it goes on until some clever reporter gets a hold of the story, and the whole thing comes out in the headlines, another blot on the of Jesus. In the past year, our fellows were studying cults, and one of the fellows did a report on faith healers, and he brought a video cassette to the class. It seems that there's a show on television, Johnny Carton, and one night he had a fellow on called the Incredible Randy.

Randy's no friend of Christianity, apparently, but he likes to expose anything that professes to be supernatural. And so he picked one of the healers, the healer's name was Peter Popoff. No harm in mentioning him, because it's been in the papers and TV.

And he went to the Peter Popoff show, and first of all you see Peter Popoff there, and he's saying, man in the meeting tonight named Harry. Harry, would you raise your hand? Harry raises his hand. Wife is good.

Harry, let's see, you live at 30, for the Lord has revealed to me you live at 3844 foothills. Harry says, yes, that's right. How did he know? The Lord reveals to him.

Wife is crying by now, this wonderful revelation from the Lord. He says, you have eye trouble, don't you? And your wife has eye trouble, too. Come over here, and let me put your hands on your eyes.

Puts his hand on their eyes, and pushes them down into the chair. I don't know whether that was flame in the spirit, but I want to tell you it was a hefty push down into the chair. And then came the expose.

Incredible Randy had gone there, not only with cameras, but with sound equipment as well. They found that Mrs. Popoff went out to the audience before the meeting, and she interviewed people who came to be healed. And if they wanted to be healed, she gave them a card to fill out.

Harry, 3844 foothills. Eye trouble. Wife has eye trouble, too.

And then the meeting would start, Mrs. Popoff was behind the scenes. I forgot to tell you that when Randy first interviewed Peter Popoff, he noticed he had an ear bone. He had something in his ear, and he thought, that's funny.

That's funny for a healer to be deaf. But before the meeting starts, Mrs. Popoff goes out in the back, and she's broadcasting on 38 megahertz, and Peter is picking it up in the earpiece. And she says, the next man is Harry.

He said, I have a revelation from the Lord that the man named Harry is coming. She said, 3844 foothills. He said, you live at 3844 foothills.

And this was, you could hear this. You could hear this on the videocassette. You could hear the broadcast.

You could hear her broadcast. You could hear him and then presenting it as a revelation from the Lord. And this is why the world gobs today.

This is why it's getting harder and harder in the United States to reach people with the gospel of the grace of God. One of America's favorite TV preachers was reported to live in a 12-room mansion modeled after the palace of Versailles. He had fabulous formal gardens, stables, and pools.

Another bought a half-million-dollar mansion in Los Angeles, which his wife called a little place to get away to, and he added a Rolls-Royce to his fleet of Jaguars and Mercedes-Benz. And assembly people are sending money to these radio and TV deliveries. Instead of supporting the missionaries, those who've been commended from the assembly, they become part of a TV church and are sending money.

Heartbreaking to read the newspapers and of Christian leaders who've left their wives and gone off with their secretaries, or celebrated Christian women who've turned away from husband and foes to go off with another man. Dear friends, the evangelical world really needs a house cleaning. All is not gold that glitters.

I think of how Christ is sometimes libeled by so-called Christian politicians, men who profess to be born again in order to get the votes, because they know that the despicable evangelical community with voting power. And then you hear their earthy language, and you read about their questionable compromises and their shadowy association that it all links with the name of Jesus. That's the dishonor done to the Lord Jesus Christ is incalculable.

And maybe we should even mention Christian prisoners. And we've seen so much of this out our way. Men who claim to have been saved, and through strong representation from believers, the judge shows leniency to them.

He says, I know you're a con man, but under the circumstances, I'm going to release you. And they released him, and some Christian organization gets ahold of him, and they put him on parade throughout

the country, forgetting the scripture. He says, not a novice, but being lifted up with pride, he's fallen to the condemnation of the devil.

And that's just what happened. I visited up at San Quentin once with a man there. I'm very fond of him.

Do you know why? He went around town, San Quentin, with a t-shirt, and it said, Powered by Christ. And he would lead a man to Christ out in the yard of San Quentin. I thought to myself, McDonald, if you were here, would you do that? No way, you know.

Powered by Christ. That was his testimony at San Quentin. He came out of the Christian organization, got ahold of him, made a movie about him, got him traveling throughout the country.

Last I heard, he was acting inside again. And he had a wonderful testimony for the Savior, that dear fellow. What shall we say about Christian students who cheat on exams, and housewives who quarrel with their neighbors, and common folk who are rude and short-tempered? And these are all libels instead of bibles.

Every instance of behavior that is un-Christlike causes the enemies of Christ to blaspheme. Every poor role model causes people to say, What you are speaks so loud, I can't hear what you say. I think it was this that caused John MacArthur to say one time, I think that Jesus had a lot more class than many of his agents.

A soldier was brought before Alexander the Great with some discipline problem, and Alexander said, And what's your name? And he said, Alexander, sir. He said, Well, either change your name or change your behavior. What's your name? Christian Lord.

That's it. He came across a little thing in one of the books by E. Stanley Jones. He was talking to Mahatma Gandhi one day, and he said to him, and he said, I would like to see Christianity in India not as a foreign religion, not as a religion from some imperial power, but as a native religion of India, a part of the national life of India, and contributing its power to India's uplift and redemption.

What would you suggest that we do to make this possible? And you know what Gandhi said? He said, I would suggest that all of you Christians must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, I would suggest that you practice your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. And third, he said, I would suggest that you must put your emphasis on love, for love is the center and soul of Christianity.

I'll tell you, that's something coming from an unconverted man, isn't it? I think I'll read that again so that it'll stick in my mind and in your mind as well. I would suggest that all of you Christians must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, I would suggest that you must practice your religion without adulterating it or toning it down.

And third, I would suggest that you must put your emphasis on love, for love is the center and soul of Christianity. Well, that's kind of a bleak picture. We're not in a meeting on a picture like that by any means.

We've shown how Christians have often grossly misrepresented the Lord Jesus to the world. Rather depressing. Praise God, that's another side of the picture.

There have been an army who are giving a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. I think of one of the fellows in our intern program a few years ago. He was a classmate of George Frisco here.

How many years ago was that, George? Three? Three years ago. This fellow's name was Rob Luce. He was stricken with cancer, and he was dying.

District nurse came out to visit in the home, and she said to Donna, an unconverted woman, she said, Rob makes me think of Jesus. He made all of us think of Jesus. He was a Christ-like fellow.

I'm not saying it because he died, I'm saying it because it's true. He was only saved a few years. He had memorized 1,200 verses of scripture, and when we would go over to visit with him, we would sing with him, the whole group of interns would sing with him, we'd pray with him, and the scriptures that he would quote to us were obviously given to him by the Lord for this particular time in his life.

I said to him one day, Rob, you know a lot of scripture. What's your favorite verse of scripture? He said, but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry I've received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. When the Lord took him home, one of the men in Fair Haven said, Rob taught us how to live, and he taught us how to die.

That was one of the greatest experiences, I think, of our discipleship intern training program, to be there that year with Rob Luce during his last days on earth. It made me think of what Spurgeon said. Spurgeon said, spend much time with the dying.

He used to tell his students that, spend much time with the dying. I know now why he said it. It was a tremendous experience in all of our lives.

I won't say we of course we wept, but Rob taught us how to live, and he taught us how to die. Robert Chapman, Christ-like man, he set before himself the great goal. He said, since so many preach Christ, and so few live Christ, I will aim to live Christ.

Darby said of him, he lives, but I preach. What a testimony! I've read so often that story that somebody addressed a letter to him, Robert Chapman, University of Love, England, and it was delivered. You read that? Robert Chapman, University of Love, and it was delivered.

Somebody said of William Arnett, his preaching was good, his writing was better, but his life was best of all. You could hardly say anything better to a man than that. Some of you have read the story of Sadhu Sundar Singh.

A Sikh converted. I think he was about 15 when he was converted. He had really, as a young man, been a real enemy of the gospel.

He'd gone to the mission school, and taken New Testaments, and destroyed them. But the Lord shook him when his mother died, and in a marvelous way he was converted to the Savior, and went out to live a life of discipleship. And one day, as a Christian preacher, he went to a home, and he knocked on the door, and the maid opened the door, and she rushed breathlessly to her mistress to say, I think Christ has come.

In another home, one night, Sadhu Sundar Singh was playing on the hearth rug with the children, and when they went to bed that night, they said to their mother, Mother, could Jesus put us to sleep? They were so moved by the life of this man of God. His Christian appearance was matched by his gentleness of the authority of his bearing in spirit. Another man was Robert Murray McShane, who moved Scotland, died

at the age of 29.

And James Stewart says of him, his holiness was noticeable even before he spoke a word. His appearance spoke for him. He was in the north of Scotland, spent a night with a minister there, and when he left in the morning, when he left the house in the morning, the minister broke down and wept.

He said, I have never met a more Jesus-like man. McShane spent hours in holy communion inside the veil, in rapturous praise and adoration, being bathed in Calvary's love. He would come forth from God's presence to leave the fragrance of Christ as he went from house to house in visitation.

As he walked the streets of his parish, and even anywhere in Britain, the people were startled to see the look of Jesus on his face. Richard Hillary was an unconverted pilot. He wrote a book called *The Last Enemy*, and in the book he confesses that he was really annoyed by one of his fellow pilots called Peter Pease.

Peter Pease was a consistent Christian, and he said the best man he had ever met. And his one ambition was to get Peter alone, and to open up his big guns on him, and just devastate the fabric of his faith. And his chance came as they were traveling together one day on the way to Edinburgh.

He glared at poor Peter Pease, and he said, your religion is a fake, a hereditary hangover, a useful social adjunct, and nothing more. And poor Peter opened his mouth and tried to say something, and he stammered out a few feeble protestants, and he just lapsed into silence. He was crushed by his opponent's flood of dialectics.

But Hillary says in the book that he knew that he had lost the argument, for there was one fact he could not explain Peter's character. It and his religion were inextricably bound up together, and it played havoc with logic. Hmm? A Christ-like life is worth more than a thousand arguments.

That's why J.P. Jowett said in one of his books, men may more than match you in subtlety of arguments, in intellectual arguments you may suffer an easy defeat, but the argument of a redeemed life is unassailable. Seeing the man that was healed, they could say nothing against it. Isn't that good? Seeing the man that was healed, they could say nothing against it.

It can't argue against the transformed life. Shortly arriving on the mission field with a missionary, he was speaking for the first time to a group of villagers, and he was trying to present the gospel to them, and in presenting the gospel he was introducing the Lord Jesus as one who was compassionate, kind, loving, caring, one who went about doing good, and he noticed that the people had kind of a knowing look on their face, and they were nodding in agreement. And he interrupted the message, and he said, why are you all nodding in agreement? Do you know who I'm talking about? And they said, oh yes, they said, we know who you're talking about.

You've been talking about a man who used to come here, and he described a missionary doctor who had come to their remote village to minister to their physical needs. His life had been so Christlike in caring for the people that they saw the Lord Jesus in him. He was truly an example of conformity to Christ.

If you read the little *Daily Devotion*, R. Daley read a story recently of how Billy Graham was playing golf with President Ford one time, and let's see, Jack Nicklaus, the golfer, and another golfer had been invited along, and after the round was over, one of the other pros said, hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham? And the man said with disgust, I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion

down my throat. With that, he headed for another parlor and began taking out his aggression on a bucket full of golf balls. And so the other golfer said, what's the matter with Billy Graham, a little rough on you out there? And the pro sighed and said with embarrassment, no, he didn't even mention religion.

It was his life. It was his life that made that golfer uncomfortable. He didn't even mention religion.

That they all may be one, that the world may be that thou hast sent me. That's the message, isn't it? To be more like Jesus, day by day, that others may see him in us, and want to know him as well. Shall we pray? Father, you really speak to us through your word, and we feel ashamed, and so often the things we do and say are libels instead of Bibles, and so often by our characters we misrepresent the Lord Jesus.

We give the world a caricature instead of a true picture. We think of conditions in the evangelical world today, Lord, and we're part of it, and we would just eat the sin offering. Pray, Lord, that you'll come in, in convicting power, clean away all the blocks, break up the fallow ground, that the church may begin to give a truer representation of the Lord Jesus to the world.

Make us willing, Lord. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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