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WHO IS A CHRISTIAN

By D.B. Knox

"The Protestant Faith"

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If you ask people what a christian is you will get quite a variety of answers. Some will define being a christian in terms of morality. They would say that a christian is a person who lives a good life, keeps the ten commandments, helps his neighbour. Of course a christian does these things but this is not the essential thing which makes a person a christian. Other people describe christianity in terms of belief; a christian is one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, that He rose from the dead and so on. Here too, christians of course believe these truths. But again the definition is inadequate. Others again define being a christian in terms of relationship. A christian is one who has accepted Jesus as his own Lord and Saviour. This is true; here is the essence of christianity. But it is interesting to note that the New Testament has a fourth way of describing the christians. According to the New Testament a christian is one who is expectantly waiting for the coming in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are those who are waiting and watching for their Lord. There are lots of verses in the New Testament which describe christians in this way, for example; in I Thessalonians 1:10, the Thessalonian christians are said to be waiting for God's Son from heaven. In Philippians 3:20 the Philippian christians are looking for the coming of the Saviour from heaven. In I Corinthians 1:7 the Corinthian christians are waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 9:24 the writer says that Jesus will appear to those who wait for him, that is, christians are described as those who wait for their Saviour's appearance. In II Peter 3:12 they are said to be eagerly awaiting that day, and in Titus 2:13 christians are those who are "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us". So we see that the New Testament defines christians as people who are waiting for the coming of Jesus. It is this hope and expectation which is the most characteristic feature of their present life. By this New Testament definition, can you say that you are a christian, can I claim to be one? This is the question we must ask of ourselves. What of the congregation of which we are members, is it characterised by waiting for Christ's coming, eagerly looking for it, is it a christian congregation, in terms of the way the New Testament describes christians in those apostolic days? It is no use making up our own definition of

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a christian and saying that our denomination is a christian denomination because it teaches people to keep the ten commandments, or to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we must follow New Testament descriptions of what a christian does. If we are to be true Christians we must not only personally accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, but we must be eagerly awaiting the fulfilment of his promised coming.

What a wonderful relief it is to realise that the present life is only a pilgrimage, only temporary, that it may be cut short at any moment with the glorious coming of our Saviour. This hope and expectation saves us from being obsessed with temporary causes and objectives, within the church or in our own private lives. Church property development and church buildings are unimportant on the judgement day. Faith, love, joy and obedience are the values that are eternal.

How are we to recover this vivid expectation and attitude of waiting for the Saviour's return? The last passage I quoted, Titus 2:11-14, gives us the clue. The fourteenth verse is a catena of quotations from the Old Testament all of which speak about the actions of God, of Jehovah, who will redeem his people from their iniquities and purify them as His own special people. But you will notice that in this passage, these Old Testament quotations about God are ascribed to Jesus, for indeed He is God, manifest in the flesh; and the writer in verse 13 correctly describes Jesus as "our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ". We need not hesitate to accept this title for Jesus. Not only is it the plain meaning of the Greek, but the writer goes on to make clear that this is his meaning by ascribing to Jesus all those Old Testament passages which refer to Jehovah. The wonderful truth is that the great God, the creator who inhabits eternity, has for our sakes become man and has given Himself for us on the cross in love, to redeem us from our sins and to restore us to His fellowship. God's purposes are in the process of completion. He has created the world and created us; He has entered the world as its Saviour; and He has saved us; and He will complete all this with the manifestation in glory of His eternal kingdom. We will share that glory for eternity. These purposes are sure and they



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should so fill our minds that everything else drops away to its own proper place. We should, like the early christians, be described as those who in their daily life, as they go about their duties are, in real fact, waiting for and looking for the coming of their Lord and Saviour. That will be a great day.

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