

Be the Change

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*Be the change that you want to see in the world.
Mahatma Gandhi*

By Christopher J. Patton

I live my life today as Jesus did anciently. Of course, there are rational adjustments for being born in a different age and culture, and I try to balance my beliefs and lifestyle accordingly. This is how I apply Mahatma Gandhi's quote in my own life. Here are a few of the behaviors that I do my best to model:

- A servant of God following the whole Bible in its revealed context
- A husband, father, friend and ethical neighbor to others as appropriate
- A non-participant in war and military service
- An environmentally conscientious keeper of the earthly garden
- A responsible US citizen, where not conflicting with the above
- A non-consumer of animal products as much as I have opportunity
- A economically productive worker employing dynamic material simplicity

Because I believe in the certainty of God's Word, in the death and resurrection of the Son of God and in the gift of His Holy Spirit, I can live my life with confidence that the change I live to be now will one day become reality for everyone, everywhere. It is encouraging to know that this new age of justice, peace, love and abundance does not depend on my success, even though I have the opportunity to begin to live that way today. How I live my life is a better witness to others than my words, though sharing the understanding given to me through words is also the biblical model.

Jesus came the first time to atone for an individual's sins. Those who repent, believe and confess Jesus as the Redeeming Son of God receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable them to grow into a Godly life now. Jesus will come again to eliminate the cause of societal sins by replacing the evil spiritual powers currently corrupting the governments of this age. Very soon now, a new age will begin under the reign of the Messianic King of Israel, who will also be the ruler of all nations. Jesus Christ will change the world in fulfillment of the biblical promises made to Abraham and David in order to bless all peoples. I do not need to politically militate to bring this certain reality into being: God will bring it to pass more surely than the sun rises in the east.

It has taken me awhile to get to where I am today, and the route has not been a simple or direct one. Truth is a reality beyond what I might personally want to grasp with either my heart or my intellect. Any honest search for truth is difficult at best. The world is infused with spiritual confusion, and even basic facts may prove elusive. Nonetheless, the primary reason for any delay in my own spiritual journey has been due to a stubborn reliance on my own intellect, will power and other aspects of human strength. Since all human strengths are ultimately empty weaknesses, one's own self consistently impedes spiritual growth.

However, I am now at a point in my life where I should responsibly write a brief summary about who I have come to be. I address it first to my sons and then to others of my family and friends who may care to read it. But first I must give you some background so that you will understand the historical context of my thinking. Some of that context is general, and some of it familial.

The Christian Anomaly

Gandhi, who was not a Christian, is not the only one who has noted the significant gap between modern Christianity and what Jesus taught in word and by the example of His life. Modern civilization owes its multiculturalism and materialism to its Roman heritage. Western religion does as well, and that especially

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includes the Roman Catholic Church, most Protestant denominations and the Orthodox faiths. What most of the modern world knows and experiences as "Christianity" is not the biblical faith of the early church.

I cannot presume to possess the detailed specifics of what the early church believed and how they worshipped beyond what is in the Bible and some early historical documents. What exists is enough because God has promised to guide each believer by His Holy Spirit. The differences between submitted followers of God lie in our diverse humanness that multiculturally and personally fogs the spiritual clarity of divine revelation. My understanding of the biblical narrative within the broad context of history provides the basis for the lifestyle that I endeavor to follow, but I do not claim fullness of comprehension or execution. I worship God by a life of applied faith instead of following some formalized religious tradition.



Now for a little history. The Emperor Constantine became a proponent of the "Christian God" because he believed that Jesus was the mightiest god of war. Constantine defeated his enemies by adopting the sign of the *chi* (X) *rho* (P) (the first two letters of the Greek ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, Christos, or Christ) along with a Greek inscription reading "Εν τούτω Νικά," *En Touto Nika*, meaning "with(in) this you win." The Emperor attributed his military victories to Jesus even as he continued his worship of Apollo.

The result was a universal religion that worshipped the Sun (sic) of God, and an army of Christian soldiers guaranteed entry to a heavenly paradise in return for their dutiful service to an empire nominally under God. A similar lie was told to the Muslim peoples some 400 years later. These lies in the name of God have created hundreds of years of warfare between Muslims and Christians in which millions have died.

When Emperor Constantine created his "Christian" empire, he incorporated the Roman concept of citizenship that included, if not obligated, military service. As his control over the Roman Empire consolidated, Constantine passed laws using the raw power of the state to try to force the behavior of his citizens to conform to his ideas of what was right and wrong.

Similarly, through the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, Constantine restructured church dogma and governance to suit his needs. Here he was more shrewd, though not less absolute. Besides eliminating church leaders who resisted his theological dictates, he successfully promoted his version of Christianity by granting power and wealth to the "Christian" priests and bishops who supported him. These rewards came at the expense of the pagan priests and priestesses. Of course, the emperor only gave the church a portion of the vast wealth that he got from plundering the now disfavored pagan temples.

This latter policy of rewarding loyal church elders with money and power was so successful that Constantine permanently corrupted "the faith once delivered." The relative few, who continued to live by the revolutionary teachings of Jesus and the early disciples, sank into historical obscurity with the exception of a few notable martyrs. Seeking to get ahead in the ancient Roman-Christian world, millions embraced the universal and official form of orthodox religion. More than that, history teaches us that religious leaders often exercised the power of the state to violently eliminate any theological or administrative competition.

All modern Christian denominations derive from the universal religion created by Constantine's shotgun marriage of biblical faith and Roman government interests: what most people experience as Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or "Christian" religion owes much of their theology and traditions of worship to Constantine and his venerated theological apologist, Augustine.

Almost all of the historical changes in the Catholic and Orthodox religions since these two giants of Christianity lived have been minor. The historical events qualified to be classified as moderate change relate to the Protestant Reformation. It is not surprising that the protestors' reforms did not completely reverse the hundreds of years of eastern and western Roman traditions in the church. The writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin did attempt to roll back some of the worst moral excesses as well as some of Constantine's imperial meddling with the administrative organization of the official church; however, both of these men repeatedly acknowledged their philosophical and theological debt to Augustine and other "Church Fathers." After all, both were educated within the Roman Catholic tradition. Remember, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was Constantine's primary apologist.

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I tried but was unable to accept various modern religious or patriotic traditions as guides through life. Ultimately, I have come back more than once to a biblical path that seeks to imitate how the disciples of Jesus lived before the days of Constantine. It is a journey of overcoming along the road to peace and love now and forever.

The way of Jesus as presented in the Bible is radically opposed to the ways of this age or world, which includes Constantine's "Christian Empire" and its descendant states. That is why the Word tells us to "love not the world or the things of the world" (1John 2:15) and "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2) Even so, Paul instructs the reader to obey civil laws as much as possible without becoming enslaved spiritually almost immediately afterward in Romans 13:1-7.

An Erratic Journey to Truth

I have not always been consistent in my depth of conviction on the issue of not participating in warfare. I was a biblically-based conscientious objector to the Vietnam War as a youth. At that time I wrote an extensive explanation to my draft board in support of my sincere beliefs, but I have never looked down on those who have fought for our nation according to their consciences.

Growing up, I was taught a history (pre-1950) where it seemed that the American cause for liberty has been mostly just and well intentioned. Today, I know that there is much to be discovered about what really took place "behind the public stage" of the political history of the United States. I do believe that power corrupts and that power has certainly corrupted the execution of American policy over the years. Mostly, this has come at the expense of the common citizen and benefited those possessing wealth and influence. Some of the powerful have also pursued an agenda not fully disclosed to the public. But the historical debate on this class of issues is not the foundational rationale for my non-participation in warfare; rather, it lies in the core values of what I believe is congruent with being a conscientious Christian.

Thus, my recurrent position of a fundamental, faith-based abstention from war and military service has been a difficult journey for me. One reason has been an exposure to various theological concepts developed since Constantine that seem to effectively justify military service. These respected and commonly accepted doctrines required some time for me to evaluate. Another reason is because I respect and honor the beliefs and sacrifices of those who have violently struggled for liberty in the truest and most honorable sense. I was brought up with a rifle and a Bible. I am a citizen of the United States of America and a descendant of pioneers who helped to establish this nation and its constitution, which I regard as the best human instrument of governance to date. Many of America's current problems come from not applying the wisdom and faith built into our constitution by the founding fathers.

The spiritual heritage of my ancestors includes Presbyterians, Baptists and others. My father is a graduate of West Point (1946). I am a direct descendant of James Wilson, who both signed the Declaration of Independence and played a vital role in writing the Constitution, serving as the first appointed Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. I am related in various less direct ways to a number of other famous names like George Washington and Gen. George A. Custer. My father's family moved into Mexico, Missouri before 1800, probably due to friendship with Daniel Boone. In short, I was brought up with an awareness of this pioneer heritage, and it helped to form my beliefs and sense of citizenship, which I discuss elsewhere.

God works His will through very imperfect instruments – mortal persons. While I certainly include myself here, I bring it up as a principle of understanding that should be applied both in evaluating the lives and teachings of our past leaders as well as in synchronizing the lives and beliefs of real people with Scripture.

Although I admit the vital role of Scripture and Christian faith in the founding and history of the United States, I do not sanctify this nation of the world because of those facts. In similar manner I do not sanctify the modern state of Israel - even though it seems to be an imperfect vehicle currently used by God to fulfill His prophetic will of returning the descendants of Jacob to their God-given inheritance on earth. The modern state of Israel owes its recognized political and territorial existence to the United Nations and not to the Creator God. It will pass away at the coming of the Messiah like any other political creation of humans.

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Embrace Change Now – the World will Change Later

This subtitle expresses the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a guide to my lifestyle choices. It explains why He came and died on a cross the first time. His sinless life, sacrificial death and immortal resurrection have made it possible for anyone to experience an internal spiritual transformation in this life as a preparation for that which will visibly and totally materialize in the future reality.

Faith is what empowers the disciple of Jesus. He or she must accept His total forgiveness and love as a reality by materially dying daily, which is to experience eternal spiritual transformation. Jesus has promised to come again before the world is completely destroyed. When He returns, things will have become so bad that any kind of human faith will be impossible. The only faith on earth in the last days will be a miraculous one empowered by God's presence in a person through the Holy Spirit.

The world celebrates the self and its empowerment. It worships the god of forces just as Emperor Constantine did. Only the external appearances have changed. Hollywood heroes determine what or who is right or wrong and execute victory by the exertion of various forms of force (at least partially if not totally) under their control and direction. Super powers or super weapons are merely the means to project a super ego, which is often portrayed in likable light. Don't forget, the most successful and admired emperors, or rulers by other titles, were absolutely ruthless in the suppression of any opposition to their expressed will or right to rule as they deemed right, which was almost always strictly to their advantage.

At Creation God gave humans the freedom to decide. By a lie, this freedom was transformed into the deceptive license of self determining what is right or wrong. Our civilization and its citizens have sought increasing power to make things right for ourselves. We do it collectively, and we do it individually in the name of a success comprised of competition and self-preservation, which in its more refined expressed may be defined as "enlightened self-interest." In other words, a person does good things with the wealth and power he has gained in this world because there is some indirect benefit to him or her. For example, the wealthy have a much more difficult time prospering in an unstable, unhappy, plague-ridden and economically dysfunctional society, so they give money to education, entertainment, science and social welfare.

To embrace positive change, to choose spiritual transformation, I have engaged the two tools that God has given us; the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The Bible gives us a written witness as to what is right and what is wrong. In life sometimes there is a fuzzy confusion that descends upon me in trying to understand the Bible because it is spiritual revelation that can only be accurately perceived and applied through the power of the Holy Spirit, the second tool.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2Timothy 3:16-17)

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1Corinthians 2:10-14)

These two tools must be interactively balanced within the context of human experience and the Creator's plan for humanity until Jesus returns to enforce an external conformity to the Father's will. At that time knowing what is right or wrong will be easier for people. Cultural norms and values will exert very strong pressure on everyone to conform externally in obedience to God's laws.

Many nations will come and say,

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"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths,"
For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations
Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war.

Each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:2-4)

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little boy will lead them.

Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

No animal or human being will be hurt. Each will possess the liberty of private property in an economic system devoid of overt greed that fairly shares the access to resources according to ability. God's future government will be an indirect management of society using true education with social justice, but I believe that external obedience may hide an internal rebellion in too many. In other words, a person's spiritual challenges will become more subtle during the years of Jesus' kingship over mortal nations. In the absence of obvious evil, humanitarian decency will be mistaken for holy perfection – the required grace of salvation's unmerited gift.

In the World but Not of the World

When I repented, I decided to conform my life to biblical teaching. I trusted the Bible's promises that I would be empowered by God's Holy Spirit to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. I have learned to trust God's judgment and control of my life. Experience has taught me that He can manage each day of my life better than I can. I consciously submit to His will as revealed in His Word and embrace

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Jesus Christ as the new identity of who I am now in part and will become in entirety for eternity. In this way I adhere to a higher form of citizenship answerable to the Kingdom of Heaven,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

How each person goes about this process of permitting God's Spirit to work in his life creates a unique expression of Godly love, a personal face on the divine definition of what is right and wrong. Free will means the freedom to choose to obey God nor not. It does not mean that I can ultimately decide for others or myself what is right and wrong. No one is capable of determining, nor given the ability to judge, what the standards are or should be – except the One who inhabits eternity and invented love.

Only the Creator can define true and genuine love; however, I understand the Bible to command me to live my unique expression of God's love in my own life and relationships with others. I live according to the spiritual understanding I have received from Him, and I do this fully knowing that I will fall short of divine standards and that my comprehension is incomplete and partially wrong. I also live this way whether it is popular with the powers that rule the world or not.

So, in practical terms, I apply the philosophical principles presented at the beginning of this paper in my own imperfect life. The "world" we live in is the continuation of a human civilization descended from the Empires of Rome and Babylon. I was born in it and of it, and according to the Bible, my life should be spent coming out of it.

I did not ask to be born, and life is sometimes pretty difficult. But what is plain to me is that there is only one way through it that both enables the best possible experiences now and promises an eternity of pure, blessed joy. That way is Jesus: living as He lived.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in

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His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1Peter 2:11-24)

Finally, I find it simplest to "be the change" – including the personal rejection of military service and participation in war by following the "love your enemy" teachings of Jesus as reiterated and expounded upon by Paul,

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:9-21)

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