

WAY TO SHILOH

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Christian & Faithful pass through Vanity Fair. From a Victorian edition of Pilgrim's Progress

What is a Christian?

It seems to be a constant task of the Church of Christ to be ever-defining her terms even the very name of Christian itself. That blessed name, of course, has been misconstrued and abused from early times and it is ever in danger of being emptied of its content and true meaning in every age. At the present time we can see it in the meaningless use of the blessed biblical term, "born again," and we can be sure that if the devil wants to set up a form of "nominal evangelicalism" he will take over the terminology to do so. In the light of this fact, the following few lines from John Newton seem appropriate. They come from one of Newton's letters to Lord Dartmouth on the subject of, "What it is to be a Christian," and in this particular section, he is dealing with what a Christian IS. The words may well challenge some of the shallow notions of today on that subject, but they will also be a comfort and a source of rejoicing to those who know the Lord.

The Christian is a new creature, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner, has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, and has seen the Son, and believed on Him.

His natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God's salvation have been subdued and silenced by almighty power, and he has accepted the Beloved, and has been made acceptable in Him.

He now knows the Lord: he has renounced the confused, distant, and uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds God in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with Him.

But he sees God in Christ reconciled a Father, a Saviour, and a friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the spirit of adoption. He is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger, but a son; and because a son, an heir, already interested in all the promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory.

The gospel is designed to give us, not simply a peradventure or a probability, but a certainty both of our perseverance and acceptance, till death shall be swallowed up in life. And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this point and perhaps all are so for a season yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God. Therefore they are steadfast and immovable in His way, because they are confident that their labour shall not be in vain, but that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord.

This is the state of the experienced Christian, who being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Every one who hath this hope in Christ purifieth himself even as He is pure.

With such a settled view of things in Christ alone, it is not difficult to see how Newton forged and moulded his poetic talent and skills into some of the lines that we love so well.

"Jesus, my Shepherd, Husband, Friend, My Prophet, Priest and King; My Lord, my life, my Way, my End, Accept the praise I bring."

Let us never fall short of what the Bible says concerning a man, or a woman, or a young person who has been made a Christian in Christ. It is "the life of God in the soul of man;" and although it might express itself poorly at times, it is that life that constitutes the "new creature" that the Bible says the Christian is.