

Easter Five (2020)

(St. James 1:22-27, St. John 16:23-33)

“Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?”

If tomorrow you or I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us in a court?

What kind of evidence would be needed for a conviction? Let's see...

Regular church attendance could be evidence, but then thousands of people go to church, some every Sunday, but the church they attend doesn't preach the truth of Jesus Christ, or that is the extent of their "Christianity", so that would not be enough.

Being a "good person" could be evidence, but then we all know "good people" who are not Christians, so that too wouldn't be enough.

Tithing or pledging could be evidence, but then many people give more than ten percent of their income for things other than a church.

Wait, I've got one. Being pro-life! Christians are pro-life so that should convict us. While that is most often true, it's not completely. There are pro-life atheists and agnostics, Muslims and Jews too.

So then, what kind of evidence would convict us for being a Christian?

St. James tells us in today's Epistle *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves... Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”*

Based on that passage, a prosecutor looking to convict us for being a Christian would look for three types of evidence:

First, evidence of our obedience to Scripture.

Second, evidence of our love for others shown in our involvement in the lives of others, either directly or through an outreach ministry.

Third, evidence we do not think or live the way the world says we should.

Would a prosecutor be able to find sufficient evidence of *that* kind to convict us for being a Christian? **(Pause)**

In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 St. Paul (who was convicted for being a Christian) gives a good summary of the kind of evidence necessary: *“We are fools for Christ's sake...; we are weak... we are despised. Even unto this present hour we... are buffeted...: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it. Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring (what is scraped off a dinner plate) of all things unto this day.”*

That kind of evidence would absolutely convict us for being a Christian!

It is evidence of a man or a woman totally surrendered to Jesus Christ and fully invested in the cause of the Gospel.

In that passage from 1 Corinthians 4, St. Paul was describing the life of an apostle. In Greek, the word “apostle” (*ἀπόστολος* *apóstolos*) means “messenger.”

While there were only twelve Apostles-proper and St. Paul was the Apostle-proper to the Gentiles, every person baptized into Christ is, in effect, an apostle; every Christian is a messenger.

We are all sent by God into this world to bring Christ to people and people to Christ. We are all sent to bring the Gospel to every creature. That is the Commission Jesus gave all of us prior to His ascension.

The place we are sent to, the people we know, and the ways in which we will minister differ, but the objective of the Commission is the same for all.

If we are faithful, then our lives will, in some form, come to look like what St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 4. We will certainly produce enough of the three types of evidence St. James provides.

The evidence necessary to get us convicted for being a Christian.

Back in the 1990's there was an evangelical campaign identified as WWJD: “What Would Jesus Do?” It was okay, but I always thought a better campaign; a truer campaign would be WDJD “What **Did** Jesus Do?”

Why speculate about what Jesus *would* do, when we know what He *did* do!

And we also know what the first followers of Jesus did.

It is written throughout the pages of the New Testament.

What we have to do is study Scripture and be “doers” of that Word.

The Epistle states “*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*”

If we really want to produce the evidence needed to convict us in court, we need to follow those who followed Jesus and be doers of the Word.

As St. Paul told the Corinthians, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*”

One of the many amazing things about Scripture is how practical its instructions are.

The instructions given are aimed at everyday followers of Jesus.

Followers like you and me.

Of those writings 1 and 2 Peter top the list of the most practical.

St. Peter was writing to Christians throughout the Roman Empire who were facing incredible persecution for their faith under the emperor Nero.

I think his instruction can be summed up this way: “Don’t pick a fight, but don’t back down from Truth either. Live your faith, faithfully; openly and graciously (thankfully even) accepting the consequences for doing so.”

1 Peter 2:11, 12 is an example of this instruction “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your [manner of life] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall [look upon], glorify God in the day of visitation.*”

As we produce the type of evidence that will convict us for being a Christian, non-believers and those who hate God will speak evil of us.

When that happens, we must accept it and just keep believing and living the way Scripture instructs. We cannot back down.

Jesus was very clear about this. “*...whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*” (St. Matt. 10:33)

We can deny Jesus in more ways than with words (what we say or do not say). We can deny Him in the way we live (what we do or do not do).

I conclude with this:

1 Peter 3:15 instructs us “*But sanctify (set apart) the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you...*”

If Christ is set apart in our hearts, and we live and keep ourselves ready to speak as His messengers, we will never deny Jesus in any way.

The Word of God will be so living and active within us, doing what Jesus and His first followers did will become as natural to us breathing.

But, the consequence of such a life is we will be easily convicted in court for being a Christian. Our lives will produce insurmountable evidence.

In the Name of the Father...Amen.