

*In the early years of Billy Graham's evangelism ministry, a notorious Los Angeles gangster named Mickey Cohen went to one of his meetings. He didn't **make** a commitment that night, but a while later, a friend of his (who **had** become a Christian), shared his faith with Mickey, and at that point, he agreed to ask Jesus into his life.*

*But the problem is, Mickey Cohen's life (the life of a Mafia boss) didn't change at all... He just continued on as the Mob Boss of LA, that he'd always been. And when his friend confronted him about it, he said: "You didn't tell me I would have to give up my work!" "You didn't tell me I would have to give up my friends!" "There's Christian athletes; There's Christian businessmen; There's Christian movie stars.... Why can't I be a Christian Mob Boss?"???*

When **anyone** becomes a Christian, there's **always** stuff in our lives that is rotten, and we need to get rid of it – There's always stuff we have to give up... But **not everything** needs to change... To an extent, Mickey Cohen was right: As a general principal, becoming a Christian, **doesn't** mean we have to change our job.

The only reason we'd ever **really** need to change our employment, is if we have the kind of job, that puts us in a position where we would be doing wrong, and breaking God's commandments, such as:

- **being** a gangster; or
- a drug dealer; or
- a hitman; or
- a Ponzi schemer...

- If you're a burglar, you might need to change your career.
- If you're a con-artist, maybe you need to change your career too.
- If you're a Jihadist, Yep, you too.

But most of us don't need to change our career.

You know sometimes, for people who are on the outside looking in, wondering about this whole 'God' thing,,, they get the feeling that "God might me calling me to something here.",,, But they **also** feel that they don't fit the mould of what a Christian is like.”:

- I don't have the right sort of job.
- I don't have the right sort of friends.
- I don't have the right sort of upbringing.
- I don't have the right sort of past time...
- I'm not a religious person...
- I just don't fit the mould...

You don't **need** to fit the mould – there is no mould. A lot of the perceived image of what a Christian should be like, is quite false.

*When I lived in Dalby, I was quite involved with the local Pistol Club (as I am now). And we were running an 'Open shoot'. And I said to the club, "Look, I can be here Friday afternoon, all day Saturday, and I can be there Sunday after about 11 O'clock. I just can't be here Sunday morning, because I've got commitments at church."*

*And I said to the folk at church, "Look, I'm going to have to run off straight after church, because this week I've got commitments at the pistol club..."*

*And it was weird. The response I got from **some** folk at the pistol club was, "You shoot,,, and you go to church???" And some people at church said to me "You're a Christian,,, and you shoot???"*

*And for me, it was like, "Why would you ever think that the 2 are incompatible?"*

*When I used to live in Goondiwindi, I'd often shoot Saturday night, and take a load of roos and pigs into town on a Sunday morning. Our church had a shower in it, and so I'd have a shower there, and then I was ready for church... And for me, that was normal.*

*Although one Sunday, there was a combined church service, and we had church at another denomination, and I didn't really know what to do, because somebody got up and prayed (must've been a greenie, I think), because they prayed against those who kill animals for profit, and that's exactly what I'd been doing the night before...*

Sometimes people get strange ideas about what a Christian should be like, and about what a Christian should or shouldn't do. And it's just a nonsense ...

So, when **anyone** becomes a Christian, **some** things **do** need to change, but not all things change. This is what Paul said:

**17 ... let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.**

You know, sometimes we get an image of a division between “**This** type of person, is suitable to be a Christian”, Vs. “**This** type of person is **not** suitable to be a Christian”

And Paul gives us a couple of examples. He first talks about, “religious divisions”.

When the Christian church was first getting going, Christianity was a new thing that God was doing, but it had grown out of the Jewish faith (Jesus was a Jew, and all of the Apostles were Jews). And yet, it was the Gentiles (the non-Jews), who were more open to the Gospel, and were giving their lives to Jesus.

But then along came “the Judaisers”. These people, went around the churches, telling all these new Christians, “If you want to be a Christian, you’ve got to become a Jew. You’ve got to become religious. You have to keep all our religious rules and regulations. For a start, get yourself circumcised.”... Because for them, circumcision was the religious ritual, required to make them one of God’s people...

But Paul very clearly said “No way!” Being circumcised, or **not** being circumcised isn’t going to make you any better of a man in **God’s** eyes – that’s all unnecessary guff.

If you were **already** circumcised when God called you, no problem. You don’t have to go and have reconstructive

surgery to get you your little flap of skin back... And if you were **uncircumcised** when God called you, no problem either. No need to go and get circumcised.

He says:

<sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor **uncircumcision**, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

Being a Christian, has nothing to do with fulfilling religious ritual, or even beginning as a religious person.

*As part of my training for the ministry, I had to do a field year in a church in the suburbs of Brisbane. Our church was not very religious (the minister didn't wear robes and stuff; the service was similar to what we have here [reasonably informal]).*

*And I visited this lady once, and she said to me, "I've only just started coming to church, and so I'm really enjoying, this 'low church' sort of atmosphere. I think if I went into one of the big inner-city churches, I don't think I'd be able to handle it yet, because I don't know anything about all of the religious stuff that they do."*

*And she went on to tell me, that what she planned to do, was to attend our local church for 2 or 3 years, until she felt prepared enough to handle the big inner-city, religious, "high church", where the ministers wore robes, and the congregation repeated chants, and maybe a few smells and bells thrown in for good measure...*

*And I was perplexed. Her view was, this sort of Christianity was baby steps, but then I'm going to graduate to being 'a better religious person'.*

*And I had to explain to her, "Hey, it's not about religious ritual, and graduating to 'a higher degree of religion' to make us a better Christian. Different people worship in different ways. Some people are more religious in their worship than others. That doesn't make their worship wrong, and nor does it make their worship any better.*

As Paul said, being circumcised or uncircumcised counts for nothing. What counts, is whether we keep the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

And this goes for social divisions as well...

I don't know how it has ever come to this point, but often, the perception is, "Those who will fit best into a church, are middle-class professionals..." Why do people think that.

Jesus called:

- rough, salt-of-the-earth fishermen;
- despised tax collectors;
- crazy zealots.

And the people he hung out with, and the people who followed him, were some of the most desperate; lonely; lowly; nobodies... The lame; the blind; the cripple; the leper; the prostitute; the poor and the hungry.

How did the perceived picture of ‘what makes a Christian’ ever become a “middle-class professional”?

In Christ, there is **no** social divide. In Corinth, there was a bigger divide than what we have in St George... In St George, what do we have?

- Irrigators
- Stockies
- Business men
- Wage-earners
- Professionals
- Tradesmen
- Those on welfare... (Whether they be whites or Murrays)

We might look at these social divides, and think “Well, I’m from this segment of the community. I don’t fit the mould of being a Christian”. What a nonsense... How about **this** for a social divide:

In Corinth, there were slaves and slave **owners**.

And Paul says to them: “Were you a slave when you were called to follow Christ? That’s not a problem. You’ll fit right into the church. It doesn’t matter that you’re a slave. If you get the opportunity to gain your freedom, well that’s a good thing – you’ll be free-er to serve God, but it’s not essential. In fact, we’re all slaves of Christ anyway. In the church, there is no “slave and free”.

We’ve all been set free from sin, and we’re all slaves to Christ (whether you’re a slave or not).

It doesn't matter what band of social strata we come from, in Christ, we are all one and we are all equal.

And so, the **general principal** is:

<sup>24</sup> ....in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with **God**.

And the two most important words in this whole passage, are those last two "**with God**".

The point is, we don't have to fit a certain mould to become a Christian – we become a Christian, and we bring God into **our world**.

And so, in the church, it doesn't matter what you are. Are you a tradesman? You don't have to go to university and become some kind of a professional. If God has called you to be a tradesman, well be a tradesman for God. You be the best and fairest tradesman that you can be, all for the glory of God. Every day that you go to work, you're working for God.

Are you a cleaner? That's no problem. If God has called you to be a cleaner, you be a cleaner for God.

When someone becomes a Christian, God comes into their life – their **whole** life... There is no area of their life, that God can be shut out of.

- We bring God into our work
- We bring God into our family
- We bring God into our friendships

- We bring God into our social life
- We bring God into our relationships

We don't leave all these things behind, to go to God. We bring God into **them**...

And once we are with God, He'll show us what needs to change:

- So the gangster should leave his life of crime
- The lazy should get a job and work for a living
- The addict should seek to be freed from his addiction
- The sinner should repent...

There **is** stuff we need to get rid of in our lives (and God can help us with that), but way too often, **extra** barriers and **extra** burdens are added, that just don't matter.

What type of person, would make a good Christian?

Anyone, who knows they need a saviour.

- We come as we are;
- We leave behind what's filthy and rotten in our lives;
- And we allow God to work on us from there.

So, that's the general principle:

<sup>24</sup> ....in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain **with God**.

But as with last week, there are also exceptions to the principal.

Sometimes God **does** give a specific call, to someone, to leave behind their old station of life. He does this, when He calls people to serve Him in a new way.

- Jesus called Peter and his brother Andrew: “Come, follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of men.”. And they left their nets.
- He called James and John. And they left their boat and their nets.
- I sometimes think of Elisha. Elisha was ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen. (That is a massive tractor). And he got a call to go and be a prophet of God. So, what did he do? He sacrificed the 12 oxen to God, and cooked them, by burning his plough... That was like saying, “I’ve got the call. I’m leaving the farm behind, because God’s got something new for me now” ...

And so, the general principle is:

<sup>24</sup> ....in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

No one has to fit a specific ‘mould’ to become a Christian... Whatever family; whatever social setting; Whatever occupation; or strata of society you come from, if that is where God has called you, then remain there. And as disciples of Jesus, we take God into **that** world, in which we are involved...

Sentence: There isn't a specific mould, for who can become a Christian.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

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# Questions.