Full text of William Borden's
"What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?"

Are you a Christian? The question was addressed to a student in one of our well-known universities, and the answer was, "What do you think I am? A Jew?" That was all it meant to him, a racial distinction, and he felt it an insult to have the question asked! There seem to be many to-day who have no clear conception of what is really meant by being a Christian. Of course, many things are involved and there are several ways in which we could treat this question. But limiting ourselves to the relationship with Christ that is involved, let us endeavor to ascertain what it means to be a Christian.

When we go back to New Testament times, when the name was first used, we find that the disciples were called Christians first of all because they trusted in Jesus Christ as their only hope of salvation from the penalty of sin and for the enjoyment of a future life of blessedness. This relationship is implied in the name Jesus, given Him by the angels before His birth, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." He Himself declared it to be His mission in life to seek and to save that which was lost and to give His life as a ransom for many. After His death the apostles preached Christ as the only Saviour of mankind. "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ – for the remission of sins." "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Many more passages might be cited, but these suffice to show that being a Christian meant first and foremost trust in Jesus as the only hope of salvation. Does it mean that to you? It should, but how many there are who call themselves Christians who, in the last analysis, are not trusting in the righteousness of Christ, but in their own merit or some other false hope. "By grace are ye saved, though through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." A Christian then, is first of all, one who has Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

But in the New Testament we find that Christ was not looked on as Saviour alone, but also as Lord. It was the Lord Jesus Christ whose name they bore, and that meant that He had absolute jurisdiction over them. This followed logically, and is nowhere more clearly brought out than in 1 Cor. 6:19,20. "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body." And what Paul taught others was but the vital truth that gripped his own heart and made him exclaim, "For me to live is Christ." That is what it meant to the disciples to be a Christian. Does it mean that to you? It should, but oh, how many there are enrolled on church lists as Christians who, as they are read by their friends and neighbors, do not tell of Christ, but of self! Christ has sacrificed Himself for us; we should sacrifice ourselves for Him even as it is written, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." For a Christian is not merely one who trusts in Christ for salvation but one 'who also strives earnestly to please Him in all things great and small.

But Christ was even more than this to those early disciples who bore His name, and should He not be as much to us to-day? He was the perfect revelation of God, He Himself was God manifest in the flesh! This is the plain and ineffaceable teaching of Scripture. At His birth the wonderful prophecy of Isaiah was applied to Him: "And they shall call His time Immanuel, which is being interpreted. God with us." John tells us, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. . . . And the word became flesh and dwelt among us." All that is implied in these statements of His apostles is quietly assumed by Jesus Himself. He is the Son unto whom all things were delivered and who alone knows the Father and reveals Him. Indeed He and the Father are one and those who have seen Him have seen the Father. The true Christian is one who has caught the vision of the pierced hands of the risen Christ, and whose heart cries out like Thomas of old, "My Lord and my God."

What does it mean to be a Christian? A Christian is one who believes in Christ as his personal Saviour, who strives to please Him as His Lord, and who worships and adores Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as very God of Very God.