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IS JESUS CHRIST THE GREAT EXEMPLAR?

BY WILLIAM EMMETTE COLEMAN.

Christian theology, whether orthodox or liberal, predicates Jesus Christ as the Great Exemplar—the model, the pattern for humanity's guidance and following. It declares, that in the deeds and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, we behold the life line of the Perfect Man, which we should, so far as in us lies, imitate and emulate. Freethought, however, speaking in the name and interests of common sense, enquires: In what manner is Jesus our great example—the pattern by which to mould our lives, thoughts and deeds? We are commanded to imitate his life, but we must have that life clearly presented to our minds before we can be enabled to imitate it.

How did Jesus spend his life? Was he married—a husband and father? Did he point out to us in any manner, by his example, our duties in the domestic relations? Verily not. On the contrary, he, if anything, looked unfavorably upon the marriage relation (Luke xx. 35), and encouraged self mutilation as a preventive of marriage, for the kingdom of Heaven's sake (Matt. xix. 12); while his favored apostle, Paul, inveighed right royally against the married state, advising all to remain single like himself. In this regard it must be confessed, that Jesus' life affords us no guide, no model of action.

Jesus, it will be remembered, waited until he was thirty years of age before engaging in aught to help the world. What necessity of this? Why let so many years of his life be wasted, surrounded as he was with sin and woe, misery and pain? If he possessed, as some suppose, the magnetic power of healing disease and relieving the distressed and the afflicted, he never utilized that power till nine or ten years after the attainment of

his majority. Can this be an example for us? Are we to wait till attaining the age of thirty years before we exert the inherent powers we possess in our world—labor? Surely not. How then is Jesus our Great Exemplar? It may be said that Jesus forbore from engaging in his ministry till he was thirty, in deference to the custom in Judea, that fixed that age as the one in which priests and public functionaries assumed the duties of their offices. So much the less, then, is this young Jew, our model and guide. Are we to be bound by an ancient Hebraic observance, because, forsooth, Jesus, in deference to it, wasted many precious years of his all-too-brief existence on earth? The fact of his conformity thereto proves, that, in this, as in his entire life, he was strongly imbued with Jewish prejudices and idiosyncracies, from the thrall-dom of which he never emancipated himself. In this respect, then, Jesus is no example for us.

But what was the nature of Jesus' public work during the one year, or the three years, of his ministry? Was he so employed that we, living in the nineteenth century, in the midst of civilization and enlightenment, should implicitly follow in his footsteps? Did he not lead the life of a wandering mendicant, accompanied by a select *cotterie* of fellow-mendicants, being followed from place to place by troops of women,—some of whom were of doubtful reputation,—upon whose substance he and his disciples often lived? (Luke viii. 1; vii. 37-39; xxiii. 55.) Did he not command his disciples to forsake all, parents, wives, friends, home, lands, and follow him—to sell all and accompany him; and declare that he himself had not where to lay his head? Did he not leave his comfortable home with his mother and brethren, who regarded him, it would seem, as insane, and tried to check him in his eccentric career, (Mark iii. 21, 31.) but who were in turn, renounced by Jesus, (Mark iii. 32-35,) and if he had not where to rest his head, was it not manifestly his own fault? Instead of gaining his livelihood by his trade of carpenter, he preferred, it seems, to be subsisted upon the substance of others; being even devoid of money sufficient to pay his taxes (Matt. xvii. 24-27.)

Did not the Nazarene enthusiast require pauperism, mendicancy, as absolutely indispensable in order to fit one to become his follower? and did he not strictly forbid his disciples to carry any money with them, likewise neither change of clothes, nor shoes,