Christian Mass-Murderers?
By: Keith Keyser

The recent heinous terrorist attack carried out in Norway by the maniac Anders Behring Breivik has once more brought Christians into disrepute with many news outlets erroneously identifying this murderer as a Christian.[1] Putting aside this man's personal case for a moment, it is all too common for people to be described by themselves or others as "Christian" without any legitimacy to their usage of the term. Christians themselves are in part to blame, for they frequently accept shallow professions by the famous and notorious merely in a misguided effort at publicity, legitimization in society's eyes, or for increasing statistics of converts. The Lord Jesus Himself was quite stringent with those who wanted to follow Him. One's bare declaration of faith was not sufficient; their profession had to be real, and He could read hearts (John 2:23-25.) His apostles also looked for true conversion and its subsequent fruits in the lives of those who professed to be Christians. Appreciating Jesus' ethics, opposing His secular and religious enemies, and desiring the benefits of the kingdom were not sufficient grounds for really becoming a believer. For one to really be a Christian, they must receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior (John 1:12; John 3:16; John 5:24.). The Scripture puts it starkly: "He that has the Son has life, he that does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12.)

Words Have Meaning

One would scoff at a professing Marxist who had never read *The Communist Manifesto* or *Das Kapital*; his profession would be still less credible if he took up a career as a stock broker on Wall Street. Likewise, one could affirm themselves a member of a political party, but if they disagreed with the majority of that party's platforms, disliked their candidates, and lived in a manner that thwarted that party's agenda, one would surely be justified in rejecting their claimed adherence to that political party. Or what about a Vegan who owned a chain of burger joints and daily feasted on ¼ pound cheeseburgers?

Of course, the issue is complicated by the fact that often people declare that they are Christians but then do things that are diametrically opposed to the character and word of the Lord Jesus Christ. One thinks of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and in the more modern scene, the twisted theologies of certain white supremacist groups. Yet for all of these egregious abuses of the term "Christian" the standard remains the same: does their behavior agree with what the Lord taught in the Scriptures? As Christ said: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32.)

Imperfectly Reflecting Our Lord

It is true that a genuine Christian will not always accurately represent their Lord. Believers are the first to point to their own failings and their ongoing struggle with sin. As the Bible describes this ongoing conflict: the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh" (Gal 5:17.) Having said that, the overall course of a Christians' life ought to exhibit the fact that they are "new creatures in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 5:17.) If they do not exhibit fruits of righteousness then they and others might well question the reality of their profession. [2]

The Lord Jesus taught that His followers would eschew violence in the advancement of His kingdom. He commanded them to love their enemies, to do good to their persecutors, and to patiently bear suffering without retaliation. In all of these things, He is the great exemplar, as 1 Pet. 2:21-23 says:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: '*Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth';* who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously."

  This recent Norwegian terrorist deserves the term Christian about as much as Attila the Hun deserves the designation of a pacifist. Terminology is important. Only those who possess a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus have the right to call themselves Christians; they demonstrate a life that is consistent with His will and teachings (2 Tim. 2:19.) To non-believers I say: read the gospels to see what a real Christian is; to believers: let us walk with our Lord in humility in such a way that men will see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16.)

1 Tim Challies has a worthwhile post on this topic, see here: http://www.challies.com/articles/pondering-norways-darkest-hour

2 To consider evidence for the reality of one's possession of eternal life, the author recommends the reader read 1 John.