

# Søren Kierkegaard

1813-1855



## Great Christians of History

Søren Kierkegaard in his short life was one of the most influential philosophers this world has known. He was labeled as a trouble-maker by church officials and a heretic by many- mostly due to a misunderstanding of the way he used pseudonyms in his writings to make theological points. But one thing is clear, he cannot be ignored. Kierkegaard had a huge influence on Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He continues to challenge readers today to reject the conformity of the crowd, live as an individual before God and to dwell on eternity.

I am slowly making my way through Kierkegaard's writings. I have read some good short biographies about him- Peter Vardy and Malcom Muggeridge's inclusion of him in the *Third Testament. Provocations* edited by Charles Moore has a good variety of his most important writings. *Purity of Heart, Either-Or, Fear & Trembling, Training in Christianity* and *Attack on Christendom* are all excellent.

Here is a sampling of the ideas from Kierkegaard that I have clung to in his writings. Listen to this amazing prophecy about television in the middle of the 1850's and how prophetic it is today to the massive conformity we witness in how the media tells us what to think: "Suppose someone invented an instrument, a convenient little talking tube which, say, could be heard over the whole land... I wonder if the police would not forbid it, fearing that the whole country would become mentally deranged if it were used. The whole evil in the daily press consists in its being calculated to make the passing moment a thousand or ten thousand times more inflated than it really is. But all moral elevation consists first and foremost in being weaned from the momentary. There has never been a power so diametrically opposed to Christianity as the daily press."

Kierkegaard stressed that we must all stand "naked" before God as individuals. Conforming to the crowd gives no excuse in the day of judgment. He writes, "If someone really puts God first, this inevitably leads to confrontation with the world. To sustain the faith journey through the whole of one's life is precisely the task but it is arduous. It is much more 'sensible' and 'rational' to conform, but this denies God."

Reading Kierkegaard will give you a great appreciation for his cutting wit. He was continually at odds with the church establishments of his day in Denmark because he believed they were practicing a form of what we might call country-club Christianity. After receiving a church reprimand where he was forbidden from setting foot in his town's church unless he reformed, he wrote: "If I do not reform, the Dean would have me punished. And how? Indeed the punishment is cruelly devised; it is so cruel that I counsel the women to have their smelling salts at hand in order not to faint when they hear it. If I do not reform, the church door will be closed to me. Horrible!!! So then, if I do not reform, I shall be shut out, excluded from hearing on Sundays during the quiet hours, the eloquence of the witnesses to the 'truth'."

I urge you to read Kierkegaard. It is difficult philosophical reading at times, but it will enrich your thoughts about God and how we are to live passionately for Him.