

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

Book 1



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Learn what the life of a Christian should look like

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW116

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Partaker Of Every Spiritual Blessing

A Christian Is A Disciple Of Christ

A Christian's Life Is A Life Of Faith

A Christian Is A Steward

A Christian's Life Is A Transformed Life

A Christian Is A Member Of The Body Of Christ

A Christian Must Be The Light Of The World

A Christian Is A Preacher

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Partaker Of Every Spiritual Blessing

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a partaker of every spiritual blessing.

All Spiritual Blessings Are In Christ

God has blessed those who are Christians in many ways. He has blessed the Christian physically (in providing him what he needs in life) and He has blessed him spiritually.

Physical vs. spiritual blessings

There are many ways God blesses us physically. For instance, Jesus promises that those who “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” will be given the things necessary for physical life (i.e. food, drink, clothing), according to Matthew 6:25-34. Certainly, there are many things

that God has blessed us with – often even in addition to the physical necessities of life. James 1:17 says that every “good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

While we should truly be thankful to God for all of the many physical blessings He has given us, we should also realize that these are not the greatest source of blessings for those who are Christians. In fact, God has not promised to give the Christian any more than the basic necessities of life! He has not promised the Christian great riches or physical health due to his/her relationship with Him. Instead, you can read the Scriptures and see numerous instances in which those who were Christians suffered physically as Christians. Some were put into prison. Some were separated from their families. Some were beaten. Some were killed. Therefore, Paul wrote that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Though some people may begrudge the fact that God has not promised to bless the Christian with great physical blessings, Christians should rejoice that the blessings he/she enjoys as Christians are not temporary in nature! You see, all physical blessings are only temporary. They will not survive this physical life – and they will not result in true happiness. Instead, the Christian’s greatest blessings are the spiritual blessings that have been provided through Jesus Christ! These blessings will never be taken away from you – at death or prior to death. Instead, you will continue to reap the benefits of these blessings throughout all of eternity (as long as you remain faithful to God).

Spiritual blessings are only available in Christ Jesus

Many of the physical blessings Christians enjoy are also available to those who are not Christians. For instance, Jesus says that the Father “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). He continues to be the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17) – even to those who are not Christians. In fact, Romans 2:4 demonstrates that God often does show His goodness to those who are

not Christians in order that it might bring them to repentance. In fact, it is often those who are not Christians who have the world's greatest possessions and riches.

Yet, while those who are not Christians are often blessed physically, all the spiritual blessings are *only* available to those who are in Christ Jesus. Look at Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Every one of the blessings which pertain to heavenly and spiritual things are only available to those who are "in Christ." Therefore, they are dependent upon a relationship with God!

Those who are Christians are the ones who have fulfilled the instructions of God in order to enter that relationship and be partakers of those blessings. For instance, consider Galatians 3:26-27: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Therefore, those who have put Christ on in baptism are those who have come "into Christ." Again, the Christian has now gained access into all of these spiritual blessings that are eternal in nature. They are eternal because they are rooted in the heavenly things of God rather than the things on this earth!

These blessings are worth all the sacrifice

Those who are Christians, therefore, must weigh the opportunity to be partakers of all the spiritual blessings provided in Christ Jesus. Though there will be great sacrifice required of those who are Christians (see Luke 9:23-26, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 2:20), the eternal blessings in Christ make all of these sacrifices worth it! Rather than building a life upon physical blessings which come and go (offering only temporary happiness), the Christian will be building a life that is based upon the unseen promises of God that offer eternal and true joy!

These spiritual blessings are why Christians during New Testament times were willing to suffer such great persecution – and even be put to death. For instance, consider how the apostle Paul realized that the spiritual blessings that are available in Jesus Christ were worth all of the sacrifice that was

involved in living for the Lord. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Certainly, these spiritual blessings are so valuable that the Christian should never relinquish them for anything or anyone!

Now, having realized the nature of these blessings and the opportunity to partake of them, let's spend some time considering the blessings God has made available to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Forgiveness Of Sins

Forgiveness of sin is available to those in Christ Jesus. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Though God has made His grace and His mercy available to all mankind (i.e. Titus 2:11), only those who are Christians actually receive the forgiveness of sins.

The need for forgiveness

To fully appreciate the spiritual blessing of having your sins forgiven, you need to have an accurate understanding of the dangers of sin. First, understand that sin occurs whenever you violate God's law. It is identified as "lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Therefore, sin can occur any time you do what God instructs you not to do or when you do not do what He tells you to do.

Why is the forgiveness of sin so important? It is important because sin *always* separates the sinner from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 demonstrates that it is your sin that has "separated you from your God" and has "hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear." God is perfectly holy and blameless (1 John 1:5). Therefore, the separation that has resulted between you and God is not God's fault. He is not the one who left you. You are the one who separated yourself

from Him whenever you committed unrighteousness (since all unrighteousness is sin, 1 John 5:17)!

Romans 6:23 says that this spiritual separation from God (a spiritual “death”) is what you have deserved (earned) because of your sins. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Therefore, the Scriptures demonstrate that you can even be dead while you are living (1 Timothy 5:6) – because if you are living in your sins you are spiritually separated from God (dead). Ultimately, if you experience physical death while you are dead spiritually, you will experience everlasting separation from God in Hell. Therefore, Revelation 21:8 refers to this place as “the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Then, you need to understand that (since this is what you earned by your past sinful conduct) you cannot do anything to earn or deserve the forgiveness of your sins. Instead, without Christ, you were hopelessly lost in your sin, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). You were entirely dependent upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the mercy of God!

How God forgives

Ephesians 2:13 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” God is the one who has made the only sacrifice that is sufficient to take away sin and make the forgiveness of sins possible. He is the one who sent His only begotten Son into this world so that you might not perish (in your sins) but that you could have everlasting life (as the result of being forgiven of your sins), John 3:16! Therefore, it is by the shed blood of Jesus Christ that “remission of sins” is offered to all (Matthew 26:28). But, what does it mean for the Christian to be forgiven of his sin through Jesus Christ?

When God forgives sin, He forgives it completely – with no trace remaining to be counted against the Christian. Isaiah 1:18 pictures the forgiveness of sins by saying, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” Furthermore, Hebrews 8:12 (quoting from Jeremiah

31:31-34) references God’s promise to forgive sins under the new covenant. He said, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

Also consider the language of Acts 3:19: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Pay particular attention to the phrase “blotted out.” Other translations do a better job with this expression than the *New King James Version* does. For instance, the *New American Standard Bible* translates this expression, “wiped away.” It is my understanding that the original meaning of this expression had reference to the practice of creditors charging their debtors. The debts would be recorded on tables covered with wax. Then, when those debts were paid, an instrument would be used to smooth the wax so that no trace of the debt would remain. This is the way God forgives the sins of the one who becomes a Christian – there is no trace of it that remains (see also Matthew 18:21-35)!

Look at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 as an example of this. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

These individuals had been guilty of the sins of fornication, homosexuality, drunkenness, theft, etc. – things which should have prevented them from being part of God’s kingdom. And, it would have *if* they would not have found the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. These individuals (according to Acts 18:8) heard God’s word, believed, and were baptized. Therefore, they had their sins washed away through the blood of Jesus Christ, were set apart from their sins, and were made pure in God’s sight!

The result of forgiveness

Using the Corinthians as an example, you can see the result of the way in which God forgives sins!

Consider three additional points regarding the result of forgiveness.

(1) Forgiveness of sins results in the restoration of fellowship with God. When you lived in your sin, you were separated from God (in a state of spiritual death). However, when you have your sins forgiven, you return to fellowship with God. 1 John 1:5-6 says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Now, having your sins forgiven, you are walking in the light of God’s holiness and partake of all the blessings that He makes available to those who are in fellowship with Him (as we are studying in this lesson)!

(2) There is no condemnation in Jesus Christ. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” Whenever you lived in sin, you were under the sentence of condemnation to eternal punishment in Hell. However, now that you are forgiven of your sins and walking in the light of God’s holiness (no longer pursuing the sinful desires of your flesh), you are under *no* (absolutely zero) sentence of condemnation!

(3) You have been set free from your sin. Look at Ephesians 1:7 again. It is in Christ that you “have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” The word “redemption” indicates the releasing that is brought about through a payment of ransom. This payment of ransom was provided by the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Romans 6:15-23 demonstrates, the Christian had previously been enslaved to sin (which led to spiritual death); but, now he can be set free from his sin and become a slave to righteousness (which leads to eternal life in Heaven)!

An Eternal Inheritance

Those who are in Christ Jesus have been given an incorruptible inheritance. Ephesians 1:11-12 says, “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Adopted as a child of God

There are many types of inheritances spoken of throughout the pages of God’s word. Certainly, mankind has placed great importance on leaving an inheritance to one’s descendants. In fact, Proverbs 13:22 even says, “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children.” So, while an inheritance is certainly a valuable thing, there is no inheritance that even approaches the inheritance God has made available for those who are His children.

Just prior to identifying the inheritance that is obtained by those who are in Christ (Ephesians 1:11-12), Paul said that those who are in Christ have been adopted as sons (Ephesians 1:5-6)! Certainly this adoption as sons is essential to being heirs of the Almighty Father! In fact, read Romans 8:14-17.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

Prior to becoming an adopted child of God (when you were living in your sins), you were a child of the devil. For instance, Jesus told some, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). They were children of the devil because they were living according to the

devil's desires. They resembled him. 1 John 3:10 says, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."

Though you were required to give up practicing sin and live in a way that was holy and blameless in the sight of God (Ephesians 1:5-6), you could not make yourself right with God and deserve to access the inheritance He provides for His children. Instead, you were dependent on God adopting you (which He accomplished through Jesus Christ)! Now, God did not adopt you because you were worthy to be His child and gain His inheritance. Rather, He has adopted you because He loved you and had pity on you. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Eternal inheritance in Heaven

Now, as an adopted child of God (who is now determined to live according to God's ways of holiness), you have gained access into the inheritance of your Heavenly Father. The Creator of all the universe. The one from whom all blessings flow. The one who dwells in the Heavenly city that is beautiful beyond human comprehension.

This Heavenly Father now calls you His heir – and a joint heir with Jesus Christ, provided that you are willing to suffer with Him (Romans 8:17). This eternal inheritance that is promised is the salvation of your soul and the reward of eternal life in Heaven. 2 Timothy 2:10 demonstrates that Christians will "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." 2 Timothy 2:11-13 continues, "This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."

Consider what 1 Peter 1:3-9 says about this wonderful inheritance that is reserved in Heaven for you (as a child of His): "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from

the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls."

Hope while on earth

This eternal inheritance of Heaven has been promised and is "reserved" for you. However, you do not yet experience the joys that are awaiting you. Now, as was true about the Christians Peter wrote this first epistle to, you are being tested. Your faith is being put to the test through various means – and you are demonstrating whether you are truly dedicated to glorifying and honoring your Heavenly Father while you live on this earth. Yet, you use the hope of this promised inheritance (promised by a God who cannot lie, Titus 1:2) as an anchor for your soul to keep you faithful to God through the temptations, trials, and persecutions of life on this earth (Hebrews 6:19).

Therefore, though you once were without hope and without Christ (Ephesians 2:12), you now have the "living hope" of the eternal inheritance in Heaven (1 Peter 1:3-4)! Whenever you live with the full hope of the things God has promised to His children, you can endure anything that life will throw at you – through Jesus Christ who gives you the necessary strength (Philippians 4:13)! As a child of God, you need to know that there is "victory through...Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Therefore, you must "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Your labor is not in vain in Jesus because those who "die in the Lord" are blessed – as they "rest from their labors, and their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13)!

As a child of God, you have now been granted the right to enter through the gates of the Heavenly city and partake of the tree of life! Revelation 22:14 says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” Allow the hope of gaining access into the Heavenly city to keep you true and steadfast in your service of God throughout your life on this earth!

Joy And Peace

There is both joy and peace that results from being in Christ. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

All things work together for good

To be able to understand the true joy and peace that you have as a Christian, you must first recognize that it is based upon all of the other spiritual blessings that result from having fellowship with God – and that it is not dependent upon any external factors. You see, any type of “joy” or “peace” that is based on something temporary is not true joy and peace because it can be taken away from you by some external factor!

Instead, the kind of true joy and peace that you can have in Jesus Christ is based on the unwavering promises of God! Therefore, since your hope is in the promises of God, you can find joy and peace in any and every circumstance you find yourself in – even when your earthly conditions are not ideal. For instance, after saying that there is joy and peace in Jesus (Romans 5:1-2), Paul said that Christians can “glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4). Similarly, James said that you can “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3).

This is because everything works together for good for the child of God! “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). This is *not* a promise that everything will turn out for the good *physically* for the Christian. Instead, this is a promise that everything will turn out for the good *spiritually* for the Christian. Therefore, no matter what you go through during the course of your lifetime, you know that God’s promises are true – and you will receive the everlasting home in Heaven if you are faithful to Him! Then, as you endure difficult situations throughout your lifetime, you simply can know that all of these situations will only make you stronger in your faith and in your service to the Lord – because there is nothing and no one who is strong enough to separate you from the love of Christ if you are faithful to Him (see Romans 8:31-39)!

Rejoicing in Christ

The joy that is available to you is the joy of being a child of God and a partaker of all the spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus! It is the joy of knowing that, no matter what happens in your life, you know that God is pleased with you and you will spend eternity in Heaven! Whenever individuals were obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they went on their ways rejoicing, having received the forgiveness of sins and become heirs of God through Jesus Christ (see Acts 8:39; Acts 16:34).

Notice how the apostle Paul encouraged his brethren to rejoice in Jesus Christ. Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” Now, this instruction (by itself) is enough to teach you about the true joy you should have in Jesus Christ. However, you also need to consider the context of this passage. Namely, it appears as if Paul wrote the book of Philippians while in Rome as a prisoner. So, even though Paul was being persecuted for the cause of Jesus Christ, he tells his brethren to rejoice! Likewise, whenever Paul and Silas were in prison in the city of Philippi, they were still found praying and singing hymns to God – and all the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

As a child of God, you can live your life truly rejoicing with “joy inexpressible and full of glory”

because you know that you will receive “the end of your faith – the salvation of your” soul (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Peace that surpasses all understanding

Prior to becoming a child of God (when you were living in your sin), you had made yourself an enemy of God. James 4:4 says, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” You had made the decision to live your life contrary to the will of God and serve a different master. As an enemy of God, you were separated from all the spiritual blessings available through Jesus Christ and were headed for certain everlasting punishment through the vengeance God will show to His enemies (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

However, having now “been justified by faith,” you “have peace with God” through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Therefore, you are now in a state of friendship and harmony with the Almighty God. And, as a child of God, the quality of this peace is enduring and beyond all human comprehension. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

You no longer must be terrified of the consequences of your sins because you have found forgiveness of those sins through Jesus Christ, thereby avoiding all condemnation those sins would require. Now, you have been given the opportunity *not* to perish but *have* everlasting life in Heaven (John 3:16)! Therefore, you “may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:6)!

Prayer

As you go through life on this earth, God has not left you alone as you fight your battles against the

devil and his army! Instead, God has promised that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

The blessing of prayer

Prayer is the avenue God has provided His people to be able to communicate with Him (note that He communicates with mankind through His written word). It is the way you (as a child of God) can communicate with your Heavenly Father, through your Mediator (Jesus Christ), and with the help of the Holy Spirit! All of these have an essential role in prayer – and demonstrate how much they care that your prayer is heard by God!

Through prayer, you are taught that you can find help in times of need. Having Jesus Christ as your Mediator and High Priest, you can “come boldly to the throne of grace” and “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16)! Regardless what troubles you are experiencing during your life, you can find help by coming to the Almighty God in prayer! He is able to relieve your burdens, provide strength for the weak, help you out of temptations, provide according to and beyond your needs, etc. What a comfort and a blessing to know that help is available to you when you approach the Almighty God in prayer!

Through prayer, you can express your praise and adoration of God. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” Certainly one way that we can praise God with our lips is through the avenue of prayer (just as David often did in the Psalms). Included in praising God through prayer would also be expressing thanksgiving for all things (Colossians 3:17).

Through prayer you can find the forgiveness of sins. Being a Christian does not mean that you will never sin again. In fact, the Bible demonstrates that you can sin so as to fall from the grace of God – even after you have become a Christian (see Acts 8:14-24 and Galatians 5:1-4). Thanks be to God that He has provided the avenue of prayer, through which His children can confess their sin to Him and ask Him for forgiveness – appealing through their Advocate with

the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:8-2:2)! Without this avenue of forgiveness, you would (once again) be hopelessly lost in your sin.

Through prayer you can cast all your cares upon God. You will not be exempt from the cares and concerns of this world. You live in this world and are subject to the various temptations, trials, and persecutions this life will throw at you. However, you can take great comfort in the fact that you are not alone in this world! You can truly find joy and peace in the fact that God cares for you and He hears your prayers. Therefore, He invites you to cast “all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Philippians 4:6-7 (again) says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The power of prayer

One of the main reasons prayer is such a tremendous blessing is because of the power in prayer. Again, James 5:16 says that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Another translation (the *English Standard Version*) says, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” This great power that accompanies a righteous person praying is demonstrated in verses 17 and 18 in Elijah. The passage says that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

Other passages also indicate the power of prayer. For instance, in John 15:7, Jesus says, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” Similarly, Matthew 7:7-8 says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” This is a general principle of prayer. Other passages also teach that your prayer must be according to the will of God and must be in

faith. Prayer is not some kind of “Aladdin’s lamp” to receiving things you can spend on your own desires (see James 4:3). However, none of this detracts from the true power of a righteous person praying to his Heavenly Father!

Still other passages demonstrate that those who are not children of God should not expect the same opportunities and blessings in prayer. Again, James 5:16 says that it is the prayer of the *righteous* man that is powerful and accomplishes much. 1 Peter 3:12 also says, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” Furthermore, a man in John 9:31 said, “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears them.” Though God can choose to hear any prayer He desires to hear (being Omniscient and Omnipresent), those who are Christians are the only ones who have the promised blessing of prayer!

Fellowship With Brethren

Not only has God provided help for His people through the avenue of prayer, but He has also provided help for His children through fellowship with other Christians. As we have already seen, Christians are part of God’s family (His household – see Ephesians 2:19 and 1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, not only does this mean that God is your Heavenly Father; but, it means that you have brothers and sisters who also give their lives to doing the will of God.

The nature of this fellowship

The fellowship that God provides between you and your brethren is a special one that is full of blessings. However, many people misunderstand the nature of this fellowship. To many people, this fellowship is a physical fellowship that is enjoyed through sharing physical meals, participating in athletic events, and other physical and recreational activities.

However, the great blessing of fellowship between Christians is much greater than physical

fellowship! This kind of physical fellowship can be enjoyed with any willing participants. Instead, the fellowship (joint-participation) that is shared between those who are Christians is spiritual in its nature. It is *not* joint-participation in physical things or in physical activities, but joint-participation in Jesus Christ!

Look at 1 John 1:5-7: “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

We focused on verses 5-6 previously regarding the fellowship that you can have with God. Now, I want you to focus particularly on verse 7. If you will conduct your life so as to live in fellowship with God, you also have fellowship with others who are in fellowship with God! Therefore, this joint-participation is focused on Jesus Christ. Those who are Christians have joint-participation in the blessings and promises He provides!

The blessing of this fellowship

While many folks prefer joint-participation (fellowship) in physical things (making the church a kind of “social club”), fellowship in these spiritual blessings is greatly to be preferred. Sharing with others in a game of basketball or in a potluck dinner will not (of itself) help to save your soul. However, taking advantage of the spiritual fellowship you have with your brethren will prove to be of tremendous value to your soul!

You see, God knew that His people could easily become discouraged if they were alone. So, He has provided strength and fellowship that is greater than any individual Christian – in the church. Particularly, God has authorized the existence of local churches – and given local churches the responsibility of building up the members in the faith.

Therefore, as you partake of these spiritual blessings in Christ and seek to live for the Lord, you have the opportunity to be encouraged with your

brethren in your mutual faith. For instance, Paul wanted to visit the Roman Christians so that they could be encouraged together in their “mutual faith” (Romans 1:12). Furthermore, when Peter began his second letter, he addressed it to “those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1).

This spiritual fellowship in the mutual faith that is possessed by God’s children also involves spiritual responsibilities toward one another that will help each other live in a way that is pleasing to God. For instance, local churches assemble together in order to stir up love and good works in all the members (Hebrews 10:24-25), Christians are to encourage one another daily lest they be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12-13), Christians are to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), Christians are to attempt to restore their brethren when they turn away from the truth and sin (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), etc. In all things, Christians are “members of one another” (Romans 12:5) and should be working to help all of the members of God’s family make it to Heaven! As a Christian, you will have access to this wonderful network of like-minded saints!

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are a partaker of every spiritual blessing that is available in Christ Jesus! Having these blessings ought to encourage you to persevere through any and all trials, temptations, and persecutions of life – knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). There is victory in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57)!

Study Questions

Are physical *or* spiritual blessings to be preferred? Why?

1. Forgiveness

What is the concept of forgiveness?

Forgiveness from what? What does it mean to be forgiven?

Why is it important to be forgiven of your sins?

Where is forgiveness found?

2. Hope

What is hope?

Hope for what?

Where is true hope found?

3. Hope

Whose child were you?

Who has adopted you? What are you called?

Why were you adopted?

Where is the adoption as sons found?

4. Adoption As Sons

What is joy? List some suggested sources of joy in life.

Why does the Christian have joy?

What does this joy do?

Where is this joy found?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Disciple Of Christ

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. For instance, Acts 11:26 says, "...And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Whose Disciple Are You?

It is possible to be the disciple of many different people and many different "schools of thought." There are disciples of presidents, disciples of economists, disciples of philosophers, disciples of religious teachers, etc. But, ultimately, whose disciple are you?

What it means to be a "disciple"

A "disciple" is someone who follows the ways of another (a master, leader). But, not only does this individual adopt the teachings of the master as his/her own beliefs, he/she will also be engaged in

helping to promote that way or accomplish the same kind of work/goals that another person has had.

There are two things that are involved in being the disciple of another. The first element of discipleship is that the disciple learns from the master. Therefore, he gives himself to listen to the teaching/instruction/training that is offered by the master. A disciple is going to devote himself/herself to sitting at the feet of the master teacher – just as Saul sat "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3). Or, if it is not possible to directly sit at the master's feet, the disciple will find as much of the master's teaching that is available (i.e. his writings). The disciple wants to know exactly what the master teaches/taught.

The second element of discipleship is that the disciple is an imitator of the master. The true disciple is not content to just learn from the master and think like the master, but the true disciple will also want to walk in the footsteps of the master. The true disciple will want to make applications of the things that the master has taught.

Evaluate the fruit of your life

As you consider these two elements involved in discipleship, whose disciple are you? Now, I'm not necessarily talking about being the disciple of a leader in your profession. For instance, in the year 2015, someone who works in the field of economics may be a disciple of Dave Ramsey (a leader in economic thought). Instead, I'm talking about who has ultimate sway in your life to guide your thinking and shape your worldview.

You can know who your master is by examining the fruit that is being produced in your life. There is a principle that is established throughout Scripture that demonstrates you can know exactly who you are living for by examining what kind of "fruit" your life is producing.

For instance, in Matthew 6:21, Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In verses 19 and 20, He presented the two options that are available. Either you will have your heart set on earthly things (things that are only temporary in nature) or you will have your heart set on heavenly things (things that are eternal in nature).

Jesus says you can know which of these two have captured your allegiance by examining where your treasure is. So, if you are living to accumulate the riches, pleasures, and relationships of this life, you can know that your heart is set on earthly things. However, if you are living to accomplish the will of God, you can know that your heart is set on heavenly things. Either way, you will know where your heart is by examining the “fruit” that is produced in your life.

Matthew 7:15-20 also illustrates this principle. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

In this warning about the danger of false religious teachers (false prophets, those who claim to be speaking the words of God but would actually be speaking lies), Jesus tells people that they can know who is a false prophet by examining the fruits they produce in their lives. Jesus says that this is exactly the same way you can tell bushes from one another. For instance, you can know an apple tree from a peach tree by the fruit each one produces. Similarly, Jesus says that a false prophet can be known by carefully examining what he/she teaches.

In the same way, you can know whose teaching and manner of life you try to follow by looking at your life and the decisions that you have made in the past. Are the things being produced in your life (the “fruit” of your life) consistent with the life and teachings of Christ? Or, are they consistent with the life and teachings of someone else?

Then, even if you are religious and you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you need to seriously evaluate the fruit of your life to make sure that you have not actually become a disciple of a false religious teacher. Jesus demonstrates that there would actually be many people who would claim to be following Him; but, they would actually not be

His disciples. In Luke 6:46, He said, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (compare also with Matthew 7:21-23).

One example of this is found in 2 Timothy 4:2-4. In this text, Paul gives instructions to Timothy (an evangelist), urging him to be faithful in preaching the word – and warning him that a time will come when many will not endure sound teaching. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

So, it is possible for you to have a form of religion and follow someone who will tell you what you want to hear rather than telling you the absolute truth. Many people, therefore, believe they are disciples of Jesus Christ; but, they do not actually follow the teachings or imitate the life of Christ!

As you consider discipleship, please take some time to *honestly* reflect on your life and the decisions that you are making on a daily basis. Do not deceive yourself to think that you are Jesus’ disciple if you are not actually being diligent to learn from and follow Jesus Christ!

God desires for people to be disciples of Jesus Christ

Does God want you to be Jesus’ disciple? Absolutely! Consider the “Great Commission” issued by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

Notice that Jesus wanted His apostles to be focused on the work of disciple-making. The parallel account of the “Great Commission” in Mark 16:15-16 helps us to understand that the teaching of the gospel of Christ is central to this disciple-making

work. But, please notice that Jesus did not want His apostles to teach the gospel *just* so that people would mentally acknowledge the truths about Him (i.e. have faith only). Jesus also did not want His apostles to teach the gospel *just* so that people would be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

No, He wanted His apostles (those who had been with Him) to teach the gospel to others in order to “make disciples of all the nations.” Now, this would include belief and baptism (see Mark 16:16). However, Jesus says that true discipleship does not end at baptism. Instead, there is a continual teaching even after the point of baptism!

Therefore, you should want to be more in your service to Jesus Christ than just a baptized believer. You should want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ! Now, let’s begin to investigate what that should look like specifically in your life.

A Disciple Is A Student Of Jesus Christ

Remember, one of the essential components of discipleship is to be a pupil/student of the master. In the case of a Christian, you must be a student of Jesus Christ (the Master Teacher). You should desire to learn His ways.

Why learn from Christ

Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus taught the people in very effective ways. He taught through means of parables, through contrasting His laws with the Old Law or the prevailing ideas of the day, through directly rebuking those who were involved in sin, and through His own example.

But, ultimately, the reason why you should learn from Jesus Christ is not because of His ability to teach His message. There have been many people throughout the history of the world who have had the ability to effectively communicate a message to others. This, of itself, is not a reason to follow

anyone. Instead, you must only follow someone who has authority.

For instance, suppose you wanted to be trained in a particular field of expertise. As you seek to find someone to learn from and imitate (i.e. a mentor), should you just choose someone because he is well-spoken? Obviously, this criteria alone would often result in following someone who will not help you accomplish your ultimate goal. Unfortunately, there are many people who follow after false religious teachers because of their abilities to communicate in entertaining and “uplifting” ways (creating good feelings that may or may not be based in truth).

Instead of choosing to learn the teachings of the most able or captivating communicator, you need to choose to listen to Jesus Christ (if you want to be His disciple) – and you need to do so for the following reasons.

(1) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because He has all authority. You need to choose to learn from the one who has authority. With regard to following God, Jesus Christ has been given all authority by the Father. Prior to instructing His apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, consider what Jesus said in Matthew 28:18. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Authority involves the two elements of having both power and right over all things. Therefore, Jesus declares that He is the one who possesses both of these over all things. Why, then, would you learn from or follow someone who is not speaking only the message of Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ has all authority because the Father has given Him this authority and because He is the Son of God. Therefore, as Jesus taught on this earth, He did not just tell people to blindly follow Him. Instead, He demonstrated to the people that He truly did have authority and that He truly was the Son of God (primarily through the miraculous things which He did). For instance, John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus

is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

(2) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because His way is absolute truth. Jesus, as God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14; Colossians 2:9), was not just teaching His own ideas as a man. Instead, the things He taught were absolute truth!

John 8:31-32 says, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” It is Jesus’ teachings that were absolute truth and that would set people free from their sins.

In John 6, after Jesus had taught those who were following Him that He is the Bread of Life, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” because they considered this to be a “hard saying” (John 6:60-66). When Jesus proceeded to ask His twelve apostles, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:67), consider the apostle Peter’s response. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68).

Peter was absolutely correct to recognize that Jesus Christ was the only one who had the complete words of truth that would lead to eternal salvation in Heaven – because He is the one who had all authority (having demonstrated to be the Son of God). Therefore, Peter recognized that there was no one else to go to and become a disciple of who could produce the same outcome that being a disciple of Jesus Christ would produce!

(3) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because His words will judge us on the Last Day. His words, being fully authoritative and containing absolute truth, will be the criteria by which we will all be judged one day (on the Day of Judgment).

In John 12:44-50, Jesus said as much. He said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does

not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

Again, even in this statement, Jesus comes back to the matter of authority. He demonstrates that He is not just speaking His own words. Instead, the words that He spoke were the words that were fully authoritative as the words of God. Then, He identifies the consequence of rejecting Him and not receiving the words He spoke. Specifically, He says that the one who does so rejects the words which will judge him on the Last Day.

On the great Day of Judgment, God has appointed that Jesus Christ will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30). 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that everything you have ever done, thought, or said will be subject to this judgment – whether they were good or evil. The criteria for the Judgment that will determine whether you spend eternity in Hell’s punishment or be rewarded with everlasting life in Heaven will be the words of God!

How to learn from Christ

Given these three reasons, I hope you understand that you *need* to learn from Jesus Christ (if you want to have eternal salvation). But, how do you learn from Jesus Christ? Let’s investigate.

First, you understand that you cannot learn from Christ in the exact same ways that Jesus’ original disciples learned from Him. Those original disciples were able to literally sit at the feet of Jesus, hear the words from His mouth, witness the miracles He performed, and watch His perfect example. However, now that Jesus has ascended into Heaven and currently resides at the right hand of the Father, you cannot learn from Jesus in this same way. But, you can still learn from Him.

You learn from Jesus Christ through the things that have been written in the Bible. Jesus

promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come to them after He ascended into Heaven so that they would know the will of God. Consider two passages from the book of John.

John 14:25-26 says, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

John 16:12-15 says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

Therefore, the Holy Spirit would work to accomplish two things. First, He would bring to their remembrance the things Jesus had taught. And, second, He would teach them additional truths that they had not been ready to learn whenever Jesus was with them. In all of this work, the Holy Spirit would be guiding the apostles (and also the prophets, Ephesians 3:3-5) into all truth.

Now, it is when you read the words that have been written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (in the pages of the Bible) that you can know the right doctrines to believe, know the changes you need to make to your life, and know all of the ways of righteousness involved in living to please God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)! This is why Paul could say that the things he wrote were “the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Since you learn from Jesus Christ by reading all of the things written by the New Testament writers (who wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit), you need to be diligent to study the Bible! Learning the truths that are written in the pages of the New Testament is the only way you will be able to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ!

What to learn from Christ

What do you need to learn from Christ to be His disciple? The Scriptures demonstrate that you must begin by learning the basics (the “milk”) of the word of God and that you must progressively increase in your understanding of God’s word. For instance, 2 Peter 3:18 instructs you to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 5:12-14 identifies that there was a time at which you were a newborn babe in Christ Jesus (whenever you first became a disciple). At this time, you were “unskilled in the word of righteousness” and lived on the “milk” of the word (the “first principles of the oracles of God”). However, the passage implies that this should not be the permanent state of the one who desires to be Christ’s disciple. Instead, the Scriptures demonstrate that the true disciple of Christ will be increasing in his/her ability to understand the word of God and will mature to the point that he/she is able to partake of “solid food” (the more difficult aspects of God’s word).

Ultimately, the Christian can and should be learning from Christ in every area of his/her life. The Bible provides instructions that cover every aspect of Christian living that is applicable to “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). So, since God tells us everything that is necessary to know in order to please Him, we look to all of His teachings for guidance.

As we do, we find instructions pertaining to such things as prayer (Matthew 6:5-13), forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15), faith (John 8:24), judging (Matthew 7:1-6), humility (Matthew 18:1-4), serving (Matthew 20:20-28), loving our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37), our clothing (1 Timothy 2:9-10), consuming alcohol (1 Peter 4:3-4), speaking truth (Ephesians 4:25), controlling our thoughts (Matthew 5:27-30), the sinful works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), the fruit of living a life for the Lord (Galatians 5:22-23), and many other things!

Ultimately, the one who truly desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ will desire to learn from Christ in every area through the teachings of the New Testament. The disciple of Jesus Christ will desire to acknowledge whatever God teaches about any

subject as the complete standard of truth and will determine to live accordingly – regardless of his/her own personal beliefs, opinions, traditions, feelings, etc.

A Disciple Is An Imitator Of Jesus Christ

The second of the essential components of discipleship is to be an imitator of the master. In the case of a Christian, you must be an imitator of Jesus Christ. You should desire to follow all of His ways.

More than just a student of Jesus

The one who is a disciple of Jesus must be a student of Jesus Christ and learn what Jesus taught (as well as everything taught by the inspired apostles and prophets in the New Testament). However, true discipleship does not stop at gaining an understanding of the things Jesus taught. Instead, true discipleship goes even further and involves living a life that puts those truths into practice (just as Jesus did Himself).

Let's go back and look at what Jesus said in Luke 6:46 again. "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Jesus is simply not pleased with people who give lip-service to the things He taught, but do not actually put those things into practice in their lives!

Think about Jesus' own life for a few minutes. During Jesus' life, He was hated, spitefully mistreated, and eventually killed by the world because the world hated what He taught and the way He lived (John 15:18). Now, don't you suppose that Jesus' life could have been much easier if He would have just *said* what God's will was (without actually doing it)? Don't you suppose that it would have been much easier for Jesus to have just taught us to love the lost without dying for them? Don't you suppose it would have been much more convenient for Jesus to have just taught about serving others without actually giving His life as a ransom for many? However, Jesus was not hypocritical in His teaching.

In every point, He followed up His teaching with a consistent application of those truths!

This is exactly what He wants from those who will be His disciples! He wants His disciples to put His teachings into practice in their lives. Go back and consider the "Great Commission" Jesus gave to His apostles again (in Matthew 28:18-20). Notice that those who were to be made disciples through the teaching of the gospel (i.e. through learning the will of God) were also to be taught "to observe all things" that Jesus commanded.

Therefore, a working knowledge of God's will is not sufficient for discipleship. It must be put into practice. James 1:22-25 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." Again, if you only are a hearer of God's word, you deceive yourself into thinking you are Jesus' disciple when you actually are *not* a true disciple!

Why imitate Jesus

An "imitation" is something that attempts to replicate something else. It attempts to make an exact copy of an original. For instance, the original Declaration of Independence has been replicated many times by attempting to make an exact copy of the original to be displayed in other places. Merchants also often attempt to sell imitation goods of many things (i.e. women's purses, sunglasses, clothing, etc.).

Now, we have already established why you should listen to Jesus in His teachings. But, why should you actually imitate Jesus?

(1) You should imitate Jesus because God has told you to do so. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul wrote, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." Please pay close attention to the fact that Paul was *not* encouraging others only to imitate his example. Instead, others were to imitate what they saw in Paul

to the extent that what they saw in Paul was an imitation of Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 5:1 also states, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” Again, this is given in the form of a commandment. This is one of God’s expectations for His people. We must imitate what we can know about God. And, one of the best ways we can know how God would respond to the various circumstances we encounter during our lives is through the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was “God...manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

(2) You should imitate Jesus because He was not hypocritical. While Jesus lived on this earth and taught many people, Jesus condemned hypocrisy. For instance, He condemned the hypocrisy of many of the religious leaders of the time who would bind heavy burdens on others but would not live their lives accordingly (see Matthew 23).

Yet, this was not the case with Jesus. Example after example could be provided as to Jesus’ genuineness. He would teach people the will of God – *and* He lived His life according to those same teachings. For instance, Jesus taught to forgive others of their sins (i.e. Matthew 6:14-15). And, when He was hanging on the cross (being crucified by wicked men), He pleaded that His Heavenly Father would forgive them of their wickedness (Luke 23:34).

(3) You should imitate Jesus because He was sinless. Every other man you could imitate who has lived on this earth would be unsuitable for imitation because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). Therefore, there is *some* area in everyone’s life that is spiritually dangerous for you to imitate. That is, everyone *except* for Jesus.

Consider what Hebrews 4:15 says about Jesus. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” So, when Jesus lived on this earth, He faced the same kinds of temptations that you face. For instance, you can read Matthew 4:1-11 and learn about one instance when Jesus was tempted. But, even though He was tempted in these same ways, He never sinned against God! Therefore, Jesus is truly the only perfect example of

how God wants you to live your life on earth. There is not one area in which you should not follow the example of Jesus Christ.

(4) You should imitate Jesus because He perfectly glorified God while on this earth. Because “all have sinned” and have fallen “short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), there is no other man/woman who is qualified to be the perfect model for imitation. Due to their sin, they have all (at one time or another) fallen short of glorifying God!

However, since Jesus Christ never sinned, He never fell short of His ultimate mission of bringing glory to His Heavenly Father while He lived on this earth. For instance, in John 17, as Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly life and praying to His Father, He said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:1-5).

Areas you must imitate Jesus in

We have already seen that the Bible contains a record of many of Jesus’ own teachings (as well as the teachings of the divinely inspired apostles and prophets). However, the Bible also contains a record of many things Jesus did while He lived on this earth. Thanks be to God, then, that we can look to these passages and see what God would do if He was living as man – because that’s exactly who Jesus was!

Now, we can look to Jesus’ perfect example and learn how He dealt with many situations that confronted Him during the course of His life on this earth. And, as we learn from these perfect examples, we should be able to evaluate our lives and see whether or not we are being true disciples of Jesus Christ by imitating Him.

For instance, do you respond to temptation in the same way Jesus responded to temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)? Do you serve other people like

Jesus served (John 13:1-17)? Do you love the lost like Jesus loved the lost (John 4:1-42)? Do you give of yourself like Jesus gave of Himself (2 Corinthians 8:9)?

These are only a sample of areas in which we should be imitating the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Actually, in every situation we are faced with, we should consider the question, “What did Jesus do when He was faced with the same kind of situation?” Then, “how would Jesus respond if He was faced with this decision?” But, we do not answer these questions based on our own opinions. Instead, we must look to the teachings of God’s word and find the answer there!

Will You Be A True Disciple Of Jesus?

True discipleship, then, involves these two elements of learning from and imitating Jesus Christ. And, as you consider both of these elements, you need to realize what Jesus taught in John 15:18-21. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

This passage should help you understand that true discipleship will not always be easy. Just as the world hated and persecuted Jesus, the world will hate and persecute those who follow after Him. However, Jesus wants you to realize this (He doesn’t try to conceal this truth from you) and make the conscious decision to follow Him – no matter the cost! Consider a few passages that demonstrate the cost of true discipleship and determine whether or not you will be a true disciple of Jesus.

Matthew 4:18-22

“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

On this occasion, Jesus called two groups of brothers to be His disciples – Peter and Andrew, James and John. Particularly, I want you to notice the cost of discipleship that was involved for each of them. All four were fisherman and were called to leave their livelihoods in order to enter the new occupation of being “fishers of men.” All four were called to leave their “comfort zones” of what they had always known to go into the labor fields for Jesus Christ. James and John are even said to have left their own father (Zebedee).

Luke 5:11 summarizes their sacrifice to be disciples of Jesus Christ. “So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” These men sacrificed *everything* they knew and everything they had in order to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, according to Bible teaching and secular tradition, Peter, Andrew, and James were all killed for being disciples of Jesus Christ. John also suffered during his life for being a disciple (even being exiled to an island), though he (supposedly) did not experience martyrdom.

Luke 9:23-26

“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.’”

The context of Jesus' statement (as seen from Luke 9:21-22) is Jesus foretelling His own impending suffering, death, and resurrection. Then, Jesus demonstrates that He is not the only one who must be so committed to accomplishing the will of God, when He states the things recorded in Luke 9:23-26.

Notice the three things Jesus instructs in verse 23. (1) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must deny himself. This is a denial of everything that would hinder him from following the Lord. Certainly, this includes denying himself of all sinful pleasures and treasures. (2) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must take up his cross daily. Now, the cross was an instrument used in execution. Often, part of the prisoner's execution/punishment was to carry his own cross (as Jesus also accomplished). It would be painful, humiliating, tiresome, and difficult. So, those who desire to follow Christ must be willing to do anything/everything that is required – no matter how much he is ridiculed, nor how costly it is, nor how painful it is, etc. Then, notice that this cross must be bourn *daily* (it is not something that you pick and choose when you will bear it). (3) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must follow Christ. Wherever He leads, you must humbly follow. You must recognize that your life is not your own. Instead, you must recognize that your life belongs to the one who gave His life for you so that you can be saved (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 2:20)!

But, to what extent does Jesus intend for these things to be applied? Verses 24-26 help to understand the answer to that question. Jesus illustrates that this is not *just* a denial of your own physical desires in order to not sin. Instead, this is even a willingness to follow Jesus Christ through the point of being put to death for being His disciple (see Revelation 2:10)! Then, Jesus demonstrates that you should be willing to give yourself to Him in this way because nothing on this earth is worth losing your soul for!

Luke 9:57-62

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but

the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Here are three examples of what is involved in being a true disciple of Jesus Christ. The first man needed to understand what he was getting in to as a disciple. He needed to realize that it was not an easy life (as demonstrated by Jesus not having a place to lay His head). The second man was rebuked for desiring to be Jesus' disciple, but not being willing to put Jesus ahead of his father. Then, the third man was rebuked for wanting to follow Jesus, but not being willing to put Jesus ahead of his family. In fact, Jesus plainly states that you cannot begin to follow Him and then not give Him your entire focus!

Luke 14:25-27, 33

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.’”

In the greater part of this passage (Luke 14:25-33), Jesus teaches the need to count the cost of true discipleship in order to determine whether you will be willing to give what He requires of you. What He requires, He states in verses 26-27 and 33 is that He must come absolutely first in your life. You must be willing to forsake everything and everyone else in order to follow whatever He says. Then, He says that if you fail to do this, you cannot be His disciple.

Will you be a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

How much are you willing to sacrifice for Jesus? How far are you willing to follow Him? How much are you willing to stand out from the world to live for Him? Are you truly willing to put Him

absolutely first in your life in order to learn from Him and imitate Him? If not, you cannot be His disciple.

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26)! You must recognize the cost of being a disciple of Christ and devote yourself to being a faithful disciple. And, if you do, the Scriptures teach that you receive the eternal reward in Heaven! These blessings will make all of the sufferings seem as those they were nothing (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)!

Study Questions

1. Whose Disciple Are You?

What does it mean to be a “disciple”?

How will evaluating the “fruit” of your life help you identify whose disciple you are?

How does the “Great Commission” help you understand that God wants you to be Jesus’ disciple?

2. A Disciple Is A Student Of Jesus Christ

Why should you learn from Christ?

How can you learn from Christ?

What can you learn from Christ?

3. A Disciple Is An Imitator Of Jesus Christ

Why must you be more than just a student of Jesus?

Why should you imitate Jesus?

What areas must you imitate Jesus in?

4. Will You Be A True Disciple Of Jesus?

What does Matthew 4:18-22 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 9:23-26 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 9:57-62 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 14:25-27, 33 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian's Life Is A Life Of Faith

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian's life is a life of faith.

Faith Is Necessary To Be Saved

Faith is not only a part of a Christian's life; but, it is the central part of his/her life! It is necessary every step of the way – both to become a Christian and in order to live as a Christian. There will not be any salvation for the one who does not have a genuine faith!

Necessary to become a Christian

The Christian was once alienated from God by his/her sins. Having faith in God and Christ was necessary in order to be saved from those sins. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Without this quality of faith, you are not able to conduct your life in a way that is pleasing to God. It does not matter if you are a morally good person who is trying to have a

positive impact on this world. It does not matter if you do many good things (even the things God would want and has commanded you to do). It does not matter if you are a good husband or wife and fulfill the role God has given you to fulfill in the home. It does not matter if you are an excellent father or mother who is totally invested in your children. None of it matters – without faith!

Jesus clearly indicated that faith was necessary in order for an individual to be saved from sin. John 8:24 says, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." In order for you to be able to have spiritual life through Jesus Christ, God requires that you have faith! Similarly, in Mark 16:16, Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." First, observe that both faith and baptism are identified as being requirements for salvation. Then, notice the consequence of failing to believe: Eternal condemnation. Throughout the Scriptures, therefore, the Bible tells of the need to have faith – and warns of the consequences of failing to have faith.

The Scriptures teach that we are unable to earn our own salvation from sin by our own works. However, salvation has been made available by the grace of God to all who will have faith. Ephesians 2:1-10, for instance, demonstrates that we were once "dead in trespasses and sins" when we were living according to the sinful ways of this world. But, thanks to the grace and mercy of God, we were given the opportunity to be made alive – "even when we were dead in trespasses." Verses 8-9 then say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

John 3:16 summarizes this in a similar and succinct way: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." What a tremendous opportunity we have been given – to "not perish but have everlasting life." However, in order to partake of this wonderful blessing, we must have faith! Now, this is not faith *only*, but an active and obedient faith (as we'll see later in the

lesson). Clearly, faith is necessary in order to become a Christian and be saved.

Necessary to live as a Christian

Faith is not just a one-time requirement that God has placed upon us in order to be forgiven of our sins and become a Christian. After becoming Christians, we cannot then turn away from the faith which brought us into God's favor. In fact, the Scriptures instruct that we must be "faithful until death" in order to receive the "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). The Scriptures also teach that it is possible to live in such a way so as to fall away from the grace of the Almighty God. Galatians 5:4 says, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Therefore, it is not pleasing to God if you have faith so as to receive the forgiveness of your sins and then turn away from that faith later in your life! Instead, as you live your life and experience trials, temptations, and persecutions, the "genuineness of your faith" is being put to the test (1 Peter 1:7). You must have a kind of faith that perseveres these tests. For instance, Jesus taught a parable about the word of God being planted in the hearts of men and women – and how it produced results that differed depending upon each one's heart (see Luke 8:4-8, 11-15). Specifically, Jesus makes reference to one group of people who heard and were receptive to the word of God (immediately receiving it with joy). However, they only "believe for a while" and fall away in time of temptation (vs. 13). This individual does not continue to demonstrate true faith – and, consequently, cannot live in a way that is pleasing to God!

Rather than becoming weaker in faith, God wants His people to grow in their faiths. 2 Peter 1:5-11 demonstrates that Christians are to be giving "all diligence" to add (supplement) their faiths with other God-approved qualities. For instance, verses 5-7 instruct the Christian to "add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." The passage continues by illustrating

that the one who is growing in his/her faith will be useful and fruitful in the service of the Lord!

Finally, consider how faith is necessary in your life as a Christian because of its connection to defending against the attacks of the devil. The Scriptures plainly demonstrate that Satan is active in this world in trying to lure people away from serving God (see 1 Peter 5:8). In order to be victorious over this fierce enemy who is seeking to devour our souls, the Christian will have to be alert, self-controlled, willing to resist, and "steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

In fact, God has identified spiritual armor that every Christian must put on in order to serve Him and overcome the attacks of the devil (as identified in Ephesians 6:10-18). As the apostle Paul was writing concerning this armor, consider what he says about the role of faith (vs. 16): "above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." The picture is one of Satan hurling flaming arrows at us in order to destroy us. Indeed, Satan has many different tools at his disposal in order to lure us away from serving God. However, Paul says that we must (above all) take up the "shield of faith" in order to overcome his assaults. Therefore, our faith will be necessary in order to live faithful lives that please God and be saved!

Faith In...

Faith is necessary for salvation. God has required you to have faith in order to become a Christian and in order to live pleasing to Him as a Christian. But, what or who must your faith be in? Certainly there are many things and people folks put their faiths in. However, please appreciate where the Bible says your faith must be in order to be pleasing to God.

Faith in God

Look at Hebrews 11:6 again. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." There

are clearly some fundamental truths about God that we can and must truly have faith in as Christians.

(1) Faith that God exists. Before you can put your faith in anything else about God or Christ, you must have complete faith in the existence of God. You “must believe that He is” (Hebrews 11:6). Certainly, God has given you sufficient evidence to be able to know that He does exist and put your full faith in Him. He has demonstrated that He exists in two ways. (1) He has demonstrated that He exists through His written word. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” You can have faith that God exists when you read of His existence in the pages of Scripture (i.e. Genesis 1:1). (2) He has demonstrated that He exists through the things He has created. Psalm 19:1 says that the “heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” Similarly, Romans 1:19-21 says that the truth about God can be known because God has shown it to us. Namely, He has shown us that He does exist through the things He has created. So, we are without excuse if we reject His existence.

(2) Faith that God is who He says He is. It is not enough just to believe that there is a higher power identified as “God.” There are many people who claim to have faith in God; but, they do not really believe in who God tells us He is. Instead, they believe in their own god called “God.” However, we must remember that “what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them” (Romans 1:19). What God wants us to know about Him has been made known to us (either through His creation or through His written word). Therefore, we are not at liberty to make God into whatever we want Him to be. We must simply accept who He says He is. For instance, the Bible reveals that God is an all-powerful, ever-present, eternal, all-knowing, holy, gracious, merciful, loving, and longsuffering God who is also a jealous God and will punish those who disobey Him. Yet, there are many who do not choose to believe or accept that God will punish anyone (even though they disobey God).

(3) Faith that God is manifested in 3 persons. Part of an accurate faith in God involves accepting the truth that there are three separate and distinct Beings who all possess the quality/nature of being

God. The Scriptures teach that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all are Deity. For instance, passages like Matthew 3:16-17 show all three of the members of the “Godhead” as separate Beings. In the text, Jesus Christ was on the earth and was baptized, the Holy Spirit is seen in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice is heard. Then, passages like Matthew 28:18-20, John 1:1, and Acts 5:3-4 (along with others) demonstrate that all three possess the nature of being God.

(4) Faith that God will reward those who seek Him. Not only does Hebrews 11:6 say that you must believe that God exists in order to please God; but, it says that you must believe that “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” God has promised that the outcome of your faith is the salvation of your soul and the eternal reward of life in Heaven (see 1 Peter 1:3-9). He has promised “the crown of life” to those who are “faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10). You must have the faith in God that God will do as He has promised to those who diligently seek Him.

(5) Faith that God will do everything He promises to do. Not only must you have faith that God will reward those who diligently seek Him; but, you must have faith that God will do everything He has promised to do. For instance, you must have faith that God has promised to send Jesus Christ to end this earth one day (2 Peter 3:10). You must have faith that God will judge the world by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10). You must have faith that those who are judged to have been righteous will be given everlasting life in Heaven (Matthew 25:34, 46). And, you must have faith that God will punish those who are judged to have been unrighteous by sentencing them to eternal punishment in Hell fire (Matthew 25:41, 46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). In all things, you must have complete faith that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) and that He will do whatever (anything and everything) He has promised to do.

Faith in Jesus Christ

While Jesus Christ is part of the Godhead, we need to think about Him specifically – as it relates to our faith as Christians. There are some fundamental

truths about Jesus Christ we must have faith in to be acceptable to God.

(1) Faith that Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ possesses the nature of being God. While there are many passages that teach Jesus' Deity, consider John 1:1 (note that Jesus is referred to as the "Word" in this text). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Therefore, as you develop your faith, you must believe that Jesus Christ possesses all the same qualities as God (the Father) possesses.

(2) Faith that Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Whenever Jesus Christ was born on this earth, He was God living as man. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This is the reason why Jesus Christ was identified as being both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He was God living in the flesh. You must have faith that Jesus Christ chose to leave Heaven in order to come to this earth and live as man.

(3) Faith that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life. Jesus Christ, as a man, was tempted by Satan in all the same ways we are tempted. Read, for instance, how Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. However, Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a High Priest [Jesus] who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Therefore, as you have faith in Jesus Christ and recognize that He lived on this earth, you must have faith that Jesus Christ (though He was tempted) did not commit sin.

(4) Faith that Jesus Christ demonstrated that He was the Son of God. Jesus Christ did not just claim to be the Son of God. He demonstrated that He truly was the Son of God. Jesus Christ fulfilled all the prophecies that were made throughout the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the promised Messiah. In addition, Jesus Christ performed great signs and miracles during the time He walked on this earth. And, according to John 20:30-31, these signs have been preserved in the pages of the Scriptures so that you may "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son

of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

(5) Faith that Jesus Christ offered Himself as the ransom sacrifice for sin. Jesus' primary mission in coming to this earth was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). In the language of 2 Corinthians 8:9, Jesus Christ (though He was rich) became poor so that you could become rich by His poverty. This means that Jesus Christ (although He lived in Heaven) was willing to leave Heaven, come to earth, suffer, and die on the cross so that you could become a partaker of all the riches of Heaven! Jesus Christ, as the sinless Lamb of God, was willing to offer Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world in order to give people the opportunity to have their sins forgiven. You must put your faith in the fact that Jesus Christ has provided you this opportunity to be saved!

(6) Faith that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. The apostle Paul taught that if Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith is worthless and we are still living in our sins. Of all people, then, we are the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). However, thanks be to God that Jesus Christ did raise from the dead – just as He had promised. The Scriptures provide us with sufficient evidence to believe in Jesus' resurrection, including the great number of people who were eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-11). Yes, you can have faith that Jesus Christ is risen – and that He has provided the victory over death!

What It Means To Have Acceptable Faith

Now that we have seen that faith is necessary for salvation and that we must have faith in God and in Jesus Christ, we need to develop a greater understanding of what faith actually is. There are certainly many people in this world (even religious people) who have misinformed ideas about what faith actually is. Actually, there are two things essential to having the kind of faith that is pleasing

to God: Mental acknowledgement and works of faith.

Hebrews 11:1

Throughout Hebrews 11, the author paints a picture of what acceptable faith in God really looks like. But, before he does so, the author begins with this God-inspired definition of faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

True faith is the assurance of the things you hope for. True faith makes what you hope for a reality. True faith means that the things you mentally accept as being true are not just some kind of fairy tale or wishful thinking. Instead, true faith looks at those things (though they are unseen things) as being just as real as anything else! Then, true faith acts according to these realities.

True faith is also the conviction of things not yet seen. Yes, the Christian walks “by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). However, the Christian is not walking blindly. Instead, his/her faith is grounded in the hope of the gospel and his/her faith is sure enough so as to endure all of the things that will test it.

Then, after defining what true faith is, the Hebrew writer demonstrates true faith through numerous examples. These examples include Abel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and others. In all of these examples, they had complete trust in whatever God told them – so much that they acted in the way God desired! These are the two necessary ingredients to having acceptable faith.

Mental acknowledgement

True faith must acknowledge that what God says is truth. In John 8:24, for instance, Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Also, recall that Hebrews 11:6 says that it is impossible to please God without faith – that you must believe that God exists and that God rewards.

This necessary ingredient of true faith can be seen throughout Hebrews chapter 11 in the examples that are given. For instance, (1) Noah believed the truth that God was going to send a flood to destroy

everything living on the earth. He also believed the truth that God would save him and his household if he prepared an ark (see Hebrews 11:7). (2) Abraham believed the truth that God had revealed to him concerning his son, Isaac. Abraham believed that God was going to fulfill His promise to make a great nation from the descendants of Isaac. He even believed that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead (see Hebrews 11:17-19). (3) The Israelites believed that God was able to deliver the city of Jericho into their hands (see Hebrews 11:30).

True faith begins by making definite decisions about whether you will accept what God has said to be true or not. Therefore, you cannot have true faith unless you first come to the realizations that I have stated earlier in this lesson. Believing these as truth is fundamental and essential to pleasing God. You cannot please Him if you do not accept what He says as being truth.

Works of faith

Yes, true faith mentally accepts what God has revealed as being true. However, there are many people who want to stop at that point. There are many religious organizations that believe and teach the doctrine of faith *only* for salvation. Under this doctrine, in order to become a Christian, all you must do is believe (mentally acknowledge) the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Then, many of those same religious organizations will claim that you can never live in such a way so as to lose your salvation.

However, mentally accepting certain things as being true is *not* all that is necessary for salvation – and is *not* all that is involved in having acceptable faith. Look at the rest of Hebrews 11:6. You must believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder “of those who diligently seek Him”! The necessary inference is that faith is not complete and God is not going to reward you unless you are diligently seeking Him! God requires this diligent lifestyle of seeking to live according to His instructions in order to be pleasing to Him!

God requires these works of faith (or, works of obedience) because it is not enough just to acknowledge God as God, you must also glorify Him as God throughout your life (see Romans 1:18-32).

Your life must be lived in a way that is in harmony with the things you accept mentally as being true! This is exactly what we see demonstrated as acceptable faith in Hebrews 11. Think back over those same three examples I listed a moment ago. (1) Noah's faith was not acceptable to God just because he accepted the truth about the flood and the salvation that was available in the ark. His faith was only acceptable when He acted according to those beliefs – when he was moved with godly fear and prepared the ark for the saving of his household (see Hebrews 11:7). (2) Abraham's faith was not acceptable to God just because he accepted the promises about Isaac and his descendants, concluding that God was able to even raise Isaac from the dead. His faith was only acceptable when He acted according to those beliefs – when he was willing to offer Isaac on the altar (see Hebrews 11:17-19). (3) The faith of the Israelites was not acceptable to God just because they accepted the truth that God was able to deliver the city of Jericho into their hands. Their faith was only acceptable when they acted according to those beliefs – when they obeyed God's instructions to march around the city (see Hebrews 11:30).

Yes, the Bible does teach that works must accompany your faith in order for your faith to be pleasing to God. This is true both of the faith He requires in order to become a Christian and of the faith He requires in order to live as a Christian. However, these works of faith are not the same as works of merit. Works of faith are works that demonstrate your faith in God (demonstrating that you need to be obedient to God in order for Him to save you). However, works of merit are works that demonstrate your faith in yourself (demonstrating that you believe you can save yourself through your own good works). Works of merit cannot save any sinner (see Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 4:1-4).

While there are many passages which teach that works of faith (obedience) are necessary to please God and to be saved, consider James 2:14-26. In this passage, James states and demonstrates that faith without works (of obedience) is dead (see verses 14-17, 20, 26). He also demonstrates that even the demons believe (mentally) in God and tremble at His existence (see verse 19). However, the

implication is that the demons will not be saved by this mental acknowledgement alone. James also provides examples (of Abraham and of Rahab) that both mental acknowledgement and works of obedience are necessary in order to be justified in God's sight (see verses 21-23, 25). And, verse 24 solves the matter entirely: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

Faith at work = acceptable faith

Faith that is truly pleasing to God is faith that works! Once again, these works are not done in order to earn/merit salvation. Instead, whenever the individual who mentally accepts the truths God has revealed acts in a way that is consistent and obedient with those truths, he/she recognizes that he/she is still an unprofitable servant (having simply done what was his/her duty to do, Luke 17:7-10).

This is the kind of genuine faith that God wants from all mankind! First, this is the kind of faith that is required in order to become a Christian and be saved (John 3:16). God's word requires that individuals hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Only after being baptized into Jesus Christ has a person truly believed in God (see Acts 16:30-34)!

Second, this is the kind of faith that is required in order to live as a Christian and remain in a saved condition. For instance, the apostle Peter wrote to some Christians who were being persecuted. They were being "grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of [their] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7). It was not enough for these individuals to have become Christians at a previous point in time. It was not enough for them to just mentally acknowledge the truths God had revealed. They needed to put their faith to work and demonstrate that their faith was genuine by living in obedience to God and enduring the trials of life!

Dear Christian brother or sister, do you have an active, obedient faith? Are the decisions you are making as a child of God manifesting that you truly believe in the things God has revealed to be truth? Or, have you neglected one or both of these two essential elements of faith? Remember, God says that without this kind of faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

What Faith Makes Possible

It is my hope that you have a genuine faith. It is my hope that you mentally accept all that God teaches as being true. Then, it is my hope that you are living your life in a way that is in harmony with those convictions. If you are, there are some things that only true faith will make possible in your life. Faith is powerful whenever these two elements are in place.

Examples of faith

Take a moment to be encouraged by some examples of faith – and how much their faith impacted their lives. (1) After the Israelites were permitted to go away from the land of Egypt (after being slaves there), the Egyptian army pursued them. As the Egyptian army closed in on the Israelites, the Red Sea stood between the Israelites and being free. However, God provided Moses with the ability to part the Red Sea. Then, by faith, the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as if it was dry ground (see Hebrews 11:29).

(2) Whenever the Israelites had been taken into captivity by the Midianites (an army that was as numerous as locusts) God chose to use Gideon and 300 men (armed only with trumpets, empty pitchers, and torches) to deliver the Israelites from their oppression (read Judges 6-8). Then, because of faith in God, these 300 men went boldly to attack this powerful army – and (by the power of God) came out victorious!

(3) During the days of King Nebuchadnezzar, an image of gold was constructed and a decree was issued which required all the inhabitants of that land fall down and worship the image at the appointed

times. Failure to do so resulted in being cast into a fiery furnace. However, there were three men who had an unwavering faith in God who refused – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These three men concluded that God was able to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace and from the hand of the king. But, whether God would choose to do so or not, they wanted everyone to know that they did not worship or serve the golden image (see Daniel 3:16-18)! Then, when they were cast into the burning fiery furnace, God saved them alive!

(4) After Jesus had sent His disciples away in a boat and the boat was in the middle of the sea, Jesus came walking on the sea to them (Matthew 14:22-33). The wind was contrary at the time and the boat was being tossed by the waves. Then, after Jesus made Himself known to His disciples, Peter was commanded to walk on the water and come to Jesus. For the time that Peter kept His focus and faith in Jesus, he was doing the “impossible” – walking on the water. However, whenever Peter took His focus off of Jesus and was distracted by the winds and the waves around Him, he began to sink.

Faith is the victory!

All of these examples (and so many others) demonstrate the great power of having faith in God. Their faith was the victory in each of these situations. And, although we are not called to walk on water, bow before a golden image, deliver God’s people from oppression, or pass through the Red Sea – our faith continues to be the victory over this world!

Consider 1 John 5:4-5. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Earlier in the letter of 1 John, John wrote that “the world is passing away, and lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

The Christian, in refusing to live according to the ways of this world and fulfill the desires of the flesh, will not suffer the same destruction as all those who do! Though they experience ease of living here on this earth and they often enjoy pleasures of sin, those pleasures and comforts are only temporary.

Soon, their lives will end and they will reap the eternal consequences of their decisions. However, the Christian (in living a life of faith) will not suffer destruction. Instead, the Christian will receive the end of his/her faith – the salvation of the soul (1 Peter 1:9). This is the inheritance that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away” – and is reserved in Heaven for the Christian (1 Peter 1:3-4)!

So, as the Christian has full confidence in the truths and promises God has revealed, he/she makes decisions and acts according to that faith. This faith will provide everything that the Christian needs in order to live in a way that pleases God and overcome all of the obstacles in this world!

Perseverance in trials

One obstacle the Christian’s faith will overcome are the trials of life. There will be many difficult things the Christian will endure. There will be sickness. There will be injury. There will be deaths. There will be financial struggles. There will be concerns for one’s family. All the trials of this life will put your faith to the test so as to see whether it is genuine or not! At each of these moments, you will be faced with choices – either to be steadfast in your service and devotion to God or to turn away from Him.

Faith will provide the victory over these trials! True faith will not waver at the promises of God. True faith trumps what is seen with that which is not seen. True faith recognizes that God has promised that there will be things which try our faiths. True faith recognizes that enduring these trials will produce an even stronger faith! James 1:2-4 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Perseverance in persecutions

Another obstacle the Christian’s faith will overcome are the persecutions he/she experiences for following Jesus Christ. Jesus promised that the world will hate those who are Christians – just as it hated Him (John 15:18-21). Therefore, Paul concluded that

“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Perhaps you will be physically abused for following the Lord. Perhaps you will be mocked for following the Lord. Perhaps you will be alienated from others for following the Lord. Perhaps there will be financial burdens placed on you for following the Lord.

Faith will provide the victory over these persecutions! True faith will not waver at the promises of God. True faith trumps whatever hardships you are enduring for following the Lord. True faith recognizes that God has promised that His people will suffer persecutions for following Him. And, true faith responds to these situations like Paul responded to his frequent persecutions. For instance, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Perseverance in temptations

A final obstacle the Christian’s faith will overcome are the temptations of Satan. As we have already observed, Satan is the fierce enemy of the Christian – trying to lure him/her away from following the Lord (see 1 Peter 5:8). The devil is doing everything within his power to appeal to your fleshly desires and convince you not to follow Jesus Christ! He is, as we have seen, hurling “fiery darts” at you in order to destroy you. Perhaps he is appealing to your earthly desire for riches. Perhaps he is appealing to your earthly desire for acceptance. Perhaps he is appealing to your earthly desire for physical pleasures. Whatever fleshly desire he is appealing to, he is trying hard to convince you that it is more fulfilling to follow those desires than it is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith will provide the victory over these temptations! True faith will not waver at the promises of God. True faith will trump Satan’s appeals for the passing pleasures of sin (see Hebrews 11:24-26). True faith will look to God’s promise that

there will be a way of escape from every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) – and will seek that way. True faith knows that Jesus Christ was tempted in all the same ways we are tempted, yet He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15) – and knows that following the steps of Jesus will lead out of the temptation. True faith knows that we will be able to overcome every temptation Satan uses against us (1 Corinthians 10:13). True faith knows that Satan will flee from us whenever we resist him (James 4:7). Ultimately, true faith knows that no earthly pleasure, treasure, or relationship is worth losing the soul for (Matthew 16:26)!

Conclusion

As a Christian, your life must be a life of faith. Though there are many things that will challenge your faith, know that true faith in God is strong enough to overcome the world! There is victory in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57)! If you will keep your eyes focused on Jesus (walking by faith and not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:7), you will receive the salvation of your soul when life on this earth is over (1 Peter 1:3-9)! What a glorious day that will be whenever faith will become sight – when you are no longer hoping in things that are unseen because you are living and experiencing all of the promises God had made. At this time, you will know that your faith was not misplaced and was not in vain!

Study Questions

1. Faith Is Necessary To Be Saved

Is faith necessary to become a Christian? Provide evidence for your answer.

Is faith necessary to live as a Christian? Provide evidence for your answer.

2. Faith In...

You must have faith in God. Identify some things you must believe about God.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

You must have faith in Jesus Christ. Identify some things you must believe about Jesus.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

3. What It Means To Have Acceptable Faith

How does Hebrews 11:1 define faith?

Explain how mental acknowledgement is an essential element of faith.

How does faith overcome the temptations of Satan?

Explain how works of faith are essential to faith.

What does acceptable faith look like? Do you have this kind of faith?

4. What Faith Makes Possible

List some examples of faith and briefly describe what faith made possible in each situation.

What does 1 John 5:4-5 say about faith? How is this true?

How does faith overcome the trials of life?

How does faith overcome persecutions?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Steward

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a steward.

Fundamentals Of Stewardship

The Christian is a steward. The Scriptures clearly picture this to be true. For instance, Jesus teaches some parables in which He describes the work of stewards and leaves us to make application of these parables to our lives as Christians. But, before you can evaluate how you are doing as a steward in the sight of God, you must recognize some fundamentals of stewardship.

What is stewardship?

The general idea of a steward is someone who is a manager of a household or of household affairs. The steward would, therefore, tend to whatever the master would entrust to his care. This could be his property, his wealth, his fields, his family, etc.

In today's society, we do not tend to use the term "steward" frequently. However, we still employ

the same general concept. For instance, suppose you are hired as a manager of a restaurant. Whoever owns that particular business has entrusted many of the responsibilities and oversight of that business to your care. Now, do you suppose that the owner would be pleased if you fail to prepare the work schedules for the other employees so that no one comes to work? Or, do you suppose that the owner would be pleased if you run specials that result in the business losing money? On the other hand, do you suppose the owner would be pleased if you create an excellent work environment, get the most out of the employees, and increase the profit?

There are also some who hire business managers to watch over their finances. These are individuals who take money that is not their own and invest it in the areas they believe to be appropriate to accomplish established goals. But, suppose the business manager begins to make foolish investments that the owner of those funds never authorized. Or, suppose that the business manager takes some of the funds for himself rather than investing them as he was instructed. On the other hand, suppose that the business manager uses wisdom in making the appropriate investments and provides the desired increase for the owner.

Now, for one last example, consider if you were going away on a six-month business trip. During this time, you entrust everything you are leaving behind to the care of another person. His responsibility is to properly care for your family, your house, your possessions, your money, etc. However, imagine if you return home unannounced to find that your family has been neglected (they haven't eaten in five days, they are wearing dirty clothes, etc.), the roof on your house is leaking, the grass has grown up around the house and hasn't been mowed in months, some of your possessions are missing, bills have went unpaid, checks have not been deposited, etc. Would you be pleased with your steward? On the other hand, suppose that you return home to find things just as you left them and find signs that everything has went smoothly and has been taken care of while you were gone. In fact, you actually find that some home improvements have been made while you were gone. Would you be pleased with your steward?

Matthew 25:14-30

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He would frequently teach in parables. Parables were earthly stories that were used to convey spiritual truths. Among the many different subjects Jesus addressed through His parables is the subject of stewardship. For instance, Jesus teaches parables about stewardship in Matthew 24:45-51, Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 12:42-48, and Luke 16:1-13. You would be profited by a study of each one of these parables. However, for the purposes of this study, we will only focus on Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30. This is, perhaps, His most well-known parable dealing with the subject of stewardship.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

“But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

This passage is in the context of Jesus teaching about His coming. He has already demonstrated that He is coming at an unknown time (Matthew 25:1-13). At Jesus' coming, the great Judgment will take place (as pictured in Matthew 25:31-46). At this time, everyone who has ever lived on earth will be judged for how they had lived and will either be sentenced to eternal punishment in Hell or rewarded with eternal life in Heaven. A primary component to this Judgment, as Jesus pictures in this parable of the talents, is the aspect of stewardship.

Jesus, like a man traveling to a far country, has entrusted you with certain things. And, when He returns, He will require that you give an answer as to how you have managed those things. Will you be rewarded like the two men in the parable who put what they had been entrusted with to good service for the master? Or, will you be punished like the one man in the parable who wasted what the master had entrusted to him? According to this parable, God views you as His steward on this earth and you will be judged accordingly.

You are a steward!

Listen to what Paul said about himself in Galatians 2:20. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Paul recognized that, as a Christian, his life was not about living to please himself. This means that all of the things that made up Paul's life (i.e. his money, his possessions, his abilities, his time, etc.) were also

not his to use in just any way he wanted to use them. Instead, he considered that everything about his life belonged to God to be used in His service, to His honor and glory.

But, this is not just true about Paul's life. This is also true about everyone who is a Christian. Every Christian (including yourself) has been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, listen to the language of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and consider how Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20 ought to be the same kind of statement you will make about your life. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

In addition, Jesus pictures it this way. In Matthew 13:44-46, Jesus teaches two parables with the same meaning. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

These individuals realized that their opportunity to have the hidden treasure or the pearl of great value was so wonderful that they gladly gave up everything in order to possess it. In the same way, Jesus says that your opportunity to take part in the joys of the kingdom of Heaven (an opportunity that has been made available through the blood of Jesus Christ) is so great that you should gladly give up anything and everything that is necessary to obtain it. And, as we learn from both Galatians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (along with other passages), God requires that you give Him complete control over your life.

Consider the following illustration (based on Matthew 13:45-46). I believe that this imaginary conversation makes the point about how God views you as a steward. This illustration is taken from *Call To Discipleship* (Please note that I have not read any other part of this book and make no recommendation). [Ortiz, J., & Buckingham, J. (1975). *Call to discipleship*. Plainfield, N.J.: Logos

International. Accessed from <http://sermonillustrations.com/az/s/stewardship.htm> on July 29, 2015.]

"So when man finds Jesus, it costs him everything. Jesus has happiness, joy, peace, healing, security, eternity. Man marvels at such a pearl and says, 'I want this pearl. How much does it cost?'

"The seller says, 'it's too dear, too costly.'

'But how much?'

'Well, it's very expensive.'

'Do you think I could buy it?'

'It costs everything you have – no more, no less – so anybody can buy it.'

'I'll buy it.'

"What do you have? Let's write it down.'

'I have \$10,000 in the bank.'

'Good, \$10,000. What else?'

'I have nothing more. That's all I have.'

"Have you nothing more?'

'Well, I have some dollars here in my pocket.'

'How many?'

'I'll see: Thirty, forty, fifty, eighty, one hundred, one hundred twenty – one hundred twenty dollars.'

'That's fine. What else do you have?'

"I have nothing else. That's all.'

'Where do you live?'

'I live in my house.'

'The house, too.'

'Then you mean I must live in the garage?'

'Have you a garage, too? That, too. What else?'

'Do you mean that I must live in my car, then?'

'Have you a car?'

'I have two.'

'Both become mine. Both cars. What else?'

"Well, you have my house, the garage, the cars, the money, everything.'

'What else?'

'Are you alone in the world?'

'No, I have a wife, two children...'

‘Your wife and children, too.’
‘Too?’
‘Yes, everything you have. What else?’
‘I have nothing else, I am left alone now.’

“‘Oh, you too! Everything becomes mine – wife, children, house, money, cars – everything. And you too. Now you can use all those things here but don’t forget they are mine, as you are. When I need any of the things you are using, you must give them to me because now I am the owner.’”

Once again, this illustration helps to understand how God views your life, as depicted in the passages we have just considered. Everything about your life is to be used in the service of God. There is not one area (if you want to partake of the great blessings of the kingdom of Heaven) that you do not have to give to God!

This is the concept of stewardship. Everything you have (including your very own life) is not your own. You are simply a manager of what has been entrusted to your care. So, as you live on this earth and you are given certain blessings (both physical and spiritual). But, you must not consider those blessings as your own to be used on selfish things. Instead, you must consider how you can use them in the way(s) that most pleases God and accomplishes His purposes – because He is the true owner of them and because He will judge you one Day for how you have managed His possessions while you were entrusted with them!

What Kind Of Steward Are You?

You are a steward. There is no denying that fact. In fact, everyone (whether he/she is a Christian or not) is a steward. Nothing anybody has on this earth truly belongs to himself/herself. God is the one who is the source of every blessing of life. Nobody would even have life (physical life or spiritual life) without God. But, certainly those who are Christians are stewards in an even greater sense. Therefore, the

question is not whether you are a steward or not. The question is: “What kind of steward are you?”

Either faithful or unfaithful

To understand the answer to this question, let’s go back to Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. This parable teaches you some vitally important lessons to help you understand what kind of steward you are.

First, notice that in Jesus’ parable of the talents, each of the three men were entrusted with an amount the master knew they could manage and were judged accordingly. For instance, the master did not give every man five talents (note that a “talent” was a particular weight of gold or silver). Instead, one man was given five talents, one man was given two talents, and another man was only given one talent. These talents were given, according to Matthew 25:15, “to each according to his own ability.” Similarly, God only entrusts to your care what you are capable of handling. He does not give you more than you can bear – and then punish you for failing to bear it! Consider 1 Corinthians 10:13 as proof. The passage should help you see that God knows what you are capable of bearing and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Second, also notice (from Jesus’ parable of the talents) that the master judged each of his three stewards on the basis of what each one had done. They were *not* judged on the basis of what the others had done. For instance, the one talent man was not condemned for his actions because he did not gain five talents or two talents (as the others had done). Instead, he was condemned because he did not properly manage the one talent he was entrusted with. Similarly, God will judge you based on what you do with what you are entrusted with. God is a righteous and fair Judge who will not hold you to a standard which you are incapable of living by. Instead, the God who knows your abilities will judge you according to what you do (see Romans 2:5-11).

Third, observe that there were only two categories of stewards in Jesus' parable (in Matthew 25:14-30). Both the five and two talent men were declared to be "good and faithful" servants, as they were faithful over what had been entrusted to their care (Matthew 25:21, 23). Both of these were rewarded as a result. However, the one talent man was declared to be a "wicked and lazy servant," as he was unfaithful as a manager over what had been entrusted to his care. This man was punished as a result of his unfaithfulness. Therefore, as this parable depicts the Judgment that you will (one Day) be subject to, you must observe the fact that you will either be found to have been a faithful or an unfaithful steward of what God had entrusted to your care. 1 Corinthians 4:2 simply states, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

Fourth, you learn from this parable what it means to be a faithful steward. Both the five and two talent men used their abilities and opportunities to accomplish the master's purposes with what had been entrusted to their care. Similarly, if you want to be found to have been a faithful steward, you must use your abilities and opportunities to accomplish God's purposes with what is entrusted to your care.

Fifth, you learn from this parable what it means to be an unfaithful steward. Notice carefully that the one talent man did not lose what was entrusted to his care. Instead, the man simply hid the talent in the ground and returned that single talent to the master when he returned. The man who was given a single talent did not use his abilities and opportunities to accomplish the master's purposes for that single talent. This was enough for him to be considered a "wicked and lazy servant." Similarly, God will find you to be a wicked and lazy (unfaithful) servant/steward if you do not accomplish His purposes with what He has entrusted to your care.

Now, having established that God will either find you to be a faithful or unfaithful steward, please consider all of the many things God has entrusted to your care during your life. Realize that He will judge whether or not you have used these things to accomplish His purposes during your lifetime. So, I challenge you to make a list of everything you have that makes up your life on this earth. Evaluate each

one to see whether you are being a faithful or unfaithful steward of it. Now, we will begin evaluating some specific things in order to see how you are a steward of each one of these and to help you evaluate whether you are being a faithful or an unfaithful steward of each.

You are a steward of your time

Time is one of the most precious resources that has been entrusted to your care – because there is such a limited quantity available. God knows that you only have a limited amount of time to live on this earth and that you have many, many demands on your time. Therefore, the way in which you choose to spend your time is significant. For instance, Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

As Paul is describing a transformed life that is devoted to the service of God in Ephesians 5, it is certainly noteworthy that he is concerned about your time. God wants you to "redeem" your time. To redeem your time is to buy it up, to make the most of it. Therefore, God wants you to take the time that you have in your day and give it to Him, to be used in His service (to His honor and glory).

If you are a faithful steward of your time, you will be doing exactly that. After all, that is exactly what Jesus did. In John 9:4, Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." Jesus recognized that He only had a very short period of time to live on this earth and accomplish all the things He needed to accomplish in order to glorify His Father. Therefore, Jesus was diligent to put His time to the best use possible.

Today, there are many things God wants you to be doing with your time – and every decision you make about your time is either a decision that will help you accomplish God's purposes or a decision that will not help you accomplish God's purposes. For instance, there are a number of things that you can do with your time that will directly help you accomplish God's purposes. You should pray. You should teach the gospel to others. You should try to do good to as many people as you have opportunity

to help. You should encourage others. You should study God's word. You should be fulfilling your role in your family (for instance, as a father, this may include working a secular job to provide for your family's needs; as a mother, this may include making sure the chores around the house are done). And, there is even some time you will need to spend to refresh yourself so that you can be even more effective in your work in the future.

Certainly, there are many things you can accomplish for God every minute of your life on this earth. Therefore, you need to be evaluating how you are spending these precious moments God has entrusted to your care. Consider whether there is a better use of your time. Consider whether you are wasting the time you will never be able to get back. You will be judged for whether or not you have been a good steward of your time.

You are a steward of your wealth

Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). Certainly, whatever wealth (including your money and your possessions) you have is a gift from God to you while you live on this earth. Some have been blessed with a great amount of earthly money and possessions, while others have only been given what is necessary to sustain their physical lives on earth. However, regardless of the amount of wealth you have been blessed with, you need to be using it to accomplish God's purposes.

Consider three examples of how individuals have used their wealth to accomplish God's purposes (two positive and one negative). First, consider the negative example of the man who is described as a rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. In this passage, Jesus teaches a parable about a man who prospered greatly. He considered within himself, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" Then, he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" However, Jesus says that his soul was required of him that very night (he died). This man in Jesus' story was only focused on using his wealth to accomplish his own purposes. He was not concerned in any way about accomplishing

God's purposes with what he had prospered. Then, when he died, all that he had accumulated would simply be left to someone else. Clearly, this man was not a good steward of his wealth.

A second example comes from Mark 12:41-44. In this passage, Jesus was observing how people put money into the temple treasury. As He watched He took note of how many people who were rich were giving out of their abundance. However, He took particular note of one poor widow who gave two mites (a very small amount). Then, Jesus said that this one poor widow had put more into the treasury than all of the others. Obviously, she had not done so monetarily. Instead, it was because she had truly given to the Lord what she had rather than just giving Him something from an abundance (as the others had done). Clearly, this woman who did not possess great earthly wealth still used what she had to serve God and demonstrate good stewardship.

A third example can be seen in the lives of many of the early Christians. Part of the work of these early Christians was to provide financial assistance to their needy Christian brothers and sisters. Examples of this can be seen in Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 11, Romans 15, 1 Corinthians 16, and 2 Corinthians 8-9. Particularly, I want to draw your attention to the example of Acts 4:32-37. This passage says that none of those who believed said that "any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." Then, it goes on to state that there was no one among them who lacked; "for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." The passage even specifically identifies the work of Barnabas in this respect. Particularly notice, though, the point that these Christians did not consider their possessions as their own. Therefore, because they did not consider them as their own, whenever God had a use for them, they gladly sold them and helped those who were in need. This is good stewardship!

While there are many things that you can choose to spend your money on and many things you can choose to do with your possessions, you need to realize that your wealth is not yours! You should, therefore, be seeking to accomplish God's purposes

with those things He has entrusted to your care. You can give of your money to support the work of the local church. You can give money to someone who is in need. You can use your house to teach the lost and encourage brethren. You can use your vehicle to help transport people to church services or take them to the doctor.

The bottom line is that you need to consider every way you are choosing to use the wealth that you have been given (whatever amount of wealth that may be). You will be judged for how you have used the physical wealth that has been entrusted to your care. Are you putting all of it to work to accomplish the purposes of God?

You are a steward of your body

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, Paul describes your body as a “tent” (a tabernacle). That is, it is a temporary structure that has been given to house your soul. But, a time will come when your physical “tent” will be put off and your soul will be clothed with a permanent “building” from God. His point is to compare the temporary with the everlasting. But, while you need to be focused on the everlasting, you also must be mindful of how you are treating the temporary.

While your physical body is only a temporary housing for your soul, it is identified as being the temple of God. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 again. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

As a Christian, you have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And, as a Christian, the Scriptures teach that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now, He does not do so in some miraculous way that enables you to perform special gifts. Instead, as the word which the Spirit revealed dwells in you, the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Therefore, since God dwells in you in this way, your body is the temple of the living God and you must treat your body according to His purposes.

First, this includes refusing to use your body to accomplish the purposes of the devil. For instance,

the Christian must crucify the fleshly desires that produce such sinful actions in his body such as: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like (Galatians 5:19-21). Romans 6:12-13 instructs that you “do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin.”

Second, this includes using your body to accomplish the purposes of God. Whenever the Spirit of God works in you through God’s word, your life will produce the “fruits” of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). In fact, the Christian should be producing every kind of spiritual fruit that God’s word is capable of producing in his life (see Luke 8:15). Romans 6:13 says that you must present yourself to God “as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Third, as you consider the reality that your body is to be dedicated to accomplishing God’s purposes, this also has serious implications for how you treat your body. You should be considering whether you are doing anything that knowingly harms your physical body. Common things like smoking cigarettes, other forms of tobacco, the consumption of alcohol, drugs, and overeating are well-known to harm your body. These things often result in a decrease in both the length and quality of your life. Therefore, such things hinder your service to God. Think about it. If a person insists on smoking and decreases his life by five years, he has (effectively) robbed God of five years that could have been used in God’s service. On the other hand, if an individual carefully makes decisions that promote good health, he will be able to use that health to accomplish God’s purposes.

Whatever the degree of health you currently have is, you can determine to use it in God’s service to accomplish His purposes. You will be judged concerning how you have used whatever health you currently have (whether that is good health, poor health, or something in between). Therefore, you

need to be considering the choices you are making about your physical body.

You are a steward of your relationships

You likely have a number of relationships that are involved in your life on this earth. You may have a spouse, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great nieces, great nephews, cousins, etc. In addition to these family relationships, you likely have friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances, etc. And, as a Christian, you even have Christian brothers and sisters. You likely have these kinds of relationships – and may interact with people of these sorts of relationships on a daily basis. But, do you use these relationships to accomplish God’s purposes? Are you being a faithful or an unfaithful steward of your relationships?

Your opportunities and responsibilities toward each one will certainly depend on the type of relationship it is. For instance, a husband has the responsibility to love his wife as his own body, to treat her as the weaker vessel, and to dwell with her in an understanding way (see Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:7). A wife has the responsibility to respect and be submissive to her husband (see Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-6). Fathers and mothers have responsibilities toward their children. Children have responsibilities toward their parents and grandparents. Therefore, part of your stewardship involves fulfilling the specific roles you have been given by God relative to those relationships.

But, even in addition to those fundamental responsibilities in specific relationships, you need to consider whether you are using your relationships to accomplish other purposes of God. For instance, are you using your relationships to teach other people the gospel of Jesus Christ? A good example of this is Andrew (Simon Peter’s brother). John 1:41 says that after Andrew had heard John (the Baptist) speak and followed Jesus, he “first found his own brother” and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” Then, John 1:42 says that he “brought him to Jesus.” You can be like this man – or like the woman in John 4 who found Jesus and went back to her city and told them about Jesus – and bring those you have relationships with to Jesus Christ!

However, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is only one way you can use your relationships to accomplish God’s purposes. You can encourage them. You can serve them. You can help them. You can visit them. You can bear their burdens. Whatever your relationship are, you need to be evaluating whether or not you are using them to accomplish God’s purposes. You will be judged for how you are using these relationships you have been blessed with. Make sure that you are not using them to fulfill selfish purposes.

You are a steward of God’s grace

As a Christian, you have gained access through Jesus Christ into the marvelous grace of God (Romans 5:2). This grace that God has given you the opportunity to partake of should mean a great deal to you and is the source of the true joy and peace you can have as a Christian. However, how are you using the spiritual blessings God has given you access to by His rich grace?

1 Peter 4:10 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” What are you doing with your opportunity to be a Christian and be forgiven of your sins? Are you still living your life for sin? Are you failing to be a light to those who are in darkness? Are you failing to point others to Jesus Christ? Are you failing to put off the old man and put on the new man?

The apostle Paul recognized the wonderful opportunity he had been given by the grace of God and determined that he was going to make the best use of that opportunity. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 says, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Similarly, he considered himself as a servant of Christ and a steward of “the mysteries of God” (the gospel, 1 Corinthians 4:1). Therefore, Paul was determined to make the most of his opportunity to be a Christian and be forgiven of his sin by devoting his life entirely to serving God (compare with Galatians 2:20).

In the same way, Paul (as an ambassador for Jesus Christ) would plead that others would be “reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). He said, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). He wants you to recognize that God’s grace is too great a thing to waste. Instead, you need to be truly thankful for God’s grace and devote yourself entirely to the service of God.

Are you using God’s grace to transform your life? Are you using God’s grace to tell others about the salvation that is in Jesus Christ? Are you using God’s grace to serve other people? Are you using God’s grace to encourage others to serve God? You will be judged as to whether you have been a good steward of the manifold grace of God or whether God has shown His grace to you in vain. Consider how you are using His undeserved favor (grace).

You are a steward of all things

Continue thinking about everything that makes up your life on this earth. Consider your job. Consider your abilities. Consider your opportunities. Consider your knowledge/wisdom. Consider your experiences. Consider everything. Then, evaluate whether or not you are using these things to accomplish God’s purposes. God has given you all of these things to use them to His honor and glory. Are you misusing them for your own pleasures? Or, are you devoting them to be used in God’s service to accomplish His purposes? You will be judged for how you have labored as a steward.

In all of this, you should be encouraged to realize that God can use you to accomplish His wonderful purposes – if you will give yourself entirely to Him. While we all have different degrees of wealth, different demands on our time, different degrees of health, different relationships, etc., He can use us all as stewards in His service to accomplish His purposes!

Conclusion

Will you embrace your role as a steward?
Will you devote everything you have been entrusted

with to God’s service in order that you might accomplish His purposes? Or, will you misuse and abuse all that God has entrusted to you in the way Jesus condemns in Luke 16:1-13? Determine today that you will not waste your life and all that it consists of. Determine to be a faithful steward by giving your life entirely to God!

Study Questions

1. Fundamentals Of Stewardship

What is stewardship?

What do you learn about stewardship from Matthew 25:14-30?

Are you a steward? Explain.

2. What Kind Of Steward Are You?

List some lessons from Matthew 25:14-30 to help determine what kind of steward you are.

What kind of steward are you of your time?

What kind of steward are you of your wealth?

What kind of steward are you of your body?

What kind of steward are you of your relationships?

What kind of steward are you of God's grace?

What kind of steward are you of all things?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian's Life Is A Transformed Life

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christ really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian's life is a transformed life.

Why Transformation Is Necessary

Throughout this lesson, we will be discussing some general principles as well as some specific areas in which the Christian's life must be transformed. As we do, there will certainly be many areas in which the Christian will be sacrificing his own pleasures in order to please God. But, why should the Christian sacrifice himself to God in this way? Why should he give himself to be transformed into what God wants him to be?

What it means to be transformed

To begin answering these questions about why the Christian should give himself to be transformed in this way, we need to first understand what it means to be transformed.

To "transform" is to change what a thing is into something different. Transformations happen because something has been repurposed. For instance, a building could be transformed from an office space to a restaurant as a result of a new owner taking charge of the structure. All of its furnishings would be changed. The proper appliances would be added. Décor would be changed. While it would still be the same structure, it would not look or function the same as the original structure. It would be transformed because it would be repurposed. Those who were familiar with the original structure may still be able to tell that it is the same structure; but, it will be completely clear that the building has been repurposed.

Similarly, those who are Christians have been "repurposed." The Christian has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:19-20). Therefore, the Christian's body has went from a temple of Satan (in which the Christian had served and glorified Satan through living to please himself and engaging in sin) to being the temple of God (in which the Christian is now serving and glorifying God by living to please Him). Because of this repurposing and change in ownership, the Christian will undergo numerous changes in order to serve his new purpose. While it is still the same body and the same person, he may not look and does not function the same as the original. Those who were familiar with him prior to this transformation may still see some elements of his original personality and be able to tell he is the same person; but, it will be completely clear that he has been repurposed!

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 summarizes this transformation in this way: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Transformation is necessary because of sin

The transformation of the one who becomes a Christian is necessary because of sin. While we live in our sins, we live in a condition that is separated from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 demonstrates that it is our sins that separates (builds barriers between) us and God. This is a condition of being spiritually dead (separated from the God who gives life). Thus, Romans 6:23 declares that the “wages of sin is death.” This is precisely what we deserve.

Then, those who die in this condition of being separated from God in sin will be sentenced to eternal spiritual death in Hell fire. Revelation 21:8 refers to this as the “second death.” It says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

The Scriptures are clear that this is the result of every sin a person commits (every time he/she violates the will of God). Passages such as Romans 1:18-32 clearly demonstrate this to be true. After listing numerous sins, Paul said that those who practice such things (as well as everyone who approves of the same) are “deserving of death.” Furthermore, in Galatians 5:19-21, Paul identifies certain sinful works of the flesh and says that “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Therefore, this transformation was needed in your life because you were the one who was dead in your sins. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Because of this sin, God commanded that you repent and be “converted” in order to have your sins removed. Acts 3:19 says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of

the Lord.” In fact, the Scriptures identify all of the steps of conversion as: Hear God’s word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Because of the essential nature of every one of these “steps” (as indicated by the verses listed), these are all necessary to be converted to God.

To be “converted” is to turn. So, if you are walking in one direction and turn to walk in the opposite direction, you “convert” the direction you are walking. Spiritually, you had been living your life in sin (for the ways of the world). However, in order to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sin you were required to change that direction and live for the Lord. Repentance is central to this turning. Repentance is the determination in your mind to stop living for sin and live for the ways of God. According to Acts 3:19, both are necessary in order to have sins forgiven!

Transformation is necessary because the Christian’s life is not his own

As mentioned previously, the Christian’s life is no longer his own. 1 Peter 1:18-19 discusses the price the Christian has been purchased at: “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

In order for you to have the opportunity to be forgiven of your sins and live eternally in Heaven, Jesus Christ had to leave Heaven, come to earth, suffer, and die. Romans 5:6-11 helps you understand this purchase price: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Now that you have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ (ransomed from the consequences of your sins) you have the responsibility to give your life entirely to God and use your life to glorify God in all things. The apostle Paul recognized this when He said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 demonstrates that when you truly understand the love that Christ has shown toward you in giving His life on the cross so that you can be saved from the consequences of your sins and live eternally in Heaven, you will devote yourself entirely to Him. In fact, the language that is used is that the love of Christ will compel (control) you. The picture of the Greek word for “compel” is one of being shut up in a narrow, walled road, with the walls making the road so narrow that they force you to walk in one single direction. In the same way, when you understand the sacrifice that Jesus has made for you, His love will compel you to live your life entirely for Him! Therefore, you no longer live for yourself, “but for Him who died” for you and “rose again.”

Transformation is necessary because the Christian is a new creature

As we think about transformation, let’s also understand that transformation is necessary because the Christian is a new creature. And, as we consider this, let’s learn a lesson from two small creatures that are very different from one another: The chameleon and the caterpillar. The chameleon is well-known for blending in with its surroundings. The caterpillar, on the other hand, is also well-known. But, it is well-known for its transformation into a beautiful butterfly. The chameleon only changes in order to fit in to its surroundings. However, the caterpillar completely transforms. After its transformation, it functions as a new creature – and does not function as a caterpillar any more.

Which one of these two creatures best describes your life? Do you try to just blend in with your surroundings – even if that means participating in or approving of sin? Or, are you transformed into a new creature?

Certainly, the Bible describes that the Christian has become a new creature in Christ Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” After being buried with Christ in baptism, you are raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). As a new creature in Jesus Christ, the Christian must not be living in the same sinful ways he had lived prior to becoming a Christian (just like the butterfly lives a new life as a butterfly rather than continuing to live like a caterpillar)!

The Scriptures also describe this transformation as a new birth. In John 3:3-6, Jesus taught a man, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The man (Nicodemus) responded by asking Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” However, Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Obviously, Jesus was not talking about a physical rebirth. Instead, Jesus was speaking concerning a spiritual birth. Now, consider a couple of essential lessons concerning this new birth. First, a new birth is required. The way you had been living was not pleasing to God. Your life was being lived for sin and was contrary to the will of God. Therefore, you needed a new life in order to please God. Second, realize that this new birth is accomplished by being born of water and the Spirit. The water involved in this birth refers to the waters of baptism (see Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38). Being born of the Spirit is accomplished by believing and obeying the word that the Holy Spirit has revealed (contained in the New Testament). So, when you are obedient to God’s word and are baptized into Jesus Christ, you are born again!

Now, having been born of the Spirit, you must live your life in a transformed way – one that continues to be conducted according to the teachings of God’s word (the Bible). The apostle Paul teaches that if you will dedicate your life to walking according to the revelation of God’s Holy Spirit (through the teachings of the Bible) you will not be living according to the desires of your flesh (Galatians 5:16-25). You will do this because you have been transformed into a new creature in Christ Jesus!

Transformation is necessary because the Christian is not of this world

Jesus Christ lived in a way that was as different from the world as light is from darkness. John 3:18-21 makes reference to this when it says that “the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Because of this difference, Jesus said that the world hated Him (John 15:18).

Similarly, God calls those who become Christians out of the world. Those who are Christians follow in the steps of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19).

So, those who are Christians live *in* the world (physically existing on this earth); however, they are not *of* this world. They do not value the same things. They do not have the same goals. They do not speak in the same ways. They do not dress in the same immodest ways. They do not participate in the same ungodly recreation/entertainment. They do not make the same sinful choices. They are truly different from the world.

In fact, as was true about Jesus, those who are Christians are also expected to be as different from the world as light is different from darkness. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that

they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

This difference in the Christian’s life can be clearly seen by everyone who is around him. It is as noticeable as a city that is set up on a hill or a light that is shining in the midst of darkness. This difference will be noticeable to everyone; but particularly to those who knew the individual prior to his transformation. Consider 1 Peter 4:3-4: “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”

Those people who knew you prior to your transformation will think that your new ways are strange. They won’t understand your transformation. They are still focused on living their lives for the sinful ways of this world. Many times, these ungodly people will even speak evil and mistreat you because of your change. At one time, you were “one of the guys” and you wanted to fit in with them and enjoyed participating in those sinful things. However, now that you have transformed (and they haven’t), you look strange to them! Certainly, the Christian must never be able to fit in with the same crowd that engages in sinful things in the same way after becoming a Christian as he did before he became a Christian!

Transformation is necessary because the Christian’s life is a life of holiness

God is entirely holy. 1 John 1:5 says that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” Verse 6 goes on to explain that we cannot have fellowship with this God of light while we walk in the ways of sin (darkness). Yes, even the spiritual beings residing in Heaven are pictured as continually proclaiming the holiness of God. Revelation 4:6-8 says, “Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living

How This Transformation Occurs

creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’”

To be holy is to be “set apart.” With regard to God, He is entirely set apart from everything that is evil or sinful. Nothing that is evil is part of His nature. Now, consider what is said in 1 Peter 1:13-16. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

Consider a number of applications from this passage. First, God’s holiness requires that those who are His people must also be holy. The reason for this was observed in 1 John 1:5-6 (because those who are in fellowship with sin/darkness cannot be in fellowship with God). Second, the holiness of God is the standard for your holiness. You are not free to define holiness in whatever way you desire. Instead, the passage says, “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy....” Third, you must be obedient to God as His child and not conform yourself to the same sinful lusts you had prior to becoming a Christian. That is, you must not live according to those desires – because you have been transformed. Fourth, this holiness is required in “all your conduct.” So, this is not just a transformation in certain areas you choose to transform yourself in. Instead, this is a total transformation of all your ways in order to bring your life into full harmony with the holiness of God!

This kind of transformation to holiness is what God expects out of everyone who becomes a Christian. Ephesians 1:3-4, for instance, teaches that God has blessed the Christian with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. It also demonstrates that God has chosen (before He even created the world) that those who would be His people should “be holy and without blame.” Therefore, He calls those who are His people “saints” (i.e. Ephesians 1:1). To be a “saint” is to be a most holy thing. It is simply impossible, then, to be a “saint” and live your life according to the sinful ways of the world.

The one who desires to please God must be transformed. An individual simply cannot please God and refuse to be transformed into who God wants him to be. Therefore, it is essential for you to understand how this transformation occurs. For the Christian, this section should describe what you have done. If, however, you find that you have not done what we are about to study, then you should quickly do whatever you have failed to do previously.

God has made this transformation possible

I have already quoted from the first part of Romans 6:23. We have seen that the “wages of sin is death.” Now, let’s consider the rest of the verse: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Many passages in Scripture teach that we simply could not be saved from the consequences of our sins without the grace and mercy of God.

For instance, after Ephesians 2:1-3 (quoted earlier) demonstrated the hopeless condition of living in your sins, verses 4 and 5 say, “but God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”! Later, the passage describes how we once had “no hope” and were “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Then, verse 13 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

As we saw from Romans 5:6-11, Jesus’ sacrifice is the only thing that could save us from experiencing the consequences of our sins (i.e. spiritual death and the wrath of God). Therefore, “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). Salvation from sin is available for everyone to receive. However, God has not forced you to be transformed. He has simply given you the opportunity – and invites you to receive the gift of salvation He has made available to you if you will be transformed. But, how are you transformed?

Through the instructions of the Scriptures

What is powerful enough so as to bring about the kind of transformation God desires in your life and result in the eternal salvation of your soul? Only the word of God! Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

God’s word is powerful enough to transform any life (even the most wicked) into a life that is pleasing to Him. Remember, this is the same word of God that was powerful enough to say, “Let there be light” when there was none – and it came into existence (Genesis 1:3). This is the same word of God that that was able to rebuke the wind and the sea whenever Jesus said, “Peace, be still” – and “the wind ceased and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39).

Look carefully at 2 Timothy 3:16-17. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Every word that comes from God works to make you into who God wants you to be. In fact, if you will give yourself to listen to, believe in, and obey the words of God, you will be made perfect/complete and be fully equipped to accomplish every good work God wants from your life.

As we have already seen, God requires you to be born again of the water and the Spirit. Therefore, if you want to give your life over to God, you must do everything God says you must do in order to be saved. God has said that you must: Hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). Then, after becoming a Christian, God expects that you continue to allow His word to transform you by producing the fruit of your repentance (Acts 26:20) and by being faithfully obedient to God until death (Revelation 2:10).

Through the renewal of your mind

As you consider all of the instructions God has given you, there is a renewal of your mind that is at the heart of it all. In fact, unless you are transformed in your mind, you will never be pleasing to God.

Romans 8:5-8 describes this transformation. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

The individual whose mind is set/focused on the physical things of this life is incapable of pleasing God. His mind is “enmity against God” (hostile toward God). He will never conduct his life in harmony with the instructions of God – because he is focused on the physical things of life. In contrast, the one who is spiritually minded will live in a way that is pleasing to God because he is focused on the things of God. Therefore, this man will dedicate himself to live according to whatever things the Spirit has revealed to be truth (as revealed in the pages of the Bible)! While the carnally minded man is focused on pleasing himself, the spiritually minded man is focused on pleasing God (even when it means denying himself of his own pleasures).

The spiritually minded man will see himself as being clay in the hands of God. He will not rebel against the instructions of God. He will not demand that the Potter make him into some other kind of “vessel.” Instead, he will humbly submit to the will of the Potter and be willing to be used in whatever way it seems good to the Potter!

What This Transformation Should Look Like

Having established the need to be transformed and how this transformation happens,

let's make application of these principles and focus on what this transformation should look like in your life. Generally, this transformation involves going from a life that was focused on pleasing yourself and living for the sinful things of this world to living a life that is focused on pleasing God. Let's consider some specific passages to observe what this transformation should look like in your life – as well as consider a couple “case studies” of transformation.

Romans 6

Romans 6 is a chapter that speaks about what people ought to do with the opportunity to be transformed. In this passage, the apostle Paul addresses two anticipated questions. The first question is: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1). This question stems from his statement about grace in 5:20-21, saying that “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” Well, if God's grace abounds where sin abounds, shouldn't we just keep on living in sin so that God's grace can just abound even more?

However, Paul answers this objection with an absolute “no.” “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (6:2). Paul reminds them that they had put their “old selves” to death, been buried with Christ in baptism, and had been risen to walk in newness of life (6:3-4). Since their “old selves” had been crucified with Jesus, they should “no longer be slaves of sin” (6:6). Just as Christ died only once and lives to God, they were expected to consider themselves dead to sin and “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:8-11). Therefore, they were not to allow sin to reign (have rule over) their earthly bodies any longer so that they would obey it in its lusts (6:12). Instead, they were to present the members of their bodies as instruments (tools) for accomplishing the righteousness of God (6:13).

Then, verse 15 records the second anticipated question: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” This question stems from what he said in verse 14, stating that we are not under law but under grace. Well, if we are under the grace of God, can't we just keep on sinning?

Once again, Paul's answer is an unequivocal “no.” He begins to remind the Roman Christians that they are slaves of whoever they give themselves to obey. Either they are slaves of sin (which leads to spiritual death) or they are slaves of obedience (which leads to righteousness) (6:16). Thankfully, Paul says, they had obeyed the doctrine that had been delivered to them and had been set free from sin, becoming slaves of righteousness (6:17-19). Then, he closes his response to this question by reminding them of the dangers of sin – that sin does result in spiritual death (6:20-23).

Ephesians 4-6

In the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians, the focus has been on establishing the truths about the eternal plan of salvation God had prepared through Jesus Christ. Now, Paul is revealing that those who will come to Jesus Christ can be partakers of all the spiritual blessings that have been provided through Him. Then, in the final three chapters (chapters 4-6), Paul explains that this great opportunity also comes with responsibilities to live for the Lord.

Ephesians 4:1 marks this transition. “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” Based on all of wonderful truths about the opportunity to be saved through Jesus Christ, Paul pleads with the Ephesians to live their lives in a way that is “worthy” of the gospel's calling. Then, he describes various points about what this will look like in the life of a Christian.

Namely (for the purposes of this lesson), I want to draw your attention to the section that begins in 4:17. Paul says that those Christians should no longer walk (live) “as the rest of the Gentiles walk” (4:17). They live in their sins. However, those who were Christians had learned the way of Jesus Christ and were taught according to His truth. Paul instructed, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24).

After instructing them to be transformed in this way, Paul demonstrates what this looks like, beginning in 4:25. He gives examples of transforming such as: Putting away lying and speaking truth, putting away the practice of stealing to work with your own hands and give to those who have need, putting away corrupt speech to speak that which is edifying and impart grace, etc. (4:25-32).

He continues to demonstrate this transformation in chapter 5. He says that fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting are not to even to be named among the saints (God's holy people). He continues to say that they had once been "darkness" but are now "light in the Lord" and were to walk "as children of light...finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (5:8-10). In fact, they were to be transformed to such a degree that they were to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Instead, they were to be working to expose those works of darkness (5:11). He also tells them that they were not to live as fools, but as wise and understand what the will of the Lord is (5:15-21).

As Paul continues through chapters 5 and 6, he even demonstrates that this transformation should impact their relationships, specifically identifying the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters (5:22-6:9). Even these relationships are to be controlled by the will of God.

Finally, this transformation will be worthless if the Christian does not take the proper degree of protection against the assaults of the devil. So, in 6:10-18, Paul identifies the armor that Christians must put on in their lives in order to be victorious against the attacks of Satan. This armor is identified as being: Truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, faith, the word of God, along with prayer and supplication.

Colossians 3

Colossians chapter 3, much like Ephesians 4-6, speaks very specifically about the transformation that is expected to take place in everyone who becomes a Christian. The first four verses are key to the entire chapter. "If then you were raised with

Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

"If then you were raised with Christ..." This would include every Christian! As we saw from Romans 6:3-4, everyone who has ever become a Christian has been required to die to sin, be buried with Christ in baptism, and be raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. So, when Paul instructs these individuals to "seek those things which are above" and set their minds on the things above rather than the things on the earth, it applies to every Christian! Then, also appreciate the fact that the transformation in their minds (from focusing on earthly things to focusing on heavenly things) is key to every one of the other points of transformation he will describe through this chapter.

First, he begins by identifying some things that must be put to death in the life of the Christian (3:5-11). These things are to have no part in the lives of God's holy people. They are identified as: Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying. They had previously lived according to these ways. However, they were now expected to have put off the "old man with his deeds" and "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (3:9-10).

Then, Paul identifies specific things which the Christian must "put on" in his life. They are identified as: Tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, love, the peace of God, the word of Christ, and the giving of thanks. Then, like we saw in Ephesians 4-6, this transformation also touches the Christian's relationships (as Paul identifies the same relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and masters).

Romans 12

A final passage for us to consider that details the Christian's transformation is in Romans 12. As

Paul has been teaching the Romans about the salvation that is available to everyone in Jesus Christ, he comes into chapter 12 and begins to give specific instructions through the remainder of the book about what kinds of things they should be doing as Christians. Specifically, I just want us to focus on 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Notice first that Paul’s plea is based on the “mercies of God.” So, since God has shown great mercy to you, you should devote yourself to accomplishing His will. Just imagine if you had owed a tremendous amount of debt that you could not repay and you were about to suffer serious consequences for failing to pay, then someone showed such mercy on you that you were entirely released from that debt. Wouldn’t you devote yourself to the one who showed mercy on you? Wouldn’t you consider yourself forever indebted to him and be grateful for the sacrifice that was made on your behalf? The same should be true about the mercy God has showed to you.

Second, consider that the mercy of God should lead you to give yourself to be used entirely in the service of God, that you would be a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God. Notice that this is not a partial commitment of yourself in the service of God. Instead, this is an entire devotion of your body, your spirit, your physical resources, etc. to be used to serve and glorify God!

Finally, this complete devotion of yourself to God means that you will not be “conformed to this world.” Instead, you will be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” So, you will not be “cut from the same mold” (conformed) as the world. You won’t be living your life in the same wicked and sinful ways. Instead, your mind has been transformed to seek the perfect will of God and live your life accordingly!

Case study: Paul

Not only does the Bible provide numerous passages to describe this transformation, but it also gives many “case studies.” One example is found in the apostle Paul. When we are first introduced to Paul in the Scriptures (in Acts 7-9, then known as Saul), he is involved in the stoning of Stephen (a preacher of the gospel) and severely persecuting early Christians. In fact, Paul detailed some of his work in persecuting Christians as putting some into prison, compelling them to blaspheme the Lord, and even voting for their executions (see Acts 26:9-11). However, you can read Acts 9, 22, and 26 about this man’s conversion. Then, the Scriptures detail his transformation – how he went from a persecutor to a Christian, an apostle, and preacher who would be persecuted himself!

Case study: The Corinthians

The ancient city of Corinth was a notoriously sinful place. However, even in this very wicked place, the gospel of Jesus Christ demonstrated its power to transform. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” They *were* these ways. But, they had been obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Acts 18:1-8). Therefore, they were washed, sanctified, and justified of their sins and were now living for God!

Conclusion

As a Christian, God expects for your life to be a transformed life! He expects you to be living a different kind of life than you were living prior to becoming a Christian. That is, He expects you to live

holy in all your conduct and give your life entirely over to the control of Jesus Christ and the gospel!

How has God made this transformation possible? And, why could you not make this transformation happen by yourself?

Study Questions

1. Why Transformation Is Necessary

What does it mean to be “transformed”?

How does sin makes transformation necessary?

How does the fact that the Christian’s life is not his own make transformation necessary?

How does the fact that the Christian is a new creature make transformation necessary?

How does the fact that the Christian is not *of* this world make transformation necessary?

How does the fact that the Christian’s life is a life of holiness make transformation necessary?

2. How This Transformation Occurs

What role do the Scriptures have in this transformation?

What role does the renewing of your mind have in this transformation?

3. What This Transformation Should Look Like

Describe what this transformation looks like according to the following passages:

A. Romans 6 –

B. Ephesians 4-6 –

C. Colossians 3 –

D. Romans 12 –

What can you learn about transformation from Paul?

What can you learn about transformation from the Corinthians?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Member Of The Body Of Christ

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a member of the body of Christ, which is the church (see Colossians 1:18).

A Member Of Christ's "Universal" Church

As a Christian, you are a member of Christ's one body (His church). But, what exactly does it mean to be a member of this church for which Jesus Christ died in order to establish? Let's evaluate.

What is Christ's "universal" church?

First, please understand that the term "universal church" appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? The term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one *church* Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many *churches* of Christ (referred to in the local sense). Again, while the term "universal

church" does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word "church" is used in this "universal" sense, it refers to the collection/congregation of the saved. Jesus used the word in this sense in Matthew 16:18: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Notice that the term "church" is singular. Jesus was only establishing one church. He only has one assembly/congregation of the saved – only one church! There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). He does *not* have many separate organizations/collections of people! So, whenever the word "church" is used in this "universal" sense, it refers to Christ's one congregation of saved people (all of the saved who have ever lived). Acts 2:47 also demonstrates that it was those who were being saved who were added to this church.

Now, it is important to understand that Christ's "universal" church does *not* have an earthly organizational structure (it's only organizational structure is that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, see Colossians 1:18). The "universal" church also does not have a collective work whereby all of the churches cooperate with one another and use collective funds to accomplish a central work. Finally, the "universal" church does not assemble together for worship (or any purpose) at any time or place on this earth. These three areas are all functions that relate to the "local" church (as we'll discuss later).

Why be a member of Christ's church

Why is it even important to be a member of this universal church? First, you need to be a member of this church because the church is composed of the saved. Those who are not saved are not part of this church. Therefore, if you are not part of this church, you are not in a saved condition. Those who are part of Christ's church will forever live with the Lord in Heaven; but those who are not part of His church will experience the eternal punishment of Hell (Revelation 20:15).

Second, you need to be a member of this church because there is only one true church. Christ

only promised to build one church (Matthew 16:18) – and only one church was built (Acts 2:41, 47)! Therefore, Paul said that there is only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4). There is no other body that contains those who are saved other than the church of Christ. Acts 4:12 says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” There is salvation in no other church besides in the church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

How you joined Christ’s church

How did you become part of Christ’s church (His collection of the saved)? You did this by becoming a Christian. Notice how individuals were added to the universal church in Acts 2. Specifically notice verses 37-42: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Verse 47 says, “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

This passage comes in the context of Peter and the other apostles preaching the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (after Jesus had ascended to Heaven). Verse 37 records the response of the people to the preaching, asking “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then, after Peter had given them instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins, he continued preaching to them and about 3,000 people were obedient to the instructions. Particularly note, then, that these individuals were added to “the church.” So, it is upon obedience to God’s commandments involved in becoming a Christian that an individual is added to

Christ’s church (i.e. the “universal church) – and counted among the saved!

Therefore, whenever you were obedient to the “steps” God has required you to take to be forgiven of your sins and be saved, you were added to Christ’s one “universal” church (body of the saved). You need to understand, then, what God had commanded you to do in order to become a Christian and be added to His church.

(1) You needed to hear the word of God.

Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Hearing God’s word is a necessary step before you are capable of believing or obeying it. For instance, Acts 18:8 says that the Corinthians first heard God’s word, then they believed and were baptized.

(2) **You needed to believe.** Listen to Jesus’ words in John 8:24: “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is necessary for salvation and is a prerequisite to baptism (see Acts 8:37). However, “faith only” is not sufficient for salvation or entrance into Jesus’ church. James 2:24 plainly says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (see also Matthew 7:21-23).

(3) You needed to repent of your sins.

When Paul was preaching to idolaters in Athens, he said that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Also, repentance was identified as being necessary whenever Peter was preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38. Repentance is a change in mind regarding past sins – and a determination to make the necessary changes to live for the Lord.

(4) You needed to confess Jesus Christ.

Notice the language of Romans 10:9-10: “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” A good example of this confession is seen in Acts 8:37, just prior to the baptism of the man of Ethiopia: “Then Philip said [to the man of Ethiopia], ‘If you believe with all your

heart, you may [be baptized].’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” So, this is not a confession of sin. Rather, it is a confession of the Lord Jesus Christ (see also Matthew 10:32-33).

(5) You needed to be baptized. Specifically, the baptism that God requires of people today is the baptism (immersion) in water for the forgiveness of sins. This is the baptism that the man of Ethiopia was baptized with in Acts 8:38-39: “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” According to the Scriptures, this baptism is necessary to “be saved” (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21), to be forgiven of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and to come into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Specifically, the Bible teaches that it is at this point that an individual is added to Christ’s church. Again, this is what we saw in Acts 2:37-47. The approximately 3,000 who were obedient to the instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins were added to the church. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that we are baptized into one body. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” As we obey the instructions of God’s Holy Spirit (who revealed the things written in the Bible), we comply with the command to be baptized – and enter Jesus’ body (church)! Galatians 3:26-27 demonstrates the same point: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Therefore, baptism (immersion in water) is the specific point at which we are forgiven of our sins and added to Jesus’ church.

Then, you are expected to remain faithful to Jesus throughout your earthly life. Jesus instructed Christians to be “faithful until death” in order to receive the “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). If you fail to remain faithful to God, you will lose your

salvation. Galatians 5:4 records Paul’s comments to the Galatian Christians who had “become estranged from Christ” and “fallen from grace.” John 15:2 makes reference to the unfruitful branch (the fruitless disciple of Christ) being taken away. Verse 6 says that the branch that does not abide in Christ is “cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Therefore, if you fall away from God after becoming a Christian, you must again seek His forgiveness (through repentance, confession, and prayer, see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:9).

If you have not done these things, you are not part of Christ’s church – because you have not been forgiven of your sins and are not counted among His saved people! Not if you have faith (see James 2:14-26). Not if you profess allegiance to Jesus Christ (see Matthew 7:21-23). Not if you have had water sprinkled or poured on your head (see Romans 6:3-4). Not if you have done anything other than what God has commanded! And, not even if you have done what God has commanded for the wrong reasons! For instance, some are baptized after they believed they were saved. Or, some are baptized into the churches of men rather than being baptized into Jesus’ church. However, this is all done for the wrong reasons!

Responsibilities of membership

What does it mean to be part of the universal church that belongs to Jesus Christ? What responsibilities does membership in this church have? Remember that there is no earthly world-wide oversight of the universal church (Christ is the only Head of the universal church). Therefore, your responsibility as part of the universal church is to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 2:10 summarizes this responsibility: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Jesus expects His followers to faithfully endure through all of the trials, temptations, and persecutions of life. He expects His followers to

possess the character that is approved of God (i.e. Colossians 3:12-17). He expects His followers to be laboring for Him (1 Corinthians 15:58). He expects His followers to be living holy lives (1 Peter 1:15-16). He expects His followers to be doers of God's word in all areas of their lives (James 1:22), including obeying His commandments concerning their Christian brothers and sisters.

A Member Of A "Local" Church Of Christ

As a member of Christ's one body (church), you should also be encouraged to join yourself to a "local" church of Christ (one that is dedicated to following the pattern God has revealed for local churches in the pages of the Scriptures). But, what exactly does it mean to be a member of a local church of Christ? Let's evaluate.

What is a "local" church of Christ?

First, please understand that the term "local church" appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? Again, the term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one *church* Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many *churches* of Christ (referred to in the local sense). And, while the term "local church" does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word "church" is used in this "local" sense, it refers to an assembly/congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together in a local geographic area (i.e. Rome, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Colossae, etc.). While there is only one church (in the "universal" sense), the Bible does refer to many different churches (i.e. the church in Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the church in Philippi, etc.). These different churches are simply local churches (not different denominations)!

Furthermore, local churches exist for a purpose – according to the Lord's design! God has provided a blueprint for this local assembly that is given in the New Testament. He has provided a

blueprint regarding the organizational structure, work, and worship of the local church. Unlike the "universal" church, the "local" church does have a God-given earthly organizational structure, a God-given work to accomplish, and a God-authorized assembly for worship.

Why be a member of a local church

I do not read any passage in the Bible that makes *local* church membership necessary for salvation. If it was, you would not be able to be in a saved condition until you joined yourself to a local church. Furthermore, there are a number of times in which individuals become Christians (and members of Christ's universal church); but, there are no local churches of Christ in their communities practicing the things instructed by the New Testament. For instance, what about the man of Ethiopia in Acts 8? Verse 39 says that he went on his way rejoicing after he became a Christian. However, it mentions nothing about this man joining a local church. There may or may not have been a local church in Ethiopia for him to join at that time.

That said, the approved example throughout the New Testament is for individuals who become Christians to join themselves to other Christians in their local geographic areas. There is overwhelming evidence to support joining local churches. Notice that every time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individual Christians joined themselves together in that way! Certainly, there is wisdom involved in God's plan for local churches – and we should not be quick to determine *not* to join a local church! Consider some reasons why you should be a member of a local church.

(1) You will help accomplish God's work in your local community. God's people (the church) is identified as being the pillar and support of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). That is, God's people (the church) hold up the truth of God's word. Therefore, a local church will be responsible for holding up God's word in a local community. The local church in Thessalonica is an excellent example of this (see 1 Thessalonians 1:8). You should attempt to use your talents, abilities, and opportunities to contribute to the work of spreading the gospel and accomplishing all of the God-given work of the local church.

Ephesians 4:11-16 makes it very clear that each member of the body of Christ has something positive to contribute to the overall function of the body. Thus, whenever a local body (church) of Christ has members who are dedicated to doing their parts, the gospel of Christ will be spread, Christians will be strengthened, needs will be met, and glory will be given to God! Furthermore, while we certainly have individual responsibilities, we must not underestimate the good that can be done whenever individuals work together as a team rather than working separately (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)!

(2) You will be assembling with your brethren and worshiping God together. God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). While this can and should be done privately, the approved examples in the Scriptures also show that this is to be done collectively as a local church. In fact, each local church has the obligation to assemble together on the first day of the week. These assemblies of the local church are beneficial to everyone who is involved. Along with the worship that is given to God, there is strength that is to be gained from such worship – as you can know that you are not alone in worshiping God! Furthermore, there are some things that you only read about local churches doing whenever they were together. For instance, the Bible only identifies the Lord’s Supper and the collection as things that are done when the church has come together (see Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

(3) You share in edification. Christians cannot fulfill the instruction to encourage one another daily if they are all alone! Hebrews 3:12-13 warns about the danger of departing from God and about the deceitfulness of sin. So, the passage instructs Christians to offer daily encouragement to one another so that they would not succumb to the daily temptations of life! God has provided a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual Christian – which is the local church! Therefore, as a member of the local church, you will be both encouraging to your brothers and sisters in Christ and you will be receiving encouragement from them. You will be gaining as well as helping to supply the needed strength to overcome the shared obstacles, temptations, and trials of life! Not only

will this come from your interactions with your brethren; but, it will also come through your collective acts of worship and Bible teaching (both publicly and privately)!

(4) You share in accountability. There is accountability in a local church. If there are elders in the church, they help watch over the souls of each member (to make sure that the members are living right). However, all of the members in a congregation must share in the responsibility to watch over each other’s souls! This is implied in James’ instructions in James 5:19-20: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Each member of a local church should be willing to receive correction from their brethren whenever they sin. Generally speaking, there is a love and concern for the spiritual well-being of each member of the congregation! And, there are even times when this love and concern will make it necessary for a local church to withdraw from an erring brother or sister (see 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

How to join a local church

Please understand that when you are obedient to the gospel’s plan of salvation, you are added by God to Christ’s universal church (as we discussed previously). However, this does *not* automatically make you a member of a local church! Still, it is important to become a member of a local church (when possible). Now, please consider how an individual actually becomes a member of a local church.

As we look to the Bible for its answer to this question, we should carefully consider the example of Saul. This is the most direct example of an individual attempting to join a local church that is given in the Scriptures. That said, please recognize that any time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individuals joined themselves together in that way!

After Saul (later known as Paul) had become a Christian, he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26 says, “And when Saul had

come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.” Clearly, the disciples were afraid of this man (having known about his past persecutions of Christians) and were skeptical of permitting him to join the local church in Jerusalem. However, Barnabas (in verse 27) took Paul and brought him to the apostles, declaring how Paul had seen the Lord on the road, how the Lord spoke to Paul, and how Paul had preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Now, consider a couple of lessons from this example – and some conclusions based on them. (1) It is an individual decision for a Christian to join himself/herself to the disciples in a particular area (i.e. to a specific local church). Therefore, an individual who becomes a Christian should seek out a local congregation of Christ’s people to join himself/herself to (if possible). Or, he/she may need to attempt to start a local church. Either way, it is the responsibility of the Christian to seek out a local church to associate with. Then, that Christian must let his/her desire to join the congregation be made known to the congregation.

(2) The members of a local church can refuse to allow an individual to join them. Please consider that each local congregation should be diligent in accepting those who wish to join the congregation; yet, they must also be careful as to who is accepted into the congregation. Once again, notice that the church in Jerusalem did not accept Saul into the congregation until *after* Barnabas took him and demonstrated that Saul really was a Christian! This same point can also be demonstrated from Acts 20:28-31. In this text, Paul warned the Ephesian elders about “savage wolves” who would come in among and harm the flock (the local congregation). Therefore, he told them to “watch.” Also consider how 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 demonstrate that congregations have the responsibility to withdraw (withhold fellowship) from members who have left the Lord. Quite simply, the test of fellowship for anyone to be a member of a local church is summarized in 1 John 1:5-7. This passage helps us to understand that if two people are each in fellowship with God, then they are in fellowship with one another. Therefore, if someone

is in fellowship with God, they should be permitted to join a local church!

Next, before we consider some responsibilities of local church membership, let’s consider how you should choose a local church to be a member of. (1) Choose a church in or near your community, when possible. This is what we saw with Paul whenever he came to Jerusalem and tried to join himself to the disciples there in Jerusalem. Other examples of local churches would demonstrate the same point – the implication is that the Roman Christians were members of churches in Rome, the Corinthian Christians were part of the church in Corinth, the Jerusalem Christians were members of the church in Jerusalem. There is great benefit to be part of the local church that assembles in or near to your community! (2) Only join a church that is doing what is right. Not all churches believe and practice the right things. There are many local churches (even local “churches of Christ”) that are not following the New Testament pattern (2 Timothy 1:13) and do not do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). In this case, God does not want you to be in fellowship with them. Ephesians 5:11 says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” (3) Sometimes there may not be a faithful congregation of the Lord’s people in your community (or a nearby community). In this case, you will want to try to start a local church that practices only New Testament Christianity.

Responsibilities of local church membership

Clearly, there are great blessings associated with being a member of a local church. Being a member of a local church helps each Christian to stay the course of faithful living throughout his/her lifetime! It is designed to make it more difficult for Christians to drift away from faithfully serving God. However, along with the blessings of local church membership, there is also individual responsibility to the local church. After all, when you joined the local church (to partake of the blessings of membership), you also entered into a sort of covenant relationship with the other members of that local church. All of the members of the local church have entered an

agreement to do their parts in the local church. Briefly consider some of the responsibilities of local church membership.

(1) Attend the assemblies. As I have briefly stated already, the local church has the responsibility to assemble together and worship God. For instance, 1 Corinthians 14 makes reference to a time when the whole church in Corinth would come together in one place (verse 23). Also, Acts 20:7 provides an example of the church in Troas assembling together on the first day of the week.

So, as you recognize that the local church is authorized to assemble together to worship God, you need to recognize the value of these assemblies. First, these are opportunities to give God the worship, praise, and glory He deserves. John 4:23-24 says that the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Now, if the Father is said to be “seeking” true worshipers, don’t you want to be dedicated to worshiping God and take advantage of every opportunity you have to do so? In the public worship assemblies of the local church, God has authorized five acts of worship: Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15; Acts 12:5, 12), singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (1 Corinthians 14:15; Colossians 3:16), teaching/learning God’s word (Acts 20:7), partaking of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week to remember Jesus Christ (Acts 20:7), and contributing to the collection on the first day of the week to gather funds for the work God has given the local church to do (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Second, these assemblies are opportunities to encourage your brethren and be encouraged by them. While you should be worshiping God any time you have the opportunity to do so (even outside the assemblies of the local church), there is great encouragement to be found whenever you come together for worship with your brothers and sisters. In fact, this is one of the reasons God desires the local church to assemble. For instance, 1 Corinthians 14:26 says that all things that are done when the church comes together must be done for “edification.” Each one of the five acts of public worship works to build you up in the faith of the gospel of Christ. And, being with your brethren during these times encourages you that you are not alone as you are trying to serve and worship God.

The Scriptures are clear, then, that members of a local church must not forsake these times when the church assembles together. Consider Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” This passage directly forbids the practice of Christians willfully neglecting to assemble with the local church. In addition, the passage states that you must demonstrate your concern for your brothers and sisters, stirring them up to love and good works. Therefore, it is sinful for you to willfully neglect to assemble with the local church you have joined yourself to – and doing so demonstrates a lack of concern and love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

(2) Participate in the assemblies. Attending the assemblies of the local church is just a start. Attending the assemblies is about as basic as the responsibilities of local church membership come. Yet, you can fail to please God even if you are assembling faithfully (i.e. every time the local church comes together). You can do this, for one, by failing to participate in the assemblies and actually engage in true worship.

Each one of the acts of worship God has authorized the local church to engage in requires participation from each member of the congregation. Therefore, you must realize that you are not engaging in true worship just because you are around others who are! In fact, to worship God in spirit and in truth requires that you be fully engaged in the acts of worship and that you are participating in the appropriate activities.

For instance, when the congregation is led in public prayers, you should be focused on the words of the prayers and make that prayer your own. When the congregation takes up the collection, you should contribute what you are able and focus on the many ways God has blessed you. When the congregation partakes of the Lord’s Supper, you should be reflecting on the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and take of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. When the congregation is engaged in the teaching of God’s word, you should be focused on the things

being taught and make the appropriate applications to your own life. And, when the congregation is singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, you should be singing with your brothers and sisters and focused on the words of the songs.

Take a moment to see that this is all true, by specifically considering the instructions concerning the singing. Ephesians 5:19 instructs, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Notice that this is a reciprocal action of singing – in which all of the members are singing to another and to the Lord. They are not sitting by as spectators who listen to a choir or the rest of the congregation. It is not an act of worship that is reserved for the “best” singers. Instead, every member is expected to lift his/her voice to God in song! God expects for you to participate in the activities of worship during the assemblies of the local church.

(3) Submit to the elders and other members. As you interact with the other members of the local church, you must recognize your responsibility to submit to the elders of the congregation and to the other members. To “submit” is to yield your desires to the desires of another. The instructions to submit in these areas imply that there will occasionally be differences of opinion (with regard to areas of Christian liberty).

First, you have the responsibility to submit yourself to the elders of the local church. The elders of the local church have been given the responsibility of overseeing the church, watching out for each member of the church and making sure that the things done by the church (collectively) are pleasing to God. Therefore, with regard to their God-given authority, you must submit yourself to them. Consider Hebrews 13:17. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Other responsibilities you have toward the elders of the local church is to know/respect them (1 Thessalonians 5:12), to esteem them very highly in love (1 Thessalonians 5:13), to be at peace with others (1 Thessalonians 5:13), to imitate their godly examples (Hebrews 13:7), and to

be careful in the area of rebuke toward them (1 Timothy 5:1, 19).

Second, not only do you have the responsibility to submit to the elders of the local church, but you have also been given the responsibility of submitting to all your brothers and sisters (in the area of Christian liberty). Consider Ephesians 5:21. Paul wrote, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” You must dedicate yourself to living peaceably with your brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12:18) and pursue unity with them (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6). Sometimes, this means that you will not have things your way and will have to yield yourself to the desires and interests of others.

(4) Contribute financially. The local church has a God-given work to accomplish. This is the work of teaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the members of the church, and extending benevolent help to needy Christians. As you consider each one of these works, it will become apparent that there is a financial element to the work of the local church. For instance, how can a local church financially assist a needy Christian brother if it does not have any money?

There is only one way God has authorized the local church to gather funds. That is through a free will offering of its members. Consider 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

God wants every member of the local church to be involved in the work of collecting these funds together. But, how much should you give to support the work of the local church? God has not made any amount mandatory. Under the Old Law, God required that His people tithe. However, the New Testament does not mandate a tithe. Instead, God says that the amount of the collection is to be proportionate to what you are blessed with (as you prosper). So, the amount of your contribution should increase whenever you are blessed with more. You

can also read 2 Corinthians 8-9 for principles related to your participation in this collection.

(5) Fulfill your “one another” responsibilities. As a member of the body of Jesus Christ (the church of Christ), you have many brothers and sisters who are also members of His church. Generally speaking, you have responsibilities toward all of your brothers and sisters as you have the ability and opportunity to come into contact with and help them. The Scriptures teach that Christians are members of “one another” (see Romans 12:4-5). Though these responsibilities extend to all your Christian brothers and sisters, I want you to be particularly focused on fulfilling your responsibilities toward your brothers and sisters in the local church.

These are “one another” responsibilities. Consider a few such responsibilities with me. You must serve one another (John 13:14; Galatians 5:13). You must love one another (John 13:35; John 15:12). You must be kindly affectionate toward one another and give preference to one another (Romans 12:10). You must greet one another in a special kind of way (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). You must bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). You must bear with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). You must forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). You must comfort and edify one another daily (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-13). You must consider one another to provoke one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). You must confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16). You must have compassion for one another, showing tenderness and courtesy (1 Peter 3:8). You must be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

Though this is not an exhaustive list of “one another” responsibilities you have toward your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, you can clearly see that you *do* have responsibilities toward your brethren. Therefore, as a member of a local church, you will need to be devoted to fulfilling your role in the responsibilities. Your brethren need you to fulfill your “one another” responsibilities!

(6) Do your share. While there are some other things we could discuss relative to your

responsibilities as a member of a local church, let’s focus on the fact that you must do your share. You see, the local church is not a *thing* that functions regardless of what the people do. Instead, the local church is a group of people who function together to accomplish their collective, God-given purpose. Therefore, a local church will not accomplish anything without the members of that church doing the work they are all capable of doing.

I encourage you to read and consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. In this text, the apostle Paul compares the church to a physical body. Like a physical body is made up of many different members, so is the body of Christ (both the universal church and local churches). And, like a physical body, the only way that the body of Christ can fulfill its purpose and function at its maximum capacity is for each individual member to contribute what he/she can contribute – using his/her own abilities and opportunities.

Yes, each member of the body is essential in order for a local church to function at its best and accomplish the most it can possibly accomplish. Therefore, as you consider your role as a member of a local church, you must determine to do your share in accomplishing the God-given purpose and work of the local church. Consider Ephesians 4:16. Paul wrote, “from whom [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are a member of Christ’s “universal” church (the body/collection of the saved). Then, the Scriptures consistently encourage you to be a member of a local church that is dedicated to following the Bible pattern for local churches. But, are you fulfilling your responsibilities as a member of the body of Jesus Christ? Is there more that you can contribute in order to do your share? There is work for you to be doing as a member of the body of Christ!

Study Questions

What are the responsibilities of local church membership?

1. A Member Of Christ's "Universal" Church

What is Christ's "universal" church?

Why should you be a member of Christ's church?

How did you join Christ's church?

What are the responsibilities of membership?

2. A Member Of A "Local" Church Of Christ

What is a "local" church of Christ?

Why should you be a member of a local church?

How do you join a local church?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is The Light Of The World

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is the light of the world.

Jesus Was The Light Of This World

John opened his gospel record by pointing us to the example of the greatest Light that has ever shone in this world – Jesus Christ! “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:1-9). Later in John’s gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying, “I

am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). Now, as we begin thinking about how Christians are expected to be lights of the world, we would do well to first examine that Light Christians will be trying to reflect – Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ life was a bold contrast to the world

When Jesus Christ came to this earth, His life was so different from the world that the greatest way this can be illustrated is the contrast between light and darkness. For instance, when a room is completely filled with darkness, there is no mistaking the presence of a light that begins to shine. It is clear and distinct – and everyone can notice that it is different from all the rest.

This is exactly how Jesus’ earthly life is described by John. Look back at John 1:1-9. You must understand that Jesus was God when He came to this earth (and He continues to be God today). As God manifested in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16), Jesus Christ showed us what God’s perfect holiness looks like in human form.

The Scriptures are clear that God is perfectly holy (separated from everything that is evil). Revelation 4:8 pictures four magnificent living beings proclaiming God as “Holy, holy, holy....” And, particularly notice the language of 1 John 1:5. “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” Therefore, because there is no element of sin/darkness that exists in God, verse 6 continues and demonstrates that God cannot be in fellowship with any works of darkness!

As a result of Jesus being completely holy, He could not be involved in any of the ways of darkness. He truly showed a different way of living to the world. 1 John 2:16 identifies that the ways of this world are the ways focused on lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These ways, John says, are “not of the Father” but are “of the world.” Therefore, Jesus’ life was not about these earthly desires. His life was truly one in which He demonstrated what it means to serve God, exercise self-discipline, glorify His Heavenly Father, and love mankind.

Unfortunately, most did not appreciate or gravitate toward this Light. John 3:19-21 explains. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Darkness hates the light. Light exposes what is going on under the cover of darkness. It exposes darkness for what it really is. In the same way, when Jesus lived on this earth, He exposed the sinful ways of mankind as being sinful. This infuriated those who loved to practice their sin. They did not want to be identified as being involved in wickedness. However, the few who truly had a desire to serve God and be eternally saved, recognized their need to come to Jesus so that their wickedness could be exposed and changed.

Jesus was the perfect example of righteous living

Jesus demonstrated God’s holiness to us in two ways. First, Jesus provided the perfect example of righteous living. There was not a single time during Jesus’ earthly life when He chose to fulfill His own fleshly desires rather than accomplish the will of His Father.

Listen to Hebrews 4:15. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” On various occasions, Jesus was tempted to live according to His own fleshly desires rather than please His Father. In fact, He was tempted to fulfill His own fleshly desires in the same ways all other people who were living on earth were tempted – and in the same ways we are tempted. Yet, though everyone else has decided to violate God’s law (sin) in order to fulfill their own fleshly desires (Romans 3:23), Jesus did not!

For instance, Jesus was tempted three times in Matthew 4:1-11. Satan tempted Jesus to use His Divine nature in order to satisfy His own physical hunger by turning stones into bread and demonstrate

that He truly was the Son of God. Yet, Jesus refused. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and told Him to throw Himself down so that God would save Him and demonstrate that He truly was the Son of God. Yet, Jesus refused. And, Satan offered to give Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world without having to suffer in order to establish His kingdom, if He would bow down and worship Satan. Yet, Jesus refused. Though this is just an overview of Jesus’ temptations, you can see how Satan appealed to Jesus’ physical desires. Yet, Jesus consistently and perfectly resisted the temptations. And, He would continue to make the same decision to serve and glorify the Father throughout His earthly life.

This consistent dedication to serving and glorifying the Father is seen through Jesus’ earthly life. Jesus demonstrated what it means to forgive. What it means to show compassion. What it means to love. What it means to exercise self-control. What it means to serve. What it means to be patient when experiencing trials, temptations, and persecutions. What it means to give. Every decision Jesus made and every example He has left is a perfect manifestation of God’s holiness!

Jesus’ teachings perfectly pointed people to righteousness

Jesus did provide a perfect example of righteous living throughout the duration of His earthly life. But, this was not the only way Jesus demonstrated God’s holiness to us. He also was engaged in teaching that perfectly pointing people to God’s standard of righteousness.

There are many examples of Jesus’ teachings that accomplished this purpose. But, there may be none more well-known than Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7. In this one sermon, Jesus revealed a great contrast in the thinking of this world and the holy ways of God.

For instance, consider the section commonly known as the “Beatitudes” (Matthew 5:3-12). Jesus said that people would only truly be “blessed” (happy) when they are poor in spirit, when they mourn, when they are meek, when they hunger and thirst for righteousness, when they are merciful, when they are pure in heart, when they are

peacemakers, and when they are persecuted for righteousness' sake. To a mind that is only focused on worldly things, this does not make any sense. However, Jesus demonstrates that these are true characteristics of those who would receive spiritual blessings from God!

He continued to challenge the conventional "wisdom" of this world throughout His "sermon." He demonstrated that failing to treat another person in the appropriate way is just as bad to God as murder. He demonstrated that lusting after another is just as serious a sin as actually committing adultery. He identified that God only approves of divorce for one cause (fornication). He demonstrated that God's people must not be vengeful and that they must be willing to love and serve (even those who act in evil ways toward us). He condemned the practices of doing good deeds for others, praying, and fasting in order to be seen of men. He told people to focus on Heavenly treasures (which are eternal) rather than on earthly treasures (which are temporary). He warned people that it is impossible to serve two masters, indicating that those who truly desire to please God must put God completely first in their lives. He condemned the practice of hypocritical judging. He warned people about false religious teachers who would lead them away from the ways of God. He warned that pleasing God is about more than merely professing to follow Him. He demonstrated that God will only be pleased with those who are doers of His word.

Although this does not cover every point of Jesus' teaching, you can see how Jesus' teaching consistently challenges us to move away from the conventional "wisdom" and ways of this world in order to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Throughout the Scriptures, you will find examples of Jesus' teachings and can observe how Jesus *always* was a stark contrast to the ways of this world and never failed to point people to the Father.

Jesus called His disciples to be the "light of the world"

Another part of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" challenges all those who desire to follow Jesus Christ to see themselves as the salt of this earth and the lights of the world. First, Jesus said, "You are

the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matthew 5:13). Salt had a variety of different purposes – and it is somewhat difficult to know if Jesus had only one in His mind or if He was speaking of the overall benefit of salt. For instance, some may have considered salt's quality of preservation – and understood Jesus to have been identifying His followers as having the ability to help preserve people in this world from the corruption of sin by pointing them to the salvation in Jesus Christ. Or, some could have considered salt's seasoning effect on food – and understood Jesus to have been identifying His people as seasoning the world with righteousness. Or, perhaps they would have considered a different benefit of salt.

Still, Jesus' overall point is made clear in the second part of the verse. What if His people stop having a positive effect on the world? What good would it be for someone to claim to be Jesus' follower, but not have this kind of positive influence to promote God's righteousness? There would be two negative results: Those who had claimed to be Jesus' followers would be cast away and the world would be lacking this positive influence for righteousness.

Then, Jesus provides another analogy in verses 14-16. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

As the Light that came into the world (as demonstrated from John 1), Jesus expects His followers to continue providing that stark contrast between the sinful ways of the world and the righteous ways of God. Having ascended into Heaven, Jesus no longer is the example the world sees living around them. Instead, Jesus left this responsibility with His followers (see Mark 16:15). His followers were expected to reflect Christ's light throughout this world – in every place they would go! They were to reflect His example of righteous living. And, they were to teach His message.

Therefore, even though Jesus would not be on this earth forever, His Light would continue to shine through His people. His people would be like a city that is set up on a hill for all to see. They would be like a light put on a lampstand in order to provide the house with light. There would be no mistaking that His people would be different from the world and that they would always be actively promoting the ways of God's righteousness throughout this world. And, whenever the world would see the good works of Christ's disciples, some would choose also to devote their lives to glorifying the Father in Heaven!

What It Means To Be The Light Of The World

Jesus Christ was the greatest Light to ever shine in this world that is full of darkness. As His disciples, Christians must be dedicated to learning Jesus' light-filled ways and following His holy example. Then, as we have seen, His disciples must also be dedicated to reflecting Jesus' light for all who are in the world to see today. But, what does it mean for you (as one of Jesus' disciples) to be the light of the world?

You are holy

We have already seen that God is entirely holy (separated from everything that is evil). Now, as one of Jesus' disciples responsible for shining as a light in this world, you must also be holy. Listen to 1 Peter 1:13-16. "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

At one time you lived to fulfill your own physical desires. You have sinned and fallen short of glorying God (Romans 3:23). But, now (as a Christian) you are not to live according to those same sinful ways. You must be dedicated to living

according to the standard of holiness that is seen in God and Jesus Christ. God says, "Be holy, for I am holy"! As a Christian, God calls you a "saint" (see Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1). A "saint" is any person who has been set apart from the sins he/she has committed and is dedicated to living for the ways of God (a most holy person). But, this is not limited to just a few of Jesus' disciples. This is the responsibility of every single person who follows Jesus Christ – as He expects everyone who follows Him to be entirely dedicated to Him (see Matthew 6:24).

In fact, notice the extent to which God expects you to imitate His holiness. Jesus' followers are not permitted to pick and choose areas in which they desire to be holy. Instead, God has instructed you to "be holy in all your conduct." In every aspect of your life, you must be holy according to God's standard of holiness. This includes the thoughts you think, the words you speak, and the deeds you do. Therefore, as the light of this world, God does not permit any aspect of your life to consist of darkness (sin). In fact, Paul wrote that those who are Christians must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Rather, they are to expose them (Ephesians 5:11).

Understand. "No fellowship" means no participation in a thing. It does not give any "wiggle room" to negotiate any involvement in sinful things. God wants His people to be entirely separated from everything that is sinful – just as He is separated from everything that is sinful. In fact, recall that 1 John 1:5-6 demonstrated that if you choose to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, you cannot have any fellowship with God (who is entirely light). Therefore, you must choose who/what you most desire to have fellowship with.

You stand out from the world

Just as Jesus stood out from the ways of this world, His people (who are entirely committed to His ways of holiness) will also stand out from this world. They will be as easily identified as being different from the world as an illuminated city on top of a hill is identified as being different from all the darkness that is around it! Consider two passages that will help to see this point more clearly.

First, consider Romans 12:1-2. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Paul pleaded with those who were Christians by the mercy God had demonstrated for them to give their lives entirely to God. They were to view their earthly lives as being living sacrifices to God that were holy and acceptable to God. Not one element of their physical lives was to be reserved for their own selfish purposes. Everything was to be used in the service of God.

Then, their lives (being entirely given to God) were not permitted to take the same shape as the world. Paul told them not to be “conformed to this world.” They were not to think the same way the world thinks, speak the same way the world speaks, or act the same way the world acts. Rather than living according to the standards and ways of the world, God’s people are expected to be “transformed.” They are to live in an entirely different way. This transformation, according to Paul, involves a renewal of the mind that is focused on following the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God!

Second, consider 1 Peter 4:3-4. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”

Those who are Jesus’ disciples are expected to have been transformed in the way that was depicted in Romans 12. Therefore, the Christian has determined that he/she has spent enough of his/her lifetime living according to the sinful ways of the world. Though he/she has lived for things like lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries, he/she has changed. There has been a transformation. There has been a dedication of his/her life entirely to the holy

ways of God and a dedication to leave the sinful ways of the world behind.

In light of this great transformation, notice how other people will view you (if you have truly become a follower of Jesus Christ). Those who see this difference will “think it strange” that you are no longer practicing the same things you used to be involved with. Most will not understand the transformation. Most will speak evil of your new life that is committed to the ways of holiness. But, you should observe the basic fact that those who see your new life in Jesus Christ will recognize that you are different and will see that you stand out from the ways of this world!

You expose others as being in darkness

Whenever Jesus lived on this earth, not only could people see that He was living a different kind of life than all the others around Him were living, but Jesus’ holy life exposed the wickedness. Once again, John 3:19-20 demonstrated that those who loved darkness hated the light because the light would expose their wickedness. Jesus’ life certainly did expose the wickedness of the world through His perfect example and through His teaching (as we discussed previously in this study). Now, as the light of the world, you will also be exposing the wickedness of this world through your example and through your teaching.

First, you expose others as being in darkness through your holy example. Whenever you dedicate yourself to exercising the proper degrees of self-control, patience, love, service, humility, meekness, compassion, etc., you are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. And, in living according to His holy standard for your life on this earth, you will be exposing those who are not living by that same standard. They will be able to see that they are not dedicated to living according to the same ways you are. And, others will be able to see that they are not living according to the same standard of righteousness.

Second, you expose others as being in darkness when you teach Jesus’ law. Jesus expects you to be teaching His holy ways to others – not *just* setting a good example of righteous living. Jesus is

not living on this earth to physically speak to people who are living in sin. So, He expects you to take His message of righteousness to them (see Mark 16:15). In doing so, you will be identifying as sin the same things Jesus identified as sin. And, you will be teaching people to live in the same way Jesus taught people to live. This, too, will expose the ways of darkness as being contrary to the will of God – and will point people to the right ways of God’s holiness.

Consequently, as you shine as a light that is exposing the darkness in the world, many people who are involved in darkness will hate and persecute you. After all, “everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20). Later, Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19). Just as the world of darkness hated and mistreated Jesus (eventually putting Him to death), the world will hate and mistreat those who expose their ways of darkness today. Yet, just as Jesus faithfully endured, you also must endure and continue to let your light shine – recognizing that there is great reward for those who are persecuted by this world (see Matthew 5:10-12).

You serve as a beacon of light for those living in darkness

Think about what it is like to wander around in physical darkness. You can’t see where you’re at. You can’t see where you’re going. You can’t see dangers approaching. You can’t see to help other people who are wandering about in the darkness. This adequately describes the spiritual condition of those living according to the ways of the world. They are spiritually lost. They cannot see the great dangers that are rapidly approaching them that they will experience after their earthly lives are over. They cannot see the way out of the darkness. And, they cannot help others who are wandering around in the darkness of sin.

On the other hand, think about what a light accomplishes. When a lamp is lit and placed on a lampstand, there will be one of two possible reactions. First, some will hate the light because they

have no interest in seeing what the light wishes to expose and will try diligently to resist the light. Second, others will have their eyes opened and use the light to make the necessary corrections and guide their future steps.

These same points are true concerning those who are Christians. Christians shine the light of God’s truth and holiness for those who are in darkness to see. It, as we discussed, exposes the darkness and presents individuals with a choice. Either they can choose to fight against God’s light and remain in their sins – or they can choose to allow God’s light to work in their lives so as to use their lives to illuminate the ways of darkness!

Like Jesus, you must choose to show compassion on those who are lost and wandering. Listen to how Jesus viewed the lost in Matthew 9:36. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion from them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” Recognize that there are many who are lost and wandering around you. Then, determine that you will do everything within your ability to let your light shine to serve as a beacon of hope to rescue those who are in darkness!

Let Your Light So Shine

Now that you are seeing the responsibility you have in serving God as the light of the world, I want you to consider some practical applications of this truth. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Being a light for Jesus Christ is not about saying you are a light. It is about actually shining the light of God’s holiness in this world that is full of darkness.

Through your speech

You must let your light so shine through your speech. There are standards God has clearly revealed for His people regarding their speech. For instance, Ephesians 4-5 reveals a number of points regarding this standard. You must not lie (4:25). No “corrupt word” is to proceed from your mouth (4:29). All

“evil speaking” is to be put away from your life (4:32). Filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting are all “not fitting” for you (5:3-4). Instead, you must “speak truth” (4:25), speak that which is “good for necessary edification” (4:29), be kind (4:32), and give thanks (5:4). Of course, this is only a sample of what God’s word teaches regarding your speech. As you live among many people who use their words contrary to the purposes of God, you must be dedicated to glorifying God through your speech.

Through your worship

You must let your light so shine through your worship. First, God wants you to let your light shine by being devoted to worshipping Him. He is “seeking” worshipers (John 4:23). But, He is not just seeking for any type of worshipers. God is seeking for “true worshipers” who “will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). So, as you live among so many worshipers who fail to worship God in spirit and truth, you must dedicate yourself to shine as a light in demonstrating what true worship really is and encourage others to also follow the Bible’s prescription for “true” worship.

Through your teaching

You must let your light so shine through your teaching. As we have already observed in this lesson, God expects those who follow Him to be dedicated to teaching His ways of righteousness (see Mark 16:15). You must demonstrate your true love for the Lord and for your fellow man by being actively involved in helping those who are in darkness to learn about the opportunity of salvation through Jesus Christ. While you live in a world that is full of people who are unconcerned about the well-being of their fellow man (especially their spiritual well-being), you must be a lost-soul-seeker.

Through your service

You must let your light so shine through your service. First and foremost, you must let your light so shine through your service to God. In fact, as we saw from Romans 12:1, your “reasonable service” is to present your entire life to God as a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to Him. Then, one of the ways this commitment to serving God will manifest

itself is that you will be devoted to serving others according to your opportunity (imitating Jesus’ example in John 13:1-17). In fact, Galatians 6:10 instructs you to “do good to all” according to your opportunity – especially toward those who are fellow Christians. Although much of this world is living with a focus on pleasing themselves, you must demonstrate an example of sacrificial service – to God and to your fellow man.

Through your character

You must let your light so shine through your character. God’s word of truth prescribes certain characteristics for those who desire to please Him. For instance, Colossians 3:12-17 identifies the characteristics of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with others, forgiving others, love, and thankfulness as being part of living the Christian life. Certainly the world (generally) does not possess these characteristics (at least not all of them). Yet, since Jesus Christ possessed all of these characteristics, God’s people also must possess them – and demonstrate them in their daily lives and interactions with others.

Through your habits

You must let your light so shine through your habits. Every person in this world has habits. Some of these habits are pleasing to God and can help you to serve Him. However, there are many habits that are contrary to His will and can result in your committing sin. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 instructs you to put everything to the test (using God’s standard of truth), hold fast to what is good, and abstain from everything that is evil. This would certainly apply to your habits. The world around you is full of habits that are displeasing to God – i.e. consuming alcohol, using tobacco products, using drugs, viewing pornography, gluttony, laziness, procrastination, etc. In the midst of all this darkness, you must use your habits to help you glorify God and make sure that the only habits others see in you will point them to Jesus’ holiness.

Through your clothing

You must let your light so shine through your clothing. In fact, the way you clothe yourself will be

one of the first things people will notice about you on a daily basis. In fact, the way you clothe yourself may be the only thing a person learns from you on a given day. Given the Christian's responsibility to clothe himself/herself in a way that will profess godliness with good works (demonstrating modesty, bashfulness, and self-restraint, 1 Timothy 2:9-10), it is important for the Christian to evaluate the message his/her clothing is sharing with the world. The world routinely rejects God's standard for clothing by wearing bathing suits, shorts/skirts that reveal the thigh, tight/form-fitting clothing, clothing that is too low-cut, clothing with inappropriate messages or pictures, etc. Rather than conforming to these worldly standards, the Christian will desire to shine for Christ through his/her clothing.

Through your choices

You must let your light so shine through your choices. The choices you make reveal your priorities. And, other people notice! For instance, the choices you make regarding your entertainment reveals whether you are entirely committed to holiness, purity, and serving God – or whether you are focused on pleasing yourself. The choices you make regarding how often you will assemble with the local church reveals whether you are entirely committed to serving God, keeping His commandments, and fulfilling your role as a member of the local church. Though these are only two examples, the world around you notices the kinds of choices you make. While the world makes choices all of the time that puts themselves first, the world should see the Christian making choices that demonstrate that God comes first in everything (Matthew 6:33).

Through your family

You must let your light so shine through your family. God has given you certain responsibilities with regard to your earthly family. He has structured the home in the way that He has desired and in the way that will cause it to function at its maximum ability. For instance, you can read passages like Ephesians 5:22-6:4 to see some instructions for the relationships between husbands, wives, and children. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," God has only approved of one cause for

divorce (Matthew 5:31-32). Though the world routinely rejects all aspects of God's plan for the family, Christians must be dedicated to fulfilling these responsibilities, thereby demonstrating the kind of family relationships God approves.

Common "Baskets"

In all areas (not just in the areas I have specifically addressed), you must be devoted to letting your light "so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Unfortunately, there are some who profess to be Jesus' disciples who will live a holy life in secret – but, then will dim their lights when they are around others. Jesus speaks of the foolishness of such in Matthew 5:15. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." If you want to be pleasing to God, you must allow your light to shine at all times – whenever and wherever you have the opportunity to do so, consistently pointing people to Jesus. But, there are some common "baskets" that are used to conceal this light. Let's briefly consider four.

Shame

Many try to hide their lights due to shame. Many people don't like to be different from the world. At least, they don't like to *appear* to be different from the world. They try to blend in to whatever environment they find themselves in. Perhaps they are even ashamed of the holy ways of Jesus Christ because they still inwardly desire to live for the ways of sin. Or, perhaps they are ashamed of taking the kinds of bold stands following Jesus requires.

Yet, regardless of the reasoning, God requires that His followers never be ashamed of Him or of His word. Jesus said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Rather than being ashamed of Jesus, God's people must have full confidence in Jesus – knowing that

Jesus Christ loved us enough to give His life for our sins so that we could be eternally saved in Heaven! Like the apostle Paul, you must also declare, “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:15-16). Jesus Christ was willing to die for you, don’t hide your light by being ashamed of Him!

Fear

Many try to hide their lights due to fear. We have already seen that the world will hate those who live according to the holy ways of God rather than the sinful works of darkness (John 15:18-19). Therefore, those who are Christians should expect to be mocked, spoken evil of, and perhaps even physically mistreated. So, rather than choosing to let their lights shine and endure whatever persecution comes, some choose to conceal their lights with the “basket” of fear.

Yet, regardless of what consequences there are for shining the light of God’s holiness in this world, the Christian must be determined never to cower in fear! Listen to the statement Jesus made to His twelve apostles as they prepared to teach God’s message to others and experience persecutions. He said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Ultimately, there is nothing that man can do to us that is worth the eternal consequence of denying Jesus Christ! Don’t allow your light to dim because of fear.

Peace

Many try to hide their lights in order to “keep the peace.” Now, it is certainly true that Christians ought to be “peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9), doing everything within their abilities to live peaceably with others (Romans 12:16). That is, everything short of compromising God’s truth. Unfortunately, there are many who do not let their lights so shine before men (whether in word or example) so that they will not offend anyone else by God’s truth or make anyone else feel bad for living in sin.

Yet, the Scriptures present many examples in which Jesus Christ and His faithful followers were dedicated to standing for what was right even when it meant offending other people. For instance, Jesus taught that the gospel will divide families (implying that not everyone within a family will accept the gospel), in Matthew 10:34-39. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to offend others in order to speak the truth that they needed to hear, in Matthew 15:1-14. And, many of the first century Christians were known by enemies of the gospel as those “who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Though God wants His people to be peacemakers, He never permits you to hide your light in order to “keep the peace.”

Indifference

Many hide their lights because of indifference. Perhaps they were once zealous for the truth of the gospel of Christ. But, as time has passed, they have developed an attitude of careless indifference toward living for God’s ways of holiness. “If other people want to live for God, great! But, if not, that’s OK.” And, some have become enticed by the ways of sin so as to again fall into Satan’s trap themselves.

Yet, God condemns indifference in those who claim to follow Him. Jesus plainly stated that it is “all or nothing” in discipleship. In Matthew 12:30, He said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” In Revelation 3:15-16, Jesus identified some who claimed to be Christians who were “neither cold nor hot.” Jesus said He would “vomit” them out of His mouth and called for them to be zealous and repent (verse 19). Given everything God has done for you, God calls you to be on fire for Him (see Titus 2:11-14). He will not accept anything less than a complete dedication to serve Him!

Conclusion

As a Christian, God expects your life to be used to shine His word of truth and His ways of righteousness throughout this world. You must never

be willing to dim your light for anything or anyone. He wants your light to so shine before men in order that they will see your good works (as you reflect the life and teachings of Jesus) and choose to also glorify your Father in Heaven. But, how will those around you who are mired in darkness be able to know the righteous and holy ways of Jesus and escape the deadly perils of sin if you are not consistently shining as a light in the world?

Study Questions

1. Jesus Was The Light Of This World

How was Jesus' life a bold contrast to the world?

How was Jesus a perfect example of righteous living?

How did Jesus' teachings perfectly point people to righteousness?

What did Jesus call His disciples to be, according to Matthew 5:13-16?

2. What It Means To Be The Light Of The World

How will your holiness impact your life as the light of the world?

How will you stand out from the world?

How will you expose others as being in darkness?

How will you serve as a beacon of light for those living in darkness?

3. Let Your Light So Shine

How should your light shine through your speech?

How should your light shine through your worship?

How should your light shine through your teaching?

How should your light shine through your service?

How should your light shine through your character?

How should your light shine through your habits?

How should your light shine through your clothing?

How should your light shine through your choices?

How should your light shine through your family?

4. Common “Baskets”

How will shame influence people to hide their lights?
How can you overcome this?

How will fear influence people to hide their lights?
How can you overcome this?

How will peace influence people to hide their lights?
How can you overcome this?

How will indifference influence people to hide their lights?
How can you overcome this?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Preacher

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a preacher.

Preaching Is The Work Of Every Christian

To engage in “evangelism” is to proclaim the saving message of God to others. To “preach” is equated with the work of a herald (whose job it would be to publish the decrees and announcements of a king, for everyone to hear). Therefore, the evangelist (gospel preacher) has the work of publishing God’s message to everyone he possibly can, so that they will know the decrees of the great and awesome God!

Who must preach

God could have chosen to use any number of avenues to publish His message. In fact, He has used a number of methods in the past. He could have chosen to directly communicate with each individual (like He did with Adam, Abraham, Moses, etc.). He could have chosen to communicate with each person

through visions and dreams (as He did with Peter in Acts 10). He could have given every person the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (as He gave to the apostles). But, He didn’t.

I don’t always know why God has chosen to do things in the ways He has chosen to do them. However, I do trust in the ways of God – knowing that His ways are much higher than my ways and His thoughts are much higher than my thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). And, as I search the Scriptures, I learn that God has revealed His will through the words that were written by the apostles and prophets (who wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit). Now, when we read the things they have written (in the pages of the Bible), we can know what the will of God is (see Ephesians 3:3-5 and Ephesians 5:17). Then, I also learn that God expects those who have learned His message to take that message and publish it to others.

2 Timothy 2:2 is one passage that helps us see this way that God has designed for His saving message and His will to be spread. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Paul addresses this statement to Timothy. Timothy had been taught the gospel of Jesus Christ in the past. Now, he had the God-given responsibility to teach this same message to others. Then, those who heard that message from Timothy would also have the God-given responsibility to tell other people this same saving message. This is the work of evangelism in a “nutshell”!

Now, let’s continue to think about Timothy and observe Paul’s instructions to Him later in the letter. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 says, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Timothy was an evangelist – and was instructed to do the work of an evangelist. By all indications, Timothy was a “full-time evangelist.” This designation is simply used in reference to those who make their living by the gospel and have a greater amount of time to devote to the work of evangelism. However, the work of Timothy to preach the word and to be diligent in doing so (whether it is accepted or rejected) is no different from the basic responsibility of all those who are Christians.

Every Christian has this same responsibility to be a preacher of God’s message. This work is not *just* for a select few people who are given financial support to accomplish this work (like Paul was on many occasions, see Philippians 4:15-16). Instead, every Christian (having learned the word of God) has the responsibility of 2 Timothy 2:2. Consider two passages to illustrate this truth.

(1) Acts 8:4. “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” This passage describes the work of Christians who were scattered due to the persecution in Jerusalem. Notice that these were not just paid evangelists. In fact, I don’t know whether there were any paid evangelists at this particular time. Rather, these were individual Christians who were dedicated to taking God’s saving message with them wherever they went. Was God pleased with their work? Is this an example to be imitated? Absolutely! And, because of their work, the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem (see Acts 11:19-26).

(2) Hebrews 5:12-14. In this passage, the Hebrew writer rebuked those who should have grown enough to be at a point they could be teachers. However, they were still in need of someone to teach them the first principles of God’s word. Clearly, then, we can conclude that God expects each Christian to be growing in his/her knowledge and ability so that he/she will be teachers. Again, this is not just the expectation of certain people who become “full time evangelists” – but for all Christians.

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls you to be a preacher (publisher) of God’s message. This is part of being faithful to Christ to death (Revelation 2:10).

To fail to fulfill this responsibility is a sin! Remember, a sin is anything that violates the law of God (1 John 3:4). And, James 4:17 says that the one who knows to do good but refuses to do it commits sin! Are you doing your part to spread God’s message?

What you preach

To publish something is to make its message/contents known to others. It is to take something from being hidden/concealed to making it available to others. For instance, a herald would take the king’s message and would make it known to the citizens of the kingdom. Similarly, the work of evangelism is the work of making God’s message known to others.

This work is summarized by 2 Timothy 4:2 in the phrase, “Preach the word.” Publish God’s word. Make it known among the people as you have opportunity! You must always remember that this is *God’s* word that you must publish. He does not authorize you to make any changes to His message (see Revelation 22:18-19). Instead, He expects those who are His heralds to accurately and faithfully make His message known to others. Just imagine if a herald would (while claiming to speak the message of the king) change or misinterpret the king’s message. This would result in all of the citizens of the kingdom failing to follow the instructions of the king. Instead, they would be following the false ideas and misinterpretations of the herald!

As a Christian, your responsibility is simply to publish God’s message. Your responsibility is *not* to publish your own ideas, your own opinions, your own traditions, your own recommendations, etc. You must be diligent as a Bible student to rightly interpret the word of God so that you can accurately convey God’s message to others. For instance, when Paul was writing to Timothy, an evangelist who was charged with preaching the word and doing the work of an evangelist, he said, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Now, in order to be faithful and do the work of an evangelist, you need to understand what

message you are publishing. Consider two basic points about the message God has given you to publish.

(1) You publish God's good news about the opportunity of salvation through Jesus Christ. The word "gospel" literally means "good news." In Romans 1:16, Paul said that he was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." This is the good news that is focused on Jesus Christ and the opportunity for all people (regardless of nationality, economic background, level of education, etc.) to be saved from the consequences of sin and have everlasting life in Heaven! Therefore, through all of your work in publishing God's message, you must remember that you are publishing a message that is full of good news!

(2) You publish what God has required for salvation. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just a message to be heard. It is a message which must also be obeyed. Failure to obey this message results in everlasting punishment in Hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Therefore, as you publish God's message, you must also be publishing what God's message requires of individuals. Central to this is to teach the gospel's plan of salvation. In addition, this requires that sin must be rebuked so that those who are in sin can repent. Consequently, there will be many people who will not desire to hear and obey the gospel's message (because they will not desire to do what the gospel requires of them, 2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Is this message a message you consider to be worth publishing through your life? Do you want to help others understand their opportunity for salvation and what God requires of them in order to obtain this salvation? Or, are you ashamed of this saving message?

Why you must preach

Think about what happens if no one publishes the message of the King? What would happen if the herald would not fulfill his responsibility to publish the message of the king? I suppose there would be two consequences of his decision. First, the message would never be known by the citizens of the kingdom

and they would be guilty of living contrary to the decree of the king. Therefore, they would suffer the consequences of living in violation of the law. Second, I suppose that the herald himself would be in danger when the king discovered that his decrees were not being published by the one who had been given that responsibility.

Now, think about these same two points relative to the work of Christians – who have been given the responsibility to be heralds of the gospel's message.

(1) Others will not learn the truth of the gospel. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul told Timothy that he was to teach other people the message of the gospel, who would then spread the message to others. We have already discussed that this is the way God intended for His saving message to be spread throughout the world – and throughout the generations. Therefore, you must consider how others will learn God's saving message if God's people are not spreading His message.

Romans 10:13-15 demonstrates this same truth. The passage teaches that it is necessary to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Then, it asks, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

You need to ask yourself this same question: "How will others be saved if I am not being diligent to spread God's message?" Who will teach them God's saving message? How will they be obedient to His instructions if they do not know what He requires? Like Paul, you need to consider the "terror of the Lord" (which will be experienced on the Day of Judgment by those who have not obeyed God) and work to persuade men to give their lives to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

(2) The Christian will be held personally responsible for this failure. Do you believe that God will not hold you personally responsible if you fail to accomplish the work of evangelism He has given you to do? Again, you must recognize that the work of preaching God's message is a God-given responsibility for all Christians. Therefore, you will

be judged as to whether or not you have faithfully executed this responsibility. If you fail to fulfill this responsibility, you commit sin (James 4:17). And, recognize that the wages of this sin is the same as the wages of any other sin – spiritual death (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8).

Ezekiel 3:16-21 uses the illustration of a watchman on a wall. Specifically, God told Ezekiel (a prophet who had the responsibility of making God’s message known to the people) that he had personal responsibility in whether or not people knew His message. God told Ezekiel that if Ezekiel would not warn the wicked of their wickedness, both he and the wicked people would be punished. However, if Ezekiel faithfully told the people God’s message, Ezekiel would not be responsible for the destruction of the wicked (even if they refused to heed the warning).

In the same way, God will hold His people responsible for whether or not His message is being spread to those who need to hear it. Jesus Christ has no hands, no feet, no tongue, etc. to do this work. Instead, He has left this work (that He died to accomplish) into the hands of those who are Christians. How can any Christian expect to be rewarded by Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment if he/she did not do what he/she could do to help others learn this great message of salvation?

Important Principles In Preaching

Now that you understand your personal responsibility to publish God’s message, you need to embrace some important principles in preaching that message. These guiding principles will help motivate you to preach the gospel, help you accomplish the work, and help you to deal with the results.

Recognize what it means to be “lost”

Jesus said that He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Similarly, God has given every Christian the responsibility to be a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, looking to

spread God’s message about salvation to anyone who is “lost.” Therefore, the Christian is a lost-soul-seeker. But, what exactly does it mean to be “lost”?

Ephesians 2:1-3 says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Sin is the problem that makes a person “lost” as opposed to being “saved.” When a person is in “trespasses and sins” (which results from violating the law of God), that individual is identified as being in a “dead” condition. Now, this is not a physically dead condition, but a spiritually dead condition. “Death” is identified as the “wages of sin,” in Romans 6:23. To be spiritually dead is to be separated from God – separated from all of the blessings and spiritual life that God provides. As long as an individual lives in his/her sin he/she will be separated from God (Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 John 1:5-6) and will be spiritually dead while he/she is physically alive (1 Timothy 5:6).

Then, the ultimate consequence of sin is that it will result in eternal spiritual death (separation from God). Yes, God has prepared a place in which all those who die (physically) while in sin will spend eternity. This is the place the Scriptures call “Hell.” 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that whenever Jesus Christ returns with the holy angels, vengeance will be taken in “flaming fire” on those who “do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” So, whenever Jesus comes and the final Judgment takes place, those who were “lost” in their sins will be forever separated from God and cast into this place of punishment. They will hear Jesus tell them, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). They will have “their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Realize that Jesus died for the lost

Jesus knew all about these consequences of dying in sin. And, He also knew that those who were “lost” in their sins could not save themselves by their own meritorious works. Instead, they would be forever “lost” in their sins – unless He would provide the sacrifice that would give them an opportunity to be saved. Therefore, Jesus Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus knew that the only way those who were “lost” could be “saved” was if He would shed His blood and sacrifice His life to make atonement for sin. No other sacrifice could accomplish this salvation from sin. Not even animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, consider what is said about Jesus in 2 Corinthians 8:9. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” He left the riches of Heaven (where there is no pain, suffering, sorrow, or death) in order to become “poor” by living on this earth and experiencing pain, suffering, sorrow, and death. Why did He do it? So that we (all humanity) could become “rich” through His poverty – meaning that we could have the opportunity to be saved from the consequences of our sins and have everlasting life in Heaven!

You can read through the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to see exactly what Jesus endured after leaving Heaven – so that we could all be saved from our sins. He was mistreated and hated throughout the course of His earthly life. He was betrayed by His own apostle. He was arrested. He was given unfair trials. He was beaten severely. He was mocked. He was spat on. He had a crown of thorns placed upon His head. Ultimately, He had nails driven through His hands and His feet – and died an excruciating death on the cross. Now, because of the love and compassion Jesus Christ demonstrated in giving His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, those who were “lost” can be saved!

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Therefore, while the “wages of sin

is death,” the “gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Through Jesus Christ those who are lost in their sins can be saved from God’s wrath and be reconciled to God (Romans 5:8-11) – if they will be obedient to the saving message of the gospel!

Understand that God requires obedience for salvation

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God has given all mankind the opportunity to be saved from their sins. Titus 2:11 says that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” However, Jesus said that most people will be lost and few would be saved – in Matthew 7:13-14.

The implication is that God requires something from mankind in order to be saved. What God requires is obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember, it will be those who did not know God and did not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ who will be punished with everlasting destruction and eternally separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Then, consider what the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 5:9. Speaking about Jesus Christ, “He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”

You see, God requires both faith and obedience in order for a person to be forgiven of his/her sins and be saved eternally. God requires every person to hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent of his/her sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38) in order to be forgiven and saved from his/her sins. Then, after becoming a Christian and being saved, God requires that every person continue to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10), continuing to obey all the instructions God gives in the pages of the New Testament.

Remember that you were once lost in sin

Now that you recognize what it means to be “lost,” realize that Jesus died for the lost, and understand that God requires obedience for salvation, let’s make this personal. The Bible teaches that *you* were the one who was lost in sin. Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the

glory of God.” Ephesians 2:1-3 implies that it was *you* who was “dead in your trespasses and sins.” Therefore, it was *you* who was headed for an eternal punishment in Hell fire!

And, it was for *you* that Jesus Christ died to save. Therefore, “you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). He left Heaven, came to this earth, was spitefully mistreated, was betrayed, was arrested, was severely beaten, was spat on, was mocked, and was put to death by crucifixion – for *you*! He has given *you* the opportunity to “not perish but have everlasting life” in Heaven (John 3:16)!

Yes, He has given *you* the opportunity to be saved from the consequences of the sins you have committed against God. However, He required that *you* must be obedient to Him in order to be saved from your sin and access the grace of God. And, in order to be obedient to the gospel of Christ, *you* were the one who was in need of someone to preach the gospel to you. Romans 10:13-15, for instance, teaches that you must call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Then, it asks, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” Please appreciate that (at one time) *you* were the one who needed a preacher to come to you and teach you the gospel, so that you could hear, believe, and obey! Just imagine: Where would *you* have been if someone had not taken the time and put forth the effort to teach *you* the saving message of the gospel of Christ?

Recognize how God is using you to reach the lost

While you need to appreciate the fact that you were the one in need of having someone preach the gospel to you in the past, you also must realize that God is using you today to fill that role for other people. Today, there are many lost people around you who need to hear, believe, and obey the message of the gospel so that they can be saved from their sins. God has loved them enough to send His Son to die on the cross for them. But, they need *you* to teach them the gospel’s message!

Today, you need to view yourself in the role of the preacher in Romans 10:13-15! Remember, God’s plan to save people includes those who will preach His saving message to the lost. Therefore, God can use you to preach His word to those around you – no matter what your abilities are! But, you must present your life and your body to God as a tool He can use to accomplish His purposes (see Romans 6:12-13).

Consider Matthew 4:18-22. On this occasion, Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. When He saw two brothers (Peter and Andrew) doing the work of fishermen, Jesus called them. He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They left their nets and followed Jesus. He proceeded from there and saw two other brothers (James and John) mending their nets. He called them – and they also followed after Him.

Now, please appreciate that Jesus called these fishermen to be “fishers of men.” Jesus was going to use these four uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13) to accomplish great work in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to thousands – and even converting thousands (see Acts 2:41). You see, when they devoted themselves to following Jesus Christ completely (learning from and imitating Him), God would be able to use their abilities to His glory! So it is with you. If you will devote yourself completely to following Jesus Christ, He will use you (with your abilities) to His glory – including through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Be prepared to preach the word

In order to preach the message of the gospel effectively, you must first know the message of the gospel. You simply cannot teach what you do not know. 1 Peter 3:15 says that Christians should be “ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Colossians 4:5-6 instructs the Christian to “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

Teaching the gospel of Christ will begin by learning the “first principles” of God’s word. These

are the very basics of the gospel. And, anyone who is a Christian ought to be able to explain the basics to others – because he/she has already believed and obeyed it. So, even a new Christian should be able to tell other people about the problem of sin, the grace of God, and the required steps of salvation.

Then, every Christian is expected to mature in the faith of the gospel. He/she is expected to move beyond just an understanding of the fundamentals of the gospel and be able to comprehend much more of the gospel's message. This will enable the Christian to answer more questions and help a greater number of people understand and obey the gospel's message. In order to accomplish this growth, the Christian will have to be continuously devoted to learning God's word. So, if you want to fulfill your God-given role and help the lost be saved, you need to spend time every day studying and meditating on God's word so that you will better understand and be able to teach its saving message!

Understand that not all will accept the word

As you endeavor to tell people about the gospel of Christ, you must understand that you will encounter mixed results. After all, Jesus, His apostles, and the early Christians did not have a 100% conversion rate with everyone they taught. Actually, only a very small percentage of the people they taught were converted. For instance, of all the people Jesus taught while He was on this earth, there were only 120 disciples in Acts 1. Even in Acts 2, when the gospel was preached by the apostles and about 3,000 people were baptized, there was likely only a very small percentage of people actually converted. Though we are not told how many people were present for the preaching, the number could have been in the hundreds of thousands (or even over a million). The same can be seen throughout the Scriptures.

Remember that Jesus said “few” would be saved (Matthew 7:13-14). Therefore, most people you come into contact with will not choose to believe and obey the gospel. In fact, there will likely be some you try to teach who will mistreat you because of your preaching. However, remember what Jesus told His apostles. “And whoever will not receive you nor

hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14). Certainly, whenever someone you teach rejects the gospel of Christ, you must not get discouraged and give up on teaching! There are still other people who need to hear the gospel – and you will not help them unless you continue preaching.

Whenever the apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season,” he also instructed him to be “longsuffering” (2 Timothy 4:2). This instruction implies that preaching will not always be easy and the gospel of Jesus Christ will not always be accepted. Yet, the Christian must persevere through these times of rejection and recognize that “success” in preaching is anytime God's word is taught. God simply never measures “success” in preaching by the number of people who are converted!

Realize that you are not responsible for the results

The work of preaching the gospel of Christ is equated to the work of sowing seed, in Jesus' parable of the soils (see Luke 8:4-8, 11-15). Jesus says that the seed is the word of God – and demonstrates that the sower simply takes the seed and plants it in the hearts of mankind. However, as he does so, he finds mixed results based on different soil conditions. Some soil will not receive the seed. Some soil produces immediate results, but the results are short-lived. Then, there are others who will accept the seed and produce the desired fruit.

Now, the differing results in this parable was not the product of the sower's work. Nor was it because of a defect in the seed. It was the product of the different types of soil conditions. Furthermore, even the fruit that was produced whenever the seed was planted in the good ground was not because of the sower. Instead, it was the product of the seed finding the right soil. So, while the sower is important (because the seed will not have any impact if it is left in the barn), the sower/preacher is not responsible for any of the results – positive or negative (as long as he/she is planting the right seed).

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 explains. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through

whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” Ultimately, any good that is done through the preaching of God’s word is because of God. And, any time the gospel is rejected is because of some problem with the hearts of those who hear the gospel. The Christian just publishes the message.

Petition God for help in preaching

With the results of preaching being outside of your ability to control, you must simply be diligent in petitioning God for help. After all, He is the one who gives the increase to the word that is sown in the hearts of men and women (1 Corinthians 3:6). As a Christian, you have the wonderful opportunity to pray to God and find help. And, He has promised that there is power in the prayers offered by righteous people (see James 5:16).

The Scriptures provide you with examples of prayer being offered in connection with the preaching of God’s word. Let me give you two examples. (1) After the apostles Peter and John were threatened not to preach in the name of Jesus anymore, they went to their companions and prayed together (see Acts 4:23-31). As they prayed, consider what was said in verses 29-30. “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” Then, after praying, verse 31 says that they “spoke the word of God with boldness” (which can be seen in chapter 5).

(2) Consider what Paul requested from the Christians in Colossae. Colossians 4:2-4 says, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” Paul certainly recognized that preaching God’s word was too great a task to undertake without the help of God!

Use your time wisely

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is going to require a time commitment. It will certainly take time to find someone to talk with about the gospel, talk to them, and study with them. Therefore, if you are interested in fulfilling the command of God to preach the gospel of Christ, you must be prepared to sacrifice some of your time in order to serve God through preaching.

Look at Colossians 4:5 again. Paul said, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.” The concept of “redeeming” time means that time needs to be bought up. That is, you must make the best use of your time (see also Ephesians 5:15-16). Specifically, this passage implies that there is a way to *not* make the best use of your time in the area of preaching.

It is certainly possible for Christians to become so consumed by other things that they fail to make the appropriate time commitment to preaching the gospel of Christ. By filling their schedules with other things, they can have little/no time left to make a determined effort to find and teach those who are lost in sin. Please, dear Christian, do not allow your schedule to become so filled that you cannot make an appropriate time commitment to find and teach those who are lost in sin and headed for an eternal punishment in Hell fire! Redeem the time!

Preach with boldness

Then, what happens whenever you do put forth the effort to seek out the lost – and an opportunity does present itself? Are you bold enough to take advantage of that opportunity by teaching the message of the gospel? Or, do you cower from the opportunity because you are afraid of how the person will receive the message?

To be bold is to be unreserved. It does *not* mean that you must speak the truth in an unkind or angry kind of way. Instead, boldness simply means that you must be willing to say what needs to be said – in the way it needs to be said. It means that you will always preach the word – whether it is “in season” or “out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). But, it also requires that you speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

Boldness is an essential element to effective gospel preaching because God does not want you just to tell people whatever they desire to hear (read 2 Timothy 4:1-4 again). In fact, what people want to hear and what they need to hear are often two very different things. What they want to hear will often not result in the salvation of their souls. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the “power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16). Therefore, like the apostles in Acts 4:31, you must dedicate yourself to preaching the word of God with all boldness.

Recognize the value of one

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the vast number of people who need to hear the message of the gospel. However, preaching the gospel is not a “one size fits all” kind of work. Instead, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is extremely personal. In fact, methods of preaching that are the most personal in nature often produce the greatest number of conversions.

So, as you seek to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, you must be able to see the value of each soul that you meet and the potential that each person has to serve Jesus Christ – and have compassion on each soul! Jesus teaches this great lesson in a couple of places. First, He teaches this lesson by example in John 4. In this chapter, Jesus shows compassion on one woman who He had the opportunity to teach. And, by teaching this one woman, she returned to her home and told the people she knew – and many people believed in Jesus.

Second, consider Jesus’ parables in Luke 15:1-10. Jesus teaches two parables in this passage. One parable is about a man who lost one of 100 sheep. The second parable is about a woman who lost one of 10 coins. Both of these parables demonstrate how the individual valued the one that was lost so much that diligent search was made until it was found. Then, when it was found, there was rejoicing over it. Likewise, Jesus says that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10)! Though one person may seem insignificant, God says that each one is extremely valuable – because each soul is worth more than everything that is on this earth (Matthew 16:26). And, that one soul will then be able to avoid the

eternal punishment of Hell fire and live eternally in Heaven. Dear Christian, please do not view any soul as insignificant.

Always be preaching

One final principle I wish to offer from the Scriptures is the principle that you should always be preaching. You should not view your work as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ as something you start and stop. Instead, you should always be praying for opportunities to preach and be looking for the opportunities that are presented – as they sometimes come when you least expect them.

There are two ways you should always be preaching. First, you should make the best use of whatever opportunities you have to point people to Jesus – even during the course of your normal conversations. Give people the opportunity to talk about Jesus and the gospel. You can learn from Jesus concerning how He turned a conversation about water into a transformative spiritual conversation (see John 4). Second, you should be dedicating your life as a message of righteousness. Matthew 5:16 speaks of letting your light shine before people so “that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” 1 Peter 3:1-2 speaks concerning Christian women who can lead their unbelieving husbands to Christ “without a word,” by their faithful conduct.

You see, there is a great deal of *generic* authority for preaching the gospel. That is, there is no one set method/avenue God has commanded you to use in preaching the gospel in your life. He has given you the freedom to take advantage of numerous tools and avenues in order to publish His saving message. But, in order to be the most effective in preaching, you must be continually dedicated to publishing God’s message!

Conclusion

Are you fulfilling your God-given responsibility to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are lost? Are you looking for every opportunity you can to publish His saving message?

Or, are you sinning against God by refusing to spread His warning? You will be held personally responsible for whether you are doing your part to preach His gospel.

How can you be prepared to preach the word?

Will everyone accept true gospel preaching?

Study Questions

1. Preaching Is The Work Of Every Christian

Who must preach?

Are you responsible for the results of preaching?

What must you preach?

How should you ask for help in preaching?

Why must you preach?

How do you need to manage your time in order to preach the gospel?

2. Important Principles In Preaching

What does it mean to be “lost”?

What is boldness? How should boldness be involved in your preaching?

What did Jesus do for the lost?

What is the value of each soul? How should this impact your preaching?

What does require for someone to be saved?

How often should be focused on preaching God’s word?

What was your spiritual condition prior to becoming a Christian?

How does God want to use you in reaching the lost?