



BECOMING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST

(Extracts from a booklet, with diagrams, prepared by John Mallison in the early 1980's

It is hoped to shortly have this available, with the diagrams,

on John Mallison's Website www.johnmallison.com)

1. God loves us and made us for a close relationship with himself.

God created us "in His image" (Genesis 1:26) which gives us status and responsibility in the creation.

His intention is for us to live in close fellowship with Him in His kingdom and under His kingly rule.

God did not create us as puppets, He made us free so that we would freely love and serve Him, but we can also use that freedom to rebel against him and do to well.

2. We have not become what God intended.

The original intimate relationship with God has been broken right from the beginning of the human race. Now we choose not to live God's way.

Everyone has sinned, everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan."

(Romans 3:23 J.B. Phillips).

"Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God"

Isaiah 59:2.

Sin has spoilt our lives they are not as God intended them. We have been squeezed into the mould of a world that is rebellious against God.

(Romans 12:2 J.B. Phillips).

3. God did for us through Jesus Christ what we could never do for ourselves.

Christ is the perfect likeness of God..."In him all the full nature of God chose to dwell." Colossians 1:15,19.

Because God loves us he made it possible for us to have our close relationship with him restored.

"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself," (restoring our relationship) 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Through Jesus Christ, the Son, God dealt with the problem of sin which spoilt his image in us and our relationship with him. "God shows his love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for our sins". Romans 5:8. "Christ was innocent of sin, and yet for our sake God made him one with the sinfulness of human beings, so that in him we might be made one with the goodness of God himself". 2 Corinthians 5:21.

4. What God has done in Jesus Christ becomes real for us through faith.

Faith involves ...

**believing that in Christ God forgives sin and breaks its power.
actually trusting God for forgiveness and new life.
reaching out to receive God's love and help in Christ.**

Faith is associated with ...

**repentance ... sorrow for past wrong doing and turning away from evil.
conversion ... turning to God and his kingdom.**

This step is often called "commitment to Christ".

- "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16.

- "For by grace you have been saved *through faith*; and this is not your own doing, it is the - gift of God -- not because of works, lest any person should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9.

"I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10.

5. Significant changes then take place.

We are born anew

John 3:3 we become a new person

..."If anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come" 2 Corinthians 5:17

We enter into a new relationship with God

He becomes our FATHER in a special sense. "...we are children of God., and if children, then heirs, heirs of God". Romans 8:14-17.

We make Him our LORD and King and seek to please Him, to live in obedience, instead of being self-centred we become Christ-centred.

"If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your hearts that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved". Romans 10:9.

He is our LIFE. As followers of the risen Christ we have a new power within us. God the Holy Spirit gives us new spiritual resources which help us to live life as God intended. "I will pray the

Father , and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth....he dwells with you and shall be in you. John 14:16,17. (See also Acts 2:38, Philippians 4:13, Romans 8:37).

We enter into a new relationship with Others

We become part of the community of those who have faith in Jesus Christ (his family), the Kingdom of God) with both privileges and responsibilities.

We share Christ's caring concern for others.

We have a new purpose to live for, to serve him and the world for which he died.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you".

John 15:12, (See also John 13:34,35).

6. Our relationship with God needs to be maintained.

For any relationship to grow one needs to spend time with the other person. In our relationship with God this is achieved by prayer, and by knowing, understanding and putting into practice the teachings of the Bible. It also grows through fellowship with other followers of Christ, sharing our faith with others and showing our love and concern for them in practical ways.

We are to make him lord of every area of our lives.

The new power of God within us flows out into our everyday living making us more like God intended us to be through activities which become channels of his grace, opposing the evil forces which spoil our lives.

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7. The 1, 2, 3s of the Christian Life

One body

It is not an optional extra to belong to the fellowship comprised of those who have faith in Christ. We are not saved to an individualistic Christian existence. By faith we are born into the family of God. We can't be truly Christian alone, we need each other, in becoming like Christ we need each other's ministry---each other's love, care, counsel and prayers (Ephesians 4:25...."we are members one of another". When we gather with other believers in worship, fellowship and service we both receive and give. Each has a special role to fulfil.

We need to be involved in the local expression of the "Body of Christ" - our church, and also a small group of disciples who are eager to grow and serve. The small group is a smaller expression of the large community of faith.

Two natures

Many become confused when they experience the continuing evil potential within them after their commitment to Christ.

Within each follower of Christ there is a potential for evil and a potential for good. The "old nature" is that self-centred, rebellious spirit which dictated our former way of life. These old ways have to be abandoned (Ephesians 4:22). But this is no negative appeal to merely abandon evil ways. Such would result in a vacuum which would quickly revert back to former ways. The new God-like nature has to become part of us. (Ephesians 4:24).

In Galatians 4:16-25 Paul develops this concept further calling the two natures "the flesh" and "the spirit". They are opposed to each other, the old nature seeking to draw us away from God and the new nature, created by God, the Holy Spirit, restoring the image of God ("in true righteousness and holiness" Ephesians 4:24 and strengthening our relationship with God.

Most new followers of Jesus Christ become concerned about a new sensitivity to sin in their lives. Christians are not perfect. The potential for evil regularly surfaces in un-Christlike attitudes and behaviour. But the renewing force of the Holy Spirit is present to set us free to be pleasing to God.

Two in partnership

It is important to understand that the Christian's life is a partnership. A new disciple is not expected to struggle through in his/her own strength. The Holy Spirit dwells within, bringing the life of God and new power by which to succeed. It is not a solo performance (Romans:11:28; John 14:16, 26).

The Holy Spirit is the creator of the "new you" and indwells us from the moment of repentance and

faith (Acts 2:38). He also gives us special gifts to effectively serve God and others. (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:7.)

Three aspects of salvation

Our relationship to God is a developing experience and it is important to understand this if we are to grow spiritually.

Past. **When we respond in faith to Jesus Christ we are forgiven and saved, or set free, from the penalty of sin. (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:23).**

Present. **But that does not end the matter...it is a continuing process. We need to be healed of those things that spoil life and to be more like Jesus. God frees us daily, from the power of sin as we continue to draw upon his life and power by faith (1 Corinthians 1:18).**

Future. **Christians have the certainty that this relationship is not destroyed by death. The process of healing is completed in the life after death when we are saved from the presence of sin. (Romans 5:9,10); 1 Corinthians 15:55-57).**

8. Christian Certainty

How can we be sure that our spiritual experience is really from God and not purely emotional?

The Outer Witness

The indwelling Holy Spirit produces a new quality of life within, which is evidenced in new attitudes and behaviour. (Ephesians, Chapter 4). The new disciple will not always be aware of this change. Christian friends play an important role in recognising and affirming this outward evidence of the new inner creation.

John Powell in "He Touched Me" (Argus 1974) shared his belief that when God touches a human being, the experience will survive three tests:

1. The Time Test: "The person touched by God will never be the same again. Even if change is not dramatic the experience will leave a permanent work". This is a long term test. Only time will prove that it was not a "flash in the pan". (Philippians 1:6).

2. The Reality Test: A proof that a person has had a genuine experience of God's grace is that it puts him/her in touch with the world as never before. It doesn't leave him/her living 'on cloud nine' in an unreal world, but it deepens awareness of the world around. People should be lifted out of their selfish little world and come alive to both the beauty and need of the wider world; as never before.

3. The Charity Rest: When people are touched by God they mirror the God of love in their behaviour. They become more loving. They love in the way Christ loved -- aloofness from others' needs gives way to identification, and selfishness fades into self-giving. The love of God floods into their hearts by the Holy Spirit producing a new love for God and mankind. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren". (1 John 3:14).

The Inner Witness

Christian certainty is not based on feelings. There will be times of joy and elation, but these will fluctuate according to circumstances. The Holy Spirit who indwells the Christian disciple will produce an *inner certainty*, what John Wesley referred to as "the inner witness" -- "When we cry, Abba! Father! it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (Romans 8:16). "We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 John 3:24, see also 4:13 and 5:10).

The Witness of Scripture

Assurance rests heavily upon an understanding of the Scriptures and an acceptance by faith of the promises they contain. The Bible is the record of God's revelation of himself and his intention for

humankind. It reveals his plan of salvation, it conveys the new covenant, the promises of grace. As with any covenant, it sets out God's part and our part. When we fulfil our part in a personal response in faith, we trust God will honour his side of the covenant. As we read the Scriptures and become more aware of the breadth and depth of his grace in Christ, and respond in faith, this certainty grows. (1 John 5:13 and John 20:31).

To say a Christian believer can never be sure is to cast serious doubts on God's integrity. (1 John 5:10). It is not presumptuous to have a humble certainty that we are forgiven and accepted into a right relationship with God. The promises are there for us to claim by faith. (1 John 5:11,12; John 1:12; 6:37; 5:24).

There are a number of helpful daily Bible reading guides for beginners and those more mature as followers of Christ. Scripture Union has a wide variety as do a number of other organisations. Check out your local Christian Book Shop.