

Foundations I, Part 4: The Christian Life and the Church

Having been Justified by faith and adopted into the family of God, let us now consider what the Christian life is to be like.

Matthew 28:19–20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus Plan for His people:

1. **They become a disciple** (through the Gospel)
2. **Associate with the Church** (Baptize)
3. **Goal: Learn to obey their God** (Teaching them to observe all that has been commanded)

Let's start with that goal and work backwards to the church.

Obedience: That is the great goal of becoming a Christian. A person can read all the Christian books in the world or pray with an older Christian every day, but if there is not a real change in their life marked by growing obedience to Christ then that person is very likely not a Christian.

Two reasons why obedience is important.

1. Obedience is important because God is glorified through the way we live.

God is glorified in our lives as we display his character to the world around us, not only by what we say, but by how we live. If we call ourselves Christians but live in a way that is clearly contrary to God's character, then we misrepresent God to those around us.

Philippians 1:9-11: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Why is Paul so eager for their love for Christ to grow/about? Note the connector: “so that” – denotes that the purpose is coming afterwards. *So that* they can “discern what is best” (so they can say *no* to sin) and “be pure and blameless”(that is, they can be holy). And what is the overarching goal of these things? “To the glory and praise of God!” Again, what you see is greater love resulting in greater obedience. The two are inextricably linked.

2. Obedience is important because it is a mark of true Christians.

Jonathan Edwards spent a great deal of time considering all the marks of conversion that attend the work of the Spirit in the great awakening. In the end he finally concluded that growth in personal holiness over time was the most universal and most reliable evidence of a true work of the Spirit. It is the same for us today.

An internal change (e.g., a love for Christ) should manifest itself in an external change of life (e.g., greater obedience). Think about **John 14:15**, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” There is an inescapable link between our love for Christ and our obedience to Christ. Our love for Christ births in us a desire to please Him. If we are truly regenerate and have the Holy Spirit living in us, our greatest desire will be to do Christ's will.

Obviously, that obedience does not make them a Christian; but it shows us about what resides within their heart.

This process of growing in our obedience/holiness is called sanctification.

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace by which we are renewed throughout in the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness.

1. **An ongoing work, not a one time act like justification and adoption**
2. **We are enabled, meaning we have to work at growing in holiness.**

Philippians 2:12–13, “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*”

1 Peter 2:24, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*”

Sanctification means making a person holy. It is called a work because, although the believer has made a definite break with his old life, his being made actually holy is carried on by degrees. It is a renewal because it restores us so as to be like God made us in the beginning.

How to develop a heart that wants to obey God?

What does it mean to have a heart for God?

1. It is a passion to know God, Philippians 3:10.

2. It is a passion to deny self, Luke 9:23-27.

a. Self-denial is demanded of all who claim to follow Jesus.

b. Self-denial is not once and for all, but daily.

c. Self-denial is painful: Perhaps rejection by friends, family. Misunderstood by friends, family. Perhaps hated, maligned by others.

3. It is a passion to serve others, Matthew 20:20-28.

a. To serve others, we must deny self exaltation, v. 21.

b. To serve others, we must be willing to suffer with Jesus, v. 23.

c. To serve others, we must see the other person as a king and ourselves as his servant, slave, vs 26, 27.

What should I do to develop a heart for God?

A. Meet with God daily.

1. Read the Scriptures systematically, Acts 17:11.

a. See the McCheyne daily reading schedule published is on resource

2. Read the Scriptures devotionally, Luke 24:32.

3. Worship God daily, Psalm 5:3, John 4:24.

B. Examine yourself daily.

1. Be hard on yourself (ruthless self-examination, intolerant toward any sin), **but gentle and patient**

with others and their sins, II Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:2, 3.

2. Understand the difference between legalism and discipline.

a. Legalism- man attempting to gain God's favor by religious activity, Mt. 23:13-39.

b. Discipline -- denying self of good things that deaden spiritual vitality, I Tim 4:7.

How do we read the Bible?

A. Not:

1. Simply to increase our knowledge, I Corinthians 8:1.

Head knowledge without emotion, action promotes pride and arrogance.

2. To support a pet theological doctrine, John 5:39, 40.

Being a student of God's word does not guarantee one is a child of God,

3. To gather ammunition with which to blast others, Matthew 19:3 ff.

4. To fulfill a religious ritual.

Most of us, at times, read the Bible and then check it off our "To Do" list. Thus, the Bible becomes sterile, lifeless, and will not feed the soul.

5. To be relieved of emotional, spiritual pain as though it were a drug.

Such people only read the Bible in a time of perceived need.

B. But we should read the Bible:

1. To show us our sin.

- a. To convict us of sin, Luke 5:31.
- b. To produce sorrow for sin, Acts 2:37.
- c. To elicit confession of sin, Psalm 32:5.
- d. To produce a deep hatred for sin, Psalm 97:10.

2. To reveal the Triune God to us.

- a. An awe of God, Psalm 33:8.
- b. A greater trust in God, Job 13:15.
- c. Our need of Jesus and His sufficiency, Isaiah 64:4; John 15:5.
- d. A deeper love for Jesus, Hebrews 11:26.
- e. A deeper awareness of, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, John 16.13,14; II Peter 1:3, 4.

3. To move us to obedience and love for Jesus.

- a. To see God's demands upon us, Deuteronomy 6:5
- b. To see how we have failed to meet His demands, Isaiah 53:6.
- c. To produce a greater zeal to obey God, Psalm 119:97.
- d. To produce a greater zeal for prayer, Mark 1:35.

Practically applying what you read.

1. SPECK. After reading, ask yourself:

- S - Is there any Sin to avoid?
- P - Is there any Promise to claim?
- E - Is there any Example to follow?
- C - Is there any Command to obey?
- K - Is there any new Knowledge of Jesus?

Developing a Consistent Prayer Life

What is prayer?

Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

1 John 5:14, *“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”*

Prayer does not have to be audible to be true prayer. John Calvin (1509-1564), the great church reformer, describes prayer as ‘an intimate conversation of the pious with God.’ That is not prayer in which the heart is not engaged. We cannot truly call on God if we do not know him. Only in the gospel does his grace and mercy become known so that we may approach him with confidence.

Our hearts must be in the right condition

1. Being poor in spirit, Matthew 5:3.

- a. "I can do nothing on my own because I am nothing in myself."
- b. "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me."
- c. "I give all credit to God for anything that I am able to do."

2. Grieving over sin, Matthew 5:4.

Do not hide or explain away your sin. a. Remember, God sees all, Psalm 139:1 ff.
Repent daily of your sin, I John 1:9. (To repent means to think again differently, then to act differently.)

3. Being gentle, Matthew 5:5.

Do not: Demand your own personal rights, be hypersensitive, defend yourself, crusade for your vindication, or lash out at those who attack you.

Do: Be patient, self-controlled (angry at the right time, never angry at the wrong time), strong and courageous, Yield your future: health, reputation, prosperity into God's loving hands.

4. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness, Matthew 5:6. 1.

Why? Because of our failures in the first three beatitudes and because of the power of indwelling sin.

How to structure our prayers: ACTS.

A: Adoration- Begin your prayer time with praise and adoration

Read or recite Psalms such as Psalms 8,23,34,91,93-100,103,139,145-150.

Address God through His various names or titles

C: Confession

1. Unconfessed sin blocks God's blessing, Psalm 66:18.

2. Ask God to show you your sin, Psalm 139:23, 24.

Evaluate your life in light of: Exodus 20; Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 12,13;

3. Do not be healed "too quickly."

See that your sin grieves God, Isaiah 53:11.

Let your sin break your heart, Isaiah 66:2.

Leave your sin at the cross, Isaiah 53:4-6.

T: Thanksgiving.

1. Learn to be thankful in everything, I Thessalonians 5:18.

Giving thanks is a statement of faith, Philippians 4:6.

When discouraged, list things for which you are thankful.

S: Supplication.

1. Making specific requests.

Pray these prayers of Paul: (*Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-11, Ephesians 1:18,19, 3:14-19.*)

2. A suggested prayer list.

a. Daily, pray for your family; close friends in need; the purpose, objectives, and goals of the church.

b. Weekly: Sunday - Various preachers, Sunday School teachers. Monday - Missionaries.

Tuesday - Local ministries. Wednesday - Unconverted friends, family, work associates.

Thursday - Christian friends with continual problems. Friday - Our Government and its leaders.

Saturday - Revival in our nation.

The Church

The word *church* is a Greek word--*ekklesia*. It means "that which is called out for a special purpose; an assembly."

The Universal Church: Consists of all true believers from all ages. Rev. 5:9

The invisible church consists of those who have been redeemed and are truly Christians. They are regenerate, born-again, made new creatures, and are indwelt by God (John 14:23). They are the ones who have trusted, by faith alone, in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and have repented of their sins. They believe in Jesus as God in flesh (John 1:1, 14; Colossians 2:9), who died on the cross, and physically rose from the dead as a payment for our sins. These people are the ones who have been justified by faith (Romans 3:28; 5:1).

The Visible Church: Consists of all those who profess Christianity and their children.

The visible church consists of the manifestation and appearance of those who identify themselves as Christians. This outward appearance consists of the denominations, buildings, pastors, elders, church attendees, and ceremonies like preaching, communion, and baptism. It is what is visible to anyone and everyone. However, not all who attend physical churches are truly Christians. The visible church can be true or false. It can be true if it holds to biblical theology or it can be false if it denies one or more of the essentials of the Christian faith. There is no singular official pattern of the visible church. Christians can meet in buildings, parks, deserts, beaches, or anywhere there is a gathering of professing believers. Some visible churches have multiple pastor, and some do not. Some have regimented, traditional worship services and others are more casual. Music can be hymns there set to organ music or praise songs that use drums and guitar. The visible church as a wide variety of manifestations and is not limited to geographical, denominational, or cultural boundaries.

What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a holy ordinance appointed by Christ, by which, by visible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed and applied to believers. Matthew 28:19, Matthew 26:26-28

To the observer, the sacraments are visible signs, declaring and bringing to the mind the leading truths which are revealed in Scripture concerning the way of salvation. They are thus seals, confirming the truth of God, just as a seal is affixed to a document so that it may be known to be genuine. To the properly qualified participant (a believer), the sacraments are signs and seals confirming his or her interest in Christ and applying or exhibiting Christ and all his benefits to the soul. Thus the Holy Spirit enables the more vigorous exercise of faith, and enjoyment of the benefits of the Christian life.

The sacraments of the New Testament are, two only, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and these take the place of Circumcision and the Passover in the Old Testament.

What is Baptism?

Baptism is the sacrament in which the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, signifies and seals our being grafted into Christ, and having a share in the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our pledge to be the Lord's.

Baptism is not a private thing but it is given by Christ to his church. Water speaks of cleansing, and this is what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together do for us. The precise mode of baptism is not described in detail in the New Testament. After all, the water is a symbol of a change beyond the power of water, and so the quantity used is not of much importance. The positive teaching of Scripture is that baptism involves putting water on the person, not putting the person into water, and the parallel with Holy Spirit baptism confirms this (Mat 3:11 compare Acts 2). A simple mode suitable to all kinds of people and situations is implied by the New Testament descriptions. Total immersion lacks Old Testament precedent or clear New Testament justification. Sprinkling/pouring has a very adequate basis in the Bible (see also Eze 36:24-27 with Heb 10:11-18).

What is the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament in which, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to Christ's appointment, his death is proclaimed, and those who receive rightly are by faith (and not by the mouth in a physical manner) made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

1 Cor 10:16-17

The Gospels of Matthew (26:26ff), Mark (14:22ff), and Luke (22:14ff) all report the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples the night before he died. Each describes Jesus giving thanks or blessing the bread and the cup, and giving them to his disciples saying that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of the covenant, or the new covenant in his blood. In Luke 22:19, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore the Lord's supper is an opportunity to remember Jesus' sacrifice to save us from our sins.

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