



Follow Me

A Walking Relationship
with Jesus

A series of seventeen Bible studies
exploring the biblical foundations
for true discipleship.

**George Tabert
and
Andre van Ameyde**

intothebible.com

© 2002 George Tabert and Andre van Ameyde

All rights reserved. Permission granted to copy and distribute. Alteration or sale for profit not permitted.

Scripture quotations are taken from The New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

These studies are based on *Making Disciples*, by George Tabert, a series of studies on New Testament discipleship. They can be found, along with other resources, at the website **intothebible.com**

The ministry of intothebible.com provides biblical resources. It is carried out on a faith basis. Any correspondence, including ordering more of these booklets, can be carried out through the website.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
DISCIPLESHIP: THE WALKING RELATIONSHIP	7
1. The Christian as Disciple	8
THE GOSPEL: ORIENTATION FOR THE WALK	14
2. The Risen Lord	15
3. The Lord Who Died	21
4. The Two Calls	27
5. The Indwelling Spirit	35
6. The Cross	41
<i>Illustration: The Four Elements of the Gospel</i>	48
7. Assurance of Salvation	49
BAPTISM: COMMITTING TO THE WALK	55
8. An Act of Discipleship	56
9. United with Christ	63
10. Living by the Spirit (1)	70
11. Living by the Spirit (2)	77
12. Channels of Grace	83
THE LORD'S SUPPER: WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP	91
13. Introducing the Church	92
14. Called to Supper	99
15. The Body in Action	105
16. Commitments at Supper	112
17. Staying Focused	119
EPILOGUE	126



INTRODUCTION

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

1 John 2:6

The New Testament has a lot to say about walking with Jesus. Initially, there were the first disciples who literally walked with him as he traveled about. In this way their relationship with Jesus consisted of physically following him and learning from him. But the walking did not end with the first disciples. The scriptures (for example, the verses cited above) teach that all believers have been brought into a walking relationship with Jesus.

From his glorified position in heaven, Jesus directs and empowers all believers to learn their walk, or manner of life, from him. That is the nature of the relationship with him that we have been brought into by faith. It is a walking relationship.

As Christians we need to understand how our faith leads to such a relationship, and what that relationship is like.

The Study Plan

In this study we will look at how Jesus Christ brings us into a walking relationship with himself.

First we will see that with the coming of Jesus, God's people are identified and set apart as Jesus' disciples—those who learn their way of life, or walk, from him (*Study 1*).

We will then look at the walking relationship, also known as discipleship, using three headings or reference points. All three are acts of the church that originate with Jesus and were carried out by the apostles after him:

- (1) the proclamation of the gospel, by which we are converted (*Studies 2-7*)
- (2) baptism (*Studies 8-12*)
- (3) the Lord's Supper (*Studies 13-17*)

Our first reference point is gospel proclamation because our faith comes through this proclamation (Rom. 10:17). Through faith, we receive Christ and are in Christ, and we are set on our walk.

The second and third points, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are rites—physical acts through which we express and commit ourselves to the realities represented in those acts. Both of these rites are concerned with our walk. Baptism expresses the once for all change in our manner of life. The Lord's Supper expresses our ongoing commitment to walk together as members of the church.

Using this Study

This study is intended both for new believers as well as for those who may have been Christians for some time. The foundational nature of our walking relationship with Jesus is so vital to biblical faith that as disciples we can always benefit by reviewing it.

Because our experience in the faith varies, there may be an occasional question you cannot relate to. Don't worry. Ask your own questions. Indeed, we hope this study will prompt much investigation and discussion that in turn leads to serious reflection and prayer, for this is crucial to genuine spiritual growth.

The personal dimension

This brings us to an important aspect of the process of spiritual growth and discipleship:

Discipleship material (including this study) cannot replace other disciples.

Consider the significance of the fact that Jesus made disciples by entering into a relationship with them. Yes, it is true and of vital importance that (1) he gave the word of God. It is also true and of vital importance that (2) the divine Spirit was present in him, and through him was with the disciples. But, in addition, let us remember that (3) he established a close relationship with his disciples in order to join them in his walk. All three of these dimensions were part of his work in making disciples.

In the same way, to learn the walking relationship with Jesus we need (1) the word of God in the Bible (which can be opened up to us by discipleship material such as this study) and (2) the indwelling Spirit of God (which we have by faith in Jesus). But, we also need (3) a relationship with other disciples whom we can join in walking with Jesus. The personal dynamic process of disciples making other disciples, which Jesus set up, is irreplaceable.

Ideally, when a person comes to faith in Christ he is immediately discipled by a more mature believer. Perhaps this has been your experience. If so, then we encourage you to carefully and prayerfully consider the example of this person to see how the biblical principles outlined in this study are to be followed.

What if you do not have a more mature Christian to guide you? In the church, things often do not happen according to the ideal. As a result you may have no one to disciple you. Even if this is the case, God still has a way for you to enter into your walking relationship with Jesus. Jesus said “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Matt. 18:20). This means that wherever two or more believers come together to seek the way of Christ, he is present to guide and teach each one through the other. If you seek out the company of even one other person who wants to pursue this relationship with Jesus, even if that person knows no more than you, you can experience the discipleship process. The key is to truly look for what God may do or say through each other as you pray and discuss together and begin to live out what you learn.

Whether you have someone to disciple you, or whether you simply pursue discipleship alongside others who are in the same position you are, you can enter into Jesus’ disciple-making process. Remember that a study such as this one is only a tool to be used within this inter-personal process.

Taking actual steps

Of course, genuine spiritual growth only happens when we actually begin to live out the word of God, in other words, when we begin to walk. For that to happen we must be willing to bring our thoughts, feelings and ways to be judged and changed by the word. We must also have some concrete steps to take. To that end each of the studies in this book concludes with a short section entitled *Before you go on...*, which contains specific steps to take in order to apply the principles learned.

We strongly urge you to follow these suggested steps by discussing, praying through and acting upon them. In addition, you may discover other steps to take not suggested in this study. Just make sure they are indeed in the way of Jesus. By translating what you learn into actual steps, your relationship with Jesus will truly be a walking relationship.

The Gospel of Matthew

The study is drawn from many New Testament passages. We take our overall mandate, though, from the Great Commission recorded in Matt. 28:18-20, in which Jesus commands his followers to go and make disciples. In fact, you will notice that considerable use is made of the Gospel of Matthew in general. This is because it particularly focuses on discipleship as a subject.

We see this discipleship focus in Matthew in the many references to discipleship and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It is also seen in the way discipleship fulfills Matthew’s theme of God present with his people. This theme is stated at the outset when, in the words of Isaiah 7, Jesus is announced as *Immanuel* which means “God with us” (Matt. 1:22). It concludes at the very end when the risen Christ commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations and promises that in this enterprise he will be *with* them to the end of the age (28:18-20). The point is clear: it is in discipleship that Christ is with us.



DISCIPLESHIP: THE WALKING RELATIONSHIP

Follow me...

Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9

With these words Jesus called people to God. In a remarkably bold way he called people to relate to God by relating to him. They did this by becoming his followers or disciples. All they could learn of God was to be revealed in him. All that they needed from God was to be found in him.

How could Jesus call people to relate to God by simply relating to himself? He could because Jesus is the divine Son of God. Matthew makes this clear by introducing Jesus as the LORD (that is “Jehovah” or “Yahweh,” the personal name for God in the Old Testament) who is about to come (Matt. 3:3). John the Baptist announces Jesus as the coming Greater One who will baptize not with a physical element such as water, but with a divine reality—the Holy Spirit (3:11). The superior nature of Jesus is seen in that only a divine person can handle the divine Spirit. As John’s ministry comes to a close, Jesus steps forward to fulfill the role of the LORD, carrying out all it means for God to be God in the world.

The first thing Jesus did was to preach the gospel and make disciples (Matt. 4:17-22). His mission was to bring people into a relationship with God, and this relationship was one of discipleship. After he had risen from the dead and just before he ascended into heaven he commanded his disciples to go to all the nations and do the same (Matt. 28:18-20). He promised he would be with them in this mission. To this day and to the end of the age, the risen Lord is active in the church making disciples. Through the spread of the gospel—the good news about him—he still says, “Follow me!”

1. The Christian as Disciple

The First Christians

The early church first followed Jesus' practice of referring to themselves as disciples.

In Acts 11:26 we read, "and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." This is a very telling comment. It means that up until this time they were simply known as disciples. In fact, throughout the four Gospels and the book of Acts those who believe in and follow Jesus are principally called disciples. It is important for us to grasp this. Sometimes we think only of Jesus' inner circle of twelve as his disciples, but this term was applied to any convert (e.g., Matt. 13:52; Acts 6:7). It was actually unbelievers who began to call disciples Christians (see also Acts 26:28 and 1 Pet. 4:16). The early church followed Jesus' practice in referring to themselves as disciples.

1. Do you consider yourself a disciple of Jesus? Why or why not?

What is it All About?

Disciple, then, is the foundational term for a believer in Jesus. As such it indicates something very basic about our relationship with him. But what does the term mean? What is discipleship? What is it *not*?

A way of life

First, *disciple* simply means *student* or *learner*. Many teachers and leaders in the ancient world had disciples. However, as a student, the disciple did not just encounter his teacher in the classroom. He lived and walked with him. He learned his master's way of life. The master drew the disciple into a relationship that would shape his entire life.

This is especially so with Jesus. He calls for a response in the disciple that entails giving up all to follow him (Matt. 10:24-25, 37-39; 16:24-26). The relationship is

not left abstract or hidden in the heart. The relationship is carried out in our walk, our actual way of life in this world. Discipleship is not just about acquiring head knowledge—memorizing verses and learning answers to difficult questions. Nor is it merely about private belief and devotion. It is about learning the way of Christ. It is the very relationship with God that we have been brought into, and it encompasses all that we do. Our goal as believers is to live out this relationship. In other words, our goal is to become functioning disciples.

2. A good modern equivalent word for disciple is *apprentice*. Does this word change the way you think of discipleship? Would you consider yourself an apprentice of Jesus?

Of Christ alone

Second, we are made disciples of Christ and of no one else. While Jesus was on earth we see this in that he alone made disciples. During this time discipleship was limited to people in physical proximity to Jesus. After he rose from the dead, though, he commissioned his followers to make disciples as well. Of course, they were not to make disciples of themselves, but of Jesus. This became possible because Jesus ascended to his glorified position in heaven and is now able to be with all his disciples wherever they are (Matt. 28:18-20).

Thus discipleship is not about following earthly leaders and teachers. Rather, we must have our own relationship with Jesus. While Christ works through members of the church, he does so in order to make disciples of himself. He brings believers under his personal life-giving guidance and control, which is experienced through a variety of means and people. While we, indeed, should follow the example of godly people in our life (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9), we do so only in order to gain for ourselves the consistent walk with Christ that we want and that they enjoy.

We must have our own relationship with Jesus.

3. How do you see the term *discipleship* used in the Christian world? Is this usage biblical?

4. Consider Matt. 10:24-25, 37-39 and 16:24-26. In your own words describe what being a disciple of Christ involves.

A True Christian

If we follow through with the identification of the first Christians as disciples, we have to say that biblical Christianity is simply discipleship and a true Christian is a disciple. This conclusion seems clear enough. However, it can leave us uneasy in the “Christian” world because discipleship is usually not spoken of as essential Christianity. The absolute and radical commitment to follow Jesus which marks discipleship is not commonly linked to merely being a Christian. Rather, discipleship is often seen as the higher commitment to which we are all called, but to which not all true Christians come. In this gap between Christianity and discipleship we see the distance between present “Christians” and the first ones—the disciples. To be genuinely biblical we must close this distance and recover discipleship as essential Christianity.

5. Why might some professing Christians not want to regard discipleship as essential Christianity?

6. What is the danger in not regarding discipleship as essential Christianity?

Mini – Study: The Crowds and the Disciples

Matthew makes a distinction between two groups who were interested in Jesus: the *crowds* (or *multitudes*) and the *disciples* (see 5:1). Let us explore the difference between these groups.

1. Why do the crowds follow Jesus around (4:23-25)? How do they regard him (7:28-29; 9:8)?
2. How does Jesus view the crowds (9:36-38)? What do they need? Are they saved or lost?
3. What sets the disciples apart from the crowds (4:19; 8:21-22; 9:9)?
4. What does Jesus do with his disciples that he does not do with the crowds (5:1-2; also 13:36-37)?
5. What are the crowds doing in 26:47-48 and 27:20-23? Why are they against Jesus now?
6. Summarize in your own words the difference between crowds and disciples.

The Question of Terms

When we go beyond the Gospels and Acts to the New Testament letters (or *epistles*) we notice that the word *disciple* is no longer used. Instead we see terms such as *saint* (“holy one”) and *believer*. To understand this shift we need to see the relationship between the Gospels and the letters.

The Gospels show us how Jesus first set up the relationship of discipleship with his followers. The Lord then commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations by teaching them to observe all that he commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). In the letters the apostles do just that. They go on to work out how the relationship of discipleship is realized and how we live within it. In so doing they use other terms which serve to describe discipleship and are characteristic of it. Acts functions as a transition between the Gospels and the letters. As we have seen, it continues to use *disciple* but also begins to introduce other terms as well.

This goes to show it is not merely the term *disciple* that is of importance, but rather the relationship it refers to. Ultimately, it does not matter which biblical term we choose to refer to ourselves. The important thing is that the saving relationship we have with Christ is real in our walk—that we are, indeed, disciples.

The important thing is that the saving relationship we have with Christ is real in our walk...

7. Which term (e.g., Christian, disciple, believer, saint) do you usually use to refer to yourself? Why?

8. Can you think of any instances where one term might be more appropriate or effective than another?

Before you go on...

Determine whether the way you relate to Jesus includes looking to him as the Master or Teacher of your life. If so, identify specific ways in which you are following him, or seeking to follow him, in a walking relationship. If not, do you think this is a necessary part of genuine biblical faith? Are you convinced that, biblically speaking, being a Christian means being a disciple?



THE GOSPEL: ORIENTATION FOR THE WALK

Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him...

Colossians 2:6

This scripture tells us something very important about our conversion, or our receiving of Christ, which comes through the gospel. It tells us that it was meant to be the basis for a new walk. Thus the gospel, which is the good news about Christ, prepares us for our walk as disciples.

We can think of our conversion as an orientation session for discipleship. Through it we receive the new focus and direction for our life and we are equipped with the resources to carry it out. The gospel, then, is the material for this orientation session.

In this section we will look at four key elements of the gospel: (1) the subject of the gospel, Jesus the Lord, who is both the risen Lord and the Lord who died; (2) the two calls; (3) the indwelling Spirit and (4) the cross. Specifically we will see how they orient us for our walk with Jesus. After that we will briefly explore the subject of assurance of salvation.

In our conversion we may not have been consciously aware of each of these elements of the gospel. However, as believers, we all heard the good news to the degree that we were brought to repentance and faith in Christ. It is important that we now learn to live on the basis of this repentance and faith. Exploring what is involved in the gospel should make us better oriented and equipped for our walk.

In taking up these four elements of the gospel we are moving into the area of gospel teaching. In a sense, after the initial preaching of the gospel there is only teaching, which opens up what is entailed in the gospel—the full reality and life in Christ. We see this in the letters of Paul. All of his doctrinal and practical instructions are only a deeper exploration and further application of what the gospel announces—salvation in Christ.

2. The Risen Lord

The Focus of Our Faith

The gospel proclaims Jesus as he lives today. He is the risen Lord enthroned in heaven at the Father's right hand. This is the news the apostles announced to the world (Acts 2:24-36; 3:15,21; 4:33; 10:38-43; 13:30-37; 17:30-31).

By announcing the resurrection the gospel calls us to faith in Jesus the Lord.

Jesus' resurrection and exaltation is God's great achievement. In Jesus God achieved what it means for him to be God in this world—a world that is under sin. For this reason Jesus is *Lord*. By announcing the resurrection the gospel calls us to faith in Jesus the Lord. Through faith we enter into what God has achieved in Christ. We step into Jesus' relationship with God and share his triumph. We actually share the risen Lord's relationship with God the Father.

1. Would you say that your faith is focused on Christ the Lord, risen and exalted? If not, how does your faith envision Christ?

2. How does the way the gospel is commonly presented today compare with the way the apostles proclaimed it in Acts (see the passages cited above)?

Mini - Study: Acts 2 – A Sample Sermon

Peter first quotes from the prophet Joel (vv. 14-21) to show the scriptural significance of the events which have just drawn the people's attention. We will pick it up from there.

1. What does Peter say about the people's relationship with God (vv. 22-23)?
2. Approximately what portion of his sermon is then spent on presenting the resurrection?
3. What does Peter say Jesus will do from his risen and enthroned position (vv. 34-35)?
4. In light of this, what must the people do and what will be the result (vv. 37-40)?
5. How did this result work out in their lives (vv. 41-42)?

Salvation and the Risen Lord

Salvation is first of all God's triumph in Christ over evil in this world. Christ was victorious over the evils of death (Rom. 5:12, 17; 1 Cor. 15:54-57) and Satan's reign over us (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15), both of which came about through sin. We are personally saved by being brought into this triumph. In this way we are saved from our sin and its consequences.

God's kingdom come near

Jesus pointed to salvation as God's triumph over sin and evil in his theme of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in the Bible is God's reign. Jesus announced that God's kingdom, or reign, has drawn near (Matt. 4:17 – NASB, KJV "is at hand").

...**G**od has come to remove the power of evil that keeps him from realizing his reign in mankind.

It is God's purpose that his reign over the world be realized through mankind (Gen. 1:26; Heb. 2:5-8). As the image of God, mankind is to exercise God's reign in creation. But, mankind is under sin and evil. For mankind to enter God's reign, the usurping power of evil must be overthrown. This involves confrontation and war (Gen. 3:15). The nearness of the kingdom that Jesus announced means that God has come to remove the power of evil that keeps him from realizing his reign in mankind (Matt. 12:28). God's full authority and triumph over evil was gained for mankind in the resurrection (Matt. 28:18; Col. 2:15; John 12:31). Now the risen Lord holds this authority in heaven where he is enthroned at the Father's right hand. He will bring God's reign to earth when he comes again (Luke 19:11-27).

Through faith in the risen Christ, we are now in the process of entering God's reign (Acts 14:22). We will fully enter it when we are glorified at Christ's return (2 Thess. 1:5-8). At present we have entered his victory over evil and share in his heavenly spiritual authority (Col. 1:13). This works out in our walk with him.

3. Consider Eph. 2:1-10. How are we to live once we have been made alive with Christ?

4. In Eph. 1:15-20 what does Paul pray that the Christians would know (i.e., experience) with respect to the resurrection of Christ?

5. Read the following texts: Matt. 5:20; 7:17-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:5-6. How important is it that God's kingdom, or reign, is evident in our lives?

Salvation clarified

Since salvation is God's triumphal achievement in the resurrection of Jesus, it is critical to see that salvation means being brought into *that* triumph rather than into the fulfillment of our own desires. God is not out to service our felt needs. Salvation, indeed, does meet all of our genuine needs, such as the forgiveness of sins

...our new life is not a renewed or revitalized earthly life...

(Rom. 4:5-8; Col. 1:14), the need to be rescued from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10) and the need to be accepted by God and be assured of his love (Rom. 5:1-2, 5, 10-11; Col. 1:21-22). However, salvation does not consist, at bottom, of God meeting our needs as we, in our natural state, feel or perceive them. Rather, it consists of God bringing us into *his* triumph over sin and evil (Col. 1:13). This means our new life is not a renewed or revitalized earthly life in which all the needs we feel in this world are met. It is the life of God—eternal life. It is liberation from the life of this world that is ruined by sin and under the law of death.

We must not accept only aspects of salvation that satisfy our felt needs but we must receive Christ for the full triumph he achieved. Only then can we consciously give ourselves over to all that Christ is and has gained for us.

6. In what ways do people commonly look to God and to religion to satisfy their felt needs? What are some of these felt needs?

7. Consider Gal. 1:4. How does deliverance from this present evil age change our perspective on our needs?

8. How are the blessings we have in Christ characterized in Eph. 1:3? What are some of these blessings?

All in Christ

Jesus is Lord. That means that in Jesus God came to carry out his role as God in the world—a world that is alienated from him by sin and evil. The resurrection fully shows that Jesus is Lord. He entered this world and became the source of resurrection life and so of the whole new creation. This opens up to us God's relationship to this world: it is in his Son.

Jesus' position as the eternal, divine Son of God is the key to discipleship.

Jesus did not begin to hold this position at the point in time when he was raised from the dead. Rather, he is God from eternity. All things were created through him and for him (Col. 1:16-17; John 1:1-3). Life is and ever was in him (John 1:4). Jesus' position as the eternal, divine Son of God is the key to discipleship. We are in a relationship with God as Father by being joined to Jesus. We live in Jesus' relationship with God.

9. What are the two acts described in Col. 1:15-16 and 19-20 by which we have been made to live in God's relationship with the Son? The first relationship he established was broken by sin, how do we live in the second relationship (vv. 21-23)?

Before you go on...

Review your ideas of what it means to be saved. We are not saved by full knowledge but by faith. But, faith fits into the mould of the full knowledge of the gospel. Does your faith line up with the gospel as we have described it? If not, why not? Are there areas you have to revisit?

3. The Lord Who Died

Once we come to know, through the news of the resurrection, that Jesus is Lord, we can then see the significance of his death. For the Lord to rise from the dead he had to first die.

Life Only Through Death

For us, resurrection life is freedom from death in sin. But for Jesus, the resurrection was first of all based on his death. New life came only through Jesus' death.

Needed: a new relationship of obedience

Mankind can only have life while in a relationship of obedience to God (Gen. 2:16-17). God's law clearly states that his judgment for disobedience, or sin, is death (Gen. 2:17; Deut. 30:15-20; Ezek. 18:20). Mankind disobeyed God (Gen. 3:6) and forfeited life. The great problem of salvation is this: How can sinful mankind, which is under God's judgment of death, again be in a relationship of obedience to God and have life? The resurrection of Jesus bluntly shows us the answer. There we see that new life for mankind can only come through the act of obeying God's will concerning sin, and that will is death.

How can sinful mankind...again be in a relationship of obedience to God and have life?

1. How did Satan, acting in the serpent, have to lie to convince Eve to disobey God (Gen. 3:4)? Do people generally believe mankind is subject to death because the human race has lost its relationship with God? If not, how do most people view death?

2. How did God place mankind under death (Gen. 3:22-24)? Why do you think he continued to allow mankind a lifespan on earth?

3. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed regarding his coming arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22:42-44). What did he pray? What was his ultimate concern? Why?

Jesus' Death for Us

Our new relationship of obedience to God is provided for in Jesus' death. The Bible presents two truths about Jesus' death in relation to us. The first is that *he died for our sins* (Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:3). The second is that *we died to sin with him* (Rom. 6:2, 8, 11). Let us look at these two aspects of Christ's death.

1. He died for our sins

The Son came as a man and laid down his life in obedience to God's requirement for mankind.

God, to accept us, must give us a new relationship that fulfills his requirement of death for sin. This means he must give us a relationship in which life is laid down in death and then raised anew—he must give us a resurrection relationship. But who has life to lay down in obedience to God's requirement for mankind? We do not have it, since life does not belong to us. While it is true that as creatures the Creator has made us alive (though even our creaturely life is now forfeit due to sin), life is not ours to lay down. Life belongs to God alone, and only he can lay it down. This he did in his Son, the one through whom God relates to creation and the one in whom is life as God gives it to us. The Son came as a man and laid down his life in obedience to God's requirement for mankind (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8). His death is the act of righteousness and of true obedience that answers to Adam's transgression and disobedience in sin (Rom. 5:18-19).

Through the death of Jesus, God has provided for us a relationship in obedience to God in his judgment on sin. Such a relationship of obedience to God is the relationship of life. This is what we have in Christ.

4. What is the difference between Adam's act and Jesus' act in Rom. 5:17-19?

Atonement made

God has forgiven us through the blood, or sacrifice, of his Son. Romans 3:25-26 says that God gave Jesus for “atonement” or “propitiation” (the removal of sins before God) to demonstrate his righteousness, “that [God] might be *just* and the *justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This means that (1) in the atonement God himself is proved to be *just* because by forgiving us through the blood of Jesus, God is clear of being corrupted by sin when he accepts us. His judgment is not violated now. It also means that (2) in the atonement God *justifies* believers—we are cleared of all sin before God and fully accepted by God.

The atonement is the essential foundation for discipleship.

The atonement is the essential foundation for discipleship. God's grace in forgiving us and accepting us into a life-giving relationship is as holy as God is in his judgment against all sin. Therefore, the relationship that we have with God does not tolerate or accommodate sin. It is as holy as God is.

Justified by faith

How can we receive the justification made possible by Christ's atoning death? Only through faith (Rom. 3:20; 5:1; Gal. 2:16). We can do nothing ourselves to remove sin from our personal relationship with God or to secure acceptance by him. We can only come to God in faith, trusting that he has done all to remove our sins (more about our response of faith in the next study). Through the blood of Jesus, all sins are freely forgiven (Rev. 1:5).

Justification by faith is the vital starting point for our discipleship. It is true that as disciples we learn to overcome sin and live sanctified lives. But, doing God's will does not earn or secure God's forgiveness and our relationship with God in Christ Jesus. We do God's will on the basis of our justification by faith and we do good through the faith by which we are justified (Gal. 5:6). Justification by faith cuts off the natural sense of religion in which people strive to make themselves right through doing good.

- 4. Read Luke 18:9-14. What was the difference in the way the two men approached God in prayer? What was the result? Why?

Through the death of Christ, all that we were by nature in our sin is terminated.

2. We died to sin with him

God, by justifying us, puts us into a new relationship with himself. We are now related to God through Christ. Through the death of Christ, all that we were by nature in our sin (and as people who had their identity in this world) is terminated. In our relationship with God, what we were has died. We are united with Christ in his death (we will explore this further in Study 8). The Bible teaches that on the cross Christ died for our sins and in being joined with him we died with him (more about this in Study 4, *The Cross*).

Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so we, having died, are made alive to God in Christ. We are no longer, in the eyes of God, dead under God's judgment. We are now in a living relationship with God.

- 5. According to 2 Cor. 5:14-15, what exactly is the result of Christ's death for us?

- 6. In Phil. 3:10-11 what is the relationship between being conformed to Christ's death and experiencing the power of his resurrection? Can you have one without the other?

7. Explain in your own words the significance of Christ's death for us in a way that includes both the fact that he died for our sins and that we died to sin with him.

Before you go on...

How do you understand Jesus' death for you. Do you accept it as the act of obedience to God's will for you that you could not fulfill yourself? If so, do you see it as the basis for a new relationship of obedience to God in which you are now alive to him? In other words, do you see your justification as a starting point for discipleship or merely as an end in itself? Make sure you are not ignoring the full purpose of Jesus' death for you.

4. The Two Calls

The two calls...form the very means by which he relates

Once we have learned the subject of the gospel—Jesus the Lord—we must then know how to respond to him in order to receive resurrection life. In other words, we need to understand just how he brings us to relate to him. This aspect of the gospel is made known by the two calls of Christ.

We have already begun to see how his call, “Follow me,” draws us into discipleship—our walking relationship. However, this call is actually the second of two calls that Jesus gave at the opening of his public ministry. The first one is, “Repent” (Matt. 4:17), which Jesus took over from John the Baptist (3:2). In these two calls we see how the gospel operates on two fronts. Both are essential to the good news. The truth about Christ requires us to respond to both. Together they form the very means by which he relates to us.

1. In what terms were you personally called to respond to the gospel by those who presented it to you? In other words, what were you actually called to *do* or *say*?

The First Call: “Repent”

Repentance is the first response God has always required from sinful man. In the Old Testament the prophets called the people to turn back to the LORD (“Jehovah” or “Yahweh,” the personal name for God in the Old Testament). As the New Testament period dawned, John the Baptist called people to repent in preparation for the coming of the LORD. Jesus himself took up the call to repentance, and after him the apostles called the world to repentance with the gospel.

The crisis behind the call

In Jesus’ day the crisis behind the call to repent is the nearness of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The kingdom is the reign of God, which will triumph over evil.

As we have seen, God determined that he would bring about his reign through mankind (Gen. 1:26; Heb. 2:5-8). But mankind is in sin and not ready for the coming kingdom. Thus people need to repent if they are to participate in God's reign instead of standing outside and against it and facing God's judgment.

After the resurrection of Jesus the kingdom advances yet another step closer, for in the resurrection Jesus is actually instated as the heavenly King (Matt. 28:18; Heb. 2:9). Hence the proclamation of the kingdom also advances. Rather than preaching the kingdom, the apostles now preach the one exalted to the place of King—the risen Lord (Acts 2:33; 3:15,21; 7:56; 10:42; 13:34; 17:31). This message further intensifies the crisis as it brings people before the King himself who will judge the world (Acts 2:34-35; 3:23; 10:42; 13:40; 17:31). Though God's work in bringing in his reign has stepped forward, God's demand remains the same: repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

3. Why do you think repentance is always the first response God requires from man?

Repentance Explored

The word *repentance* means a change of mind. In the Bible it is used especially with respect to sin. At the heart of repentance is the confession of sin (Matt. 3:6). We are to agree with God that we are sinners and that our sin rightly brings us under his judgment and condemnation. We are no longer to try to relate to God by being good, by making ourselves look good or by trying to become good before we come to God.

Repentance and faith

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin.

The change of mind involved in repentance is the only thing that will lead us to genuinely reach out in faith for God's forgiveness and salvation (Luke 13:1-5; 24:47). Thus repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 20:21). In repentance we turn *from* our sin, and in faith we turn *to* God.

Uprooting sin: the problem of our independent will

The repentance the gospel calls for is more than the confession of this or that sin. In order for us to be truly saved from sin, repentance must get at the root of sin: our desire to be self-determining. This desire brought about the fall of mankind. The Bible tells us that Eve and Adam desired to have the knowledge of good and evil

We declare self-will to be wrong, leaving us free to trust in God and to be aligned with his will.

even though it was forbidden by God (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6). In other words they wanted to decide for themselves what is good and evil. This meant they had to assert their will independent of God, which they did in the very act of taking the forbidden fruit.

The self-determining nature asserted by Adam and Eve is common to all humanity. It rejects God and his will, either by trying to deny him completely or by creating a distorted idea of God (i.e., an idol). Either way, the motivation is to assert our own will. This root sin leads to a multitude of individual sins (Rom. 1:18-32). But when we change our mind and agree with God about our sin and accept his judgment on it, our self-determining nature is uprooted. We declare self-will to be wrong, leaving us free to trust in God and to be aligned with his will.

4. What must we be convinced of before we can truly repent and put our faith in Christ?

5. How does repentance change the way we relate to God?

The emotional factor

For us, the word *repentance* can have connotations of mental anguish and agony of soul. This is not actually part of the biblical idea. However, genuine repentance can have an emotional effect on us. This is not surprising since it involves a major change in perspective regarding ourselves, our lives and God. But we must bear in mind that people's experiences in this regard vary. In addition, whatever anguish or sorrow which may result is intended as a springboard to the positive side of repentance: turning to God in faith (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

6. Can people feel sorry or remorseful about the consequences of their sin without actually repenting of it? Explain.

The results of repentance

When we repent, our self-determining nature is uprooted and we let go of our hold on sin. We can then receive Christ and his resurrection life. As a result, we are to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). Repentance changes the way we live. This new life will then be shaped by our response to Jesus' second call.

7. Consider Matt. 3:7-9. Why did the Pharisees and Sadducees feel they did not need to repent? What sort of religious excuses do people offer today to evade genuine repentance?

8. Will repentance always result in a change in life? Why or why not?

The Second Call: “Follow Me”

It is only those who have repented and put their faith in Christ who can respond in truth to the call to follow him.

After Jesus sounded the call to repent he followed up with the call, “Follow me,” which was given to specific individuals (Matt. 4:19; etc.). It is only those who have repented and put their faith in Christ who can respond in truth to the call to follow him. This is because without repentance people retain their self-determining nature and make of Christ whatever they want, thus turning Christ into an idol that they can follow in their sin. The result is only self righteousness and not God’s righteousness.

Stepping into discipleship

Those who responded to the call to follow were identified as disciples (Matt. 4:19...5:1). As we have noted, they were limited in number, as they had to be in physical proximity to Jesus. However, after he rose and ascended, his disciples went forth and made many more disciples (28:20) since the risen, glorified Lord had left the earthly sphere of physical limitation and could now be with disciples everywhere. Despite this change, though, discipleship still comes through the call to follow. Jesus established this pattern in his earthly life and it remains preserved for us in the Gospels. A disciple, i.e., a Christian, is defined as one who responds to the call, “Follow me.”

Hearing the call

How do we hear the call, then, if Jesus is no longer physically present to give it? We hear it echo in our own hearts when we read it in the Gospels, and are drawn to walk with him. It also beckons us through the character of the Christian life itself as outlined by scripture and as exemplified by godly believers we know. We see what it means to follow Jesus, and we know it is for us too.

9. How does the second call relate to and follow-up on the first call?

10. What would be the danger in giving the call to follow to those who have not first repented? If they tried to follow, what would be the nature of the resulting 'discipleship'?

Brought into relationship

The forgiveness we receive through repentance and faith becomes the basis for our relationship with Jesus. He sets up this relationship through the call to follow. In order to understand the nature of the relationship let us note some important features of Jesus' call to his disciples (in particular the fisherman in Matt. 4:18-22):

- **Jesus calls.** The disciples did not ask to follow Jesus. Jesus called them. He set up the relationship. We have no role in giving this call or deciding on the balance of our relationship with Jesus.
- **Who joins whom?** Jesus does not join Peter and Andrew and help them in their business. Rather they join him. If Jesus joined the fishermen, his divine presence and power would be reduced to serving the needs of fishermen. But, if they join Jesus in his way, then they are raised to walk in the steps of the Son of God. Their life is transformed. That is the wonder and grace of this relationship. The Christian is to become like Christ. Jesus' role is not to make our life in the world successful but to draw us into *his* life.
- **A relationship that takes over the direction of life.** The relationship Jesus sets up is designed to determine every step of life. Jesus' way will be their way. For us this means that Jesus calls us to let this relationship determine our entire life.
- **Leaving all.** To follow Jesus they had to leave all. What they had to leave was not sinful. Fishing was a good and necessary vocation in this world. But, it was no longer to control their lives. In repentance we turn from what is evil. In following Christ we release ourselves from the control of the good and necessary things of this world. Christ now controls our lives. Leaving all does not necessarily mean an immediate outward change such as a change in vocation. Christ usually leaves us where he finds us (1 Cor. 7:17-24), but he no longer lets our occupation in this world control our steps. He gives a new spiritual direction in life that will, in a deep sense, change everything.

11. Is Jesus' call to follow a request or a command? Does it make any difference?

12. Read Matt. 8:19-22. How does Jesus respond to the one who volunteers to follow? How does he respond to the one who has already been called as a disciple but is hesitant? Can you explain the difference?

13. Do Christians sometimes think that Jesus' role is to make their life in this world successful? How can we guard ourselves against adopting this attitude?

14. Do you think there is any area of life that will not be affected by following Jesus? Why or why not?

5. The Indwelling Spirit

The power and the means to follow the risen Lord do not come from ourselves. God supplies them in the gift of his indwelling Holy Spirit and in the cross. In our study of the four elements of the gospel, we have already considered the risen Lord and the two calls. We will now look at the indwelling Spirit and the cross.

The Gift of the Spirit

The Christian life *is* life in the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is an essential theme of the good news. In the Old Testament it was prophesied that the Spirit would be given in order to overcome the chronic sinfulness and idolatry of the people (Ezek. 36:22-29). In each of the Gospels John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the one who will baptize his people in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), bringing the prophesy of the Spirit to fulfillment. Accordingly, the entire role of the disciples on earth after Jesus ascended had to begin with the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). As the apostle Paul says, the Christian life *is* life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

God active within

There is much in the Bible concerning the Spirit of God. At this point we merely want to affirm that in the New Testament God is revealed as Father, Son and Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The Spirit is fully God just as the Father and Son are. Thus in giving the Spirit, God himself becomes active and at work within us. In later studies we will discuss the work of the Spirit in the struggle with the flesh and in the functioning of the church.

1. In Ezek. 36:27 what is the prophesied result of the gift of the Spirit? What should we expect as a result of Jesus' gift of the Spirit to us?

The Spirit and Jesus

The indwelling Spirit is so important to us because he is the means by which our relationship with Jesus is made real. Jesus does not walk physically with us as he did with the first disciples. Rather, he is with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit within. Just before he left this world, Jesus told his disciples that he was sending another “Helper,” the “Spirit of truth.” He says in John 14:16-18:

16 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

The Spirit is a helper like Jesus who will take Jesus’ place in the life of the disciples. In a sense this helper was already with them since he was in Jesus, so that Jesus could say they knew him. But after Jesus went to the Father this helper would indwell them and so be with them forever.

The inner teacher

As the Spirit indwells us he continues Jesus’ role of teacher by teaching us what Jesus taught (John 14:26). The Spirit makes us know Jesus and hear his call and teaching, which we read in scripture, from within us. He guides into all truth and discloses Christ to us.

He guides into all truth and discloses Christ to us.

2. How do you think having the indwelling Spirit compares with walking physically beside Jesus as the first disciples did (see John 16:7)? (You may wish to contrast what you know of the first disciples before and after they received the Spirit.)

3. How do the following passages help us to know when something is from the Spirit and not from ourselves or some other source?

- a. 1 Cor. 12:3 and 1 John 4:1-3

b. Gal. 5:22-23

c. 1 Cor. 13:1-7

Received by faith

When we hear the gospel of Christ with faith we receive the Spirit.

We receive the Spirit when we place our faith in the risen, glorified Christ (John 7:37-39). There is nothing further we have to do. When we hear the gospel of Christ with faith we receive the Spirit (Gal. 3:1-2; Eph. 1:13). Thus everyone who belongs to Christ has the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). To receive Christ is to receive the Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is even called the Spirit of Christ because through him Christ is in us (Rom. 8:10).

4. What difference would it make if we did not receive the Spirit immediately when we put our faith in Christ? Would we have a real relationship with Jesus?

The Spirit's Role in Our Life

Our spirit is the dimension of our being that can directly relate to God, who is himself spirit (John 4:24). Our spirits were formerly dead because of sin, but the Holy Spirit in us makes them alive (Rom. 8:10). Thus scripture says that by the Spirit we are "born again" (John 3:3-8).

Re-born as sons of the Father

In making us alive to God, the Spirit makes us aware of our new relationship with God as Father (Rom. 8:15-16). In Christ we have been born anew as sons of the

Father and now have a “spirit of adoption.” In this way the Spirit makes real in us the relationship that Jesus has with God as his Father (Gal. 4:4-7). We can walk with Jesus as he walked this earth in faith and obedience toward his heavenly Father.

The inner leader

As the Spirit teaches us the things of Christ and orients us toward God the Father, he leads us as sons of God (Rom. 8:14). This role of leading God’s sons answers to Jesus’ role in giving the call, “Follow me.”

- 5. What does the term *born again* (John 3:3-8) suggest regarding the difference made by the Spirit in one’s life?

- 6. Why is the Spirit-born person likened to the wind in John 3:8? What now moves and affects the Spirit-born person?

- 7. What is the significance of being made aware of God as Father (Rom. 8:15-16)?

8. In what ways does God fulfill the role of a father to us?

9. What difference does it make that the Spirit leads us with the awareness of being sons of God and not slaves (Gal. 4:4-7)?

Before you go on...

Identify the way the Spirit works in your life. Do you simply have passing experiences of God moving you or do you give yourself to the Spirit continually? All true believers have the Spirit but not all are filled with the Spirit. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). What hinders you from having the Spirit fill you? We should not grieve the Holy Spirit. Read the contexts in Eph. 4:25-32. Are there any ways in which you grieve the Spirit?

6. The Cross

The cross is the link by which our steps are tied to Jesus' steps.

The relationship we have with Jesus is not static. We do not merely *have* Jesus' constant presence. Rather, the relationship is active. We *follow* him. This is what discipleship is all about. In fact, no one can step into a relationship with Jesus without surrendering to the grace he gives in drawing our actual steps in life into his way. We have seen that Jesus gives the Spirit to make the relationship real and to lead us, but what is the key to actively following him? The answer is the cross.

The cross is the link by which our steps are tied to Jesus' steps. We will work through Matthew 16:21-27, which sets this out for us:

21 From that time Jesus Christ began to show his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.

26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

Jesus' Way Our Way (Matt. 16:21-27)

Jesus had to go the way of the cross. This is stressed in v. 21 ("he must go"). Human thought and sympathy resist the idea, but this resistance is opposed to God's thoughts just as Satan is opposed to God (vv. 22-23). The notion of a crossless salvation is very human but totally opposed to God's way. The cross is an established fact of the gospel. You cannot believe in the risen Christ without believing in the Christ who died. But the significance of the cross does not stop there. In fact, it only begins there.

...Jesus in effect says that the cross is not only necessary for him but is also a necessary condition for following him.

In vv. 24-27 Jesus in effect says that the cross is not only necessary for him but is also a necessary condition for following him. We must not only accept the fact that Jesus had to make his way to crucifixion in order to do God's will but that we too must take up our cross in order to follow Jesus into life.

1. Is the idea of a crucified saviour attractive to the world? Why or why not?

2. In your experience, is the cross usually thought of as something for Christ only or also for Christians?

3. What do Gal. 2:20 and Rom. 6:6 say about the relation of the believer to the cross?

4. What does 1 Pet. 2:24 say about the purpose of the cross with respect to believers?

To Come After Him (Matt. 16:24-27)

Jesus begins in v. 24 by saying, “If anyone wishes to come after me . . .” That is the wish of every true disciple or Christian. Go back to the scene of the call by the Sea of Galilee. They voluntarily left all to follow him. The goal is to follow Jesus into his kingdom and into eternal life. But, now the path has been disclosed—the cross. So, to follow him into life is to come after him in the way of the cross. What does this mean for us?

To deny oneself

To go the way of the cross is to deny oneself (v. 24). Jesus is not here speaking of denying oneself *things* such as particular pleasures. Rather, he requires the disciple to deny self altogether.

Such denial of self means that self is no longer to determine one’s course in life. Here is a key point in discipleship. The whole world and people in the world are controlled by the interests of self and self-affirmation. People are out to affirm, secure and advance themselves with respect to possessions, comfort, pleasure, status, reputation, etc. This is natural. It is taken for granted in the world and generally seen as necessary and good. However, such ego affirmation is the way of sin and ruin. The disciple must deny self.

We have already seen that the root of sin is our self-determining nature. God must be God. Salvation means being brought into *his* will and *his* ways—to have *his* kingdom realized through us. To respond to the gospel of the risen Lord and to his calls to repent and follow requires that we deny ourselves. This goes squarely against human nature and against the spirit of the age. Thus the cross truly is the crux of the gospel for us. Ego affirmation must be denied in the path of Jesus. In v. 25 Jesus explains that to save one’s life (literally, *soul* or *being*) in this world is to lose it in eternal ruin. The instinct and drive to secure our being in this world must be denied. Our goal must be to follow Christ in the face of what it may cost us in this life.

The instinct and drive to secure our being in this world must be denied.

5. Do you agree that people in the world are controlled by the interests of self and self-affirmation? Discuss.

6. How is the believer's motivation to do good different than the unbeliever's?

7. What are some ways or areas in which followers of Jesus must deny themselves?

8. Read Luke 14:27-30. How do we count the cost of following Jesus?

To take up one's cross

Our active obedience in every step of life is to surrender our natural self-affirmation in this world.

The cross means execution. In v. 25 of Matt. 16 Jesus explains that to find life we must lose our life for his sake. Notice, this must be our choice. Jesus does not say the cross will be imposed on us and we must resign ourselves to the inevitable. Rather, the disciple must live on the principle of deliberately surrendering his life to death, to loss. We must act out this surrender as obedience to God's will. Also notice that the Lord does not call us to perform some feat for him or to produce some righteousness for him. Rather, our active obedience in every step of life is to surrender our natural self-affirmation in this world. This must be done and can only be done for Jesus' sake as we follow him in his way out of this world. He will lead us in his way as we surrender. This surrender is the principle of life.

One can only follow Christ by taking up the cross.

And follow Christ

The principle of the cross is already implied in the call to follow Jesus in Matt. 4:19-20. The call caused the disciples to leave what was good and necessary in this world. Here in Matt. 16 Jesus explicitly lays out this cross principle for them. One can only follow Christ by taking up the cross. Every instruction Jesus gave for discipleship requires the dynamic of the cross for that instruction to be carried out in its true spirit. Just as we cannot conceive of the risen Lord apart from his death on the cross, discipleship is unthinkable without the cross.

In vv. 25-27 Jesus makes it very clear what is at stake here—it is salvation itself. Apart from taking up the cross, there is no salvation.

9. What does it mean to lose one's life in this world (Matt. 16:25-26)?

10. What do we do if something hinders our walking relationship with Jesus? What if it is a relationship, a possession, an activity, an emotion?

Mini-Study: Philippians 3 – Applying the Cross

In this passage written by the apostle Paul we can see the principle of taking up the cross in action.

1. In vv. 4-6 Paul lists his earthly credentials as a Jewish religious prodigy (Gal. 1:14). Would these be significant in his world? What do you think he would gain by them?
2. How does he regard his credentials (v. 7)? What does it mean to count something as loss? Why would he do this?

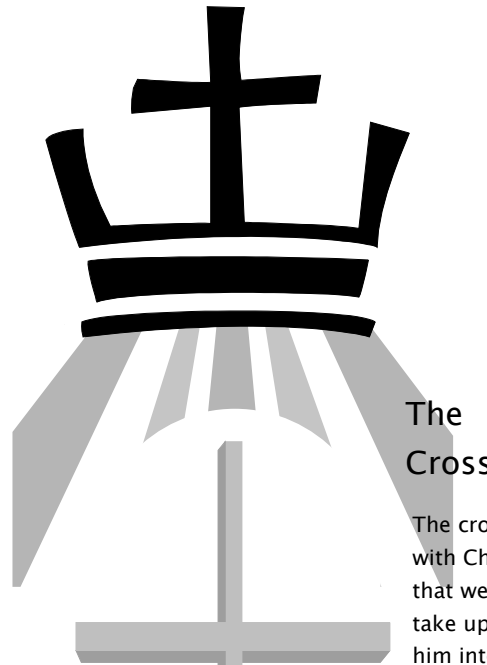
3. How does he further apply this attitude in v. 8?
4. Does v. 8 mean that apart from counting all things as loss Paul cannot “gain Christ”? What does it mean to gain Christ?
5. What sort of righteousness will Paul be found to have by counting all things as loss (v. 9)?
6. In v. 10 Paul now expresses what he has been saying in terms of being conformed to Christ’s death (i.e., the cross). What does he say that he will gain through this? Does this mean that taking up the cross is essential to our faith?
7. How does Paul restate the cross principle in vv. 12-14?
8. In vv. 17-19 what are the two examples that the Philippians must chose between?
9. How does Paul characterize those who oppose the cross? What motivates and drives them?
10. In. vv. 20-21 how does Paul finally state his focus and hope in life?

Before you go on...

What has the cross meant to you? In Luke 9:23 Jesus says we have to take up our cross daily. What does it mean for you to take up the cross in today’s activities and affairs? Does the anticipation of taking up the cross cause you anguish? How did Jesus deal with his anguish (Luke 22:39-46)? Taking up the cross gives each step of our life finality, a total consecration to God. Pray through any struggle you may having with taking up the cross.

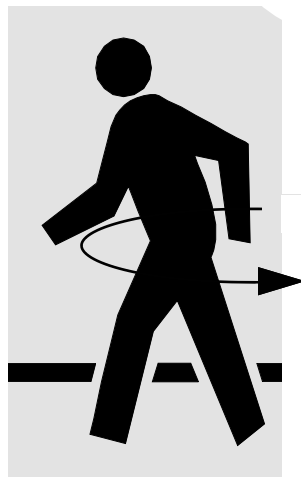
Jesus the Lord

The Lord who died and rose again is the subject of the good news – God’s triumph over evil. He must be the focus of faith.



The Cross

The cross brings us into full union with Christ. He died on the cross that we might be justified, and we take up our cross in order to follow him into life.



The Two Calls

1. Repent

This is the call to confess our sin and turn from it.



2. Follow me

This is the call to walk in the ways of Jesus and let our relationship with him determine all of our life.

The Indwelling Spirit

The indwelling Spirit makes our relationship with Jesus real.

The two calls are the means by which Jesus the Lord relates to us.

The four elements of the gospel that orient us for a walking relationship with Jesus

7. Assurance of Salvation

At some point most believers question their salvation. In some way, for some reason, doubts concerning our eternal security in Christ arise and these must be addressed. Although it is often difficult, this process can actually be beneficial. It causes us to re-examine our faith and practice and to dig deeper to explore our salvation. As we will see, the truths of the gospel that we have looked at so far all bear on the assurance of our salvation.

1. Have you ever experienced doubt concerning your salvation? If so, what was the cause?

Gospel Truths of Salvation

Each of the gospel themes we have considered are truths of salvation. They can be grouped as follows:

1. **Who has gained salvation.** This is the truth of **Jesus the Lord**. Our salvation is what he alone has gained for us
2. **How we receive salvation.** This concerns the first call to **repent**. By repentance we receive the forgiveness of sins. Repentance is the first part of faith. Through faith we receive Christ and all in him.
3. **How salvation is realized in our lives.** This comes through our response to the second call to **follow**. Discipleship is the relationship we have with the risen Lord in which we have our salvation. It is the narrow road which leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). The gift of the **Spirit** makes the relationship real. Furthermore, by the **cross** we travel the way to life. Only if we lose our life will we find it.

Three Levels of Assurance

We will now look at how these truths of salvation form the basis of our assurance. The three gospel truths of salvation (mentioned above) provide the basis for three levels of assurance. All three levels are necessary for full assurance of salvation.

1. The achievement of Jesus the Lord

The most basic level of our assurance rests in the truth that salvation is achieved by God and not by ourselves. The very fact that the Son of God himself rose from the dead and is enthroned at the right hand of God is both proof and reality of the salvation gained and secured for us. In this event Jesus, who became human, brought humanity into union with God and gave it a place in heaven, reigning eternally with him. Because God has taken it upon himself to carry out this saving act, and because it was accomplished through the resurrection and enthronement in heaven, we have assurance of salvation.

All believers...realize at bottom that it is Christ who died and rose again who has achieved salvation.

We must begin with this level of assurance that all believers have. To believe in the God of the Bible is to believe in the God who saves. The truth that salvation has been gained by Christ is absolutely fundamental to the gospel. All believers may not appreciate all of the implications of the resurrection for their lives, but they realize at bottom that it is Christ who died and rose again who has achieved salvation. We may be distracted from this truth for a time and cease to reflect on it, but all believers have this basic knowledge and thus this level of assurance.

2. Why is the knowledge that salvation is achieved by an act of God necessary for assurance?

3. What would you say to anyone who denies that salvation has been gained by Christ alone through his death and resurrection?

If we have gospel faith, we have all.

2. Received by faith

The second level of assurance is rooted in the truth that faith has *received* Christ and all that he has secured for us. When we repent and place our faith in Christ our sins are forgiven and we lay hold of salvation and the eternal security that comes with it. Faith receives all—peace with God, a standing in grace and the certainty of the glory of God forever (Rom. 5:1-2; John 3:16). If we have gospel faith, we have all.

This gospel faith is not something we must produce for ourselves. Rather, faith is initiated by God. It is brought about by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17), which communicates God's grace to us.

Not all believers understand that in receiving Christ by faith we receive the eternal certainty of personal salvation. The biblical teaching on faith can be distorted and reduced. As a result it is no longer clear for some that in trusting Christ we receive him, and the eternal life that is in him, completely.

4. Is there anything in human nature that would resist or distort the truth that eternal life in Christ is entirely received by faith? What else do people, sometimes even believers, think is involved in receiving it?

5. Why is it significant that faith is initiated by God (Rom. 10:17)?

We can, as it were, already see the salvation beginning to take effect in us.

3. Lived out in discipleship

The fact that our saving relationship with the Lord is lived out in discipleship gives us the third level of assurance. Concrete changes happen in our lives because Christ has given us the Spirit to make our relationship with him real. These changes happen as we take up the cross in order to follow the Spirit's leading. We can, as it were, already see salvation beginning to take effect in us. The Spirit is present and at work as the power of God in us and this activity is the evidence of being saved.

It is both the assurance of salvation possessed and the guarantee of the future full redemption that we will enter when Christ comes again (Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:13-14).

It is tragic, but all too true that for some, eternal security and the possession of salvation is just a matter of doctrine—merely holding to the right teachings. They confess the truth involved in the first two levels of assurance but lack the concrete reality of the third. There is no changed life. As a result they begin to doubt salvation because they have no experience of its reality in their lives. They have not come to genuine repentance and faith and do not have the Spirit. They are not saved (1 John 1:6; Jas. 2:17).

...some genuine believers...fall into doubt because they do not know just *what* life changes to look for at the third level.

There are some genuine believers, though, who understand the truth of the first two levels of assurance but fall into doubt because they do not know just *what* life changes to look for at the third level. They do not see *how* salvation is real in them and so wonder whether or not they have come to true faith. We can have a wrong idea of the experience of salvation and thus have wrong expectations for ourselves. The following are characteristics that we should look for:

- To hear the call of Christ echo in our own hearts and have the answer to this call in our heart's desire to follow (Study 3).
- To have a faith that produces good works that arise out of love (Gal. 5:6; Heb. 6:10-11; 1 John 2:4-6; 3:14; 4:13, 16-17).
- The presence of the relentless struggle with sin in our lives through which we experience victory by the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17—more about how we can gain assurance within the midst of this struggle in later studies).

When we find ourselves with faith in Christ's achievement, and with that faith becoming our inner reality and working out in true life, we have the full assurance—at all three levels—of our salvation.

6. Why might some people think possession of salvation is just a matter of doctrine?

7. Can you think of some wrong expectations of the experience of salvation that would lead believers to doubt their salvation when these expectations are not met?

8. 2 Pet. 1:1-11 concerns assurance at the third level (vv. 10-11). What does this passage tell us about:

a. the source of our changed life and the assurance that goes with it?

b. how we experience the changed life?

9. Should full assurance of salvation, at all three levels, make us more or less humble? Why? How does this relate to our confidence as believers?



BAPTISM: COMMITTING TO THE WALK

Go therefore and make disciples..., baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...

Matthew 28:19

This scripture from Matthew connects baptism with the act of making disciples. But what exactly is the connection? What does baptism have to do with discipleship?

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are rites—physical acts that express spiritual realities and through which we commit ourselves to living out those realities. Both were instituted by Jesus himself. They stand out because New Testament church practice has so little in the way of ceremony. Clearly, they signal key aspects of the faith.

Though Christians in general recognize the importance the New Testament gives to these rites, many struggle with understanding them. In the case of baptism, it is generally recognized that if one comes to faith in Christ one should be baptized. This is the biblical pattern. After all, baptism is a command of the Lord and so it is a matter of obedience. However, the connection with discipleship is often not apparent. Commonly this is because teaching on discipleship itself is unclear or absent altogether.

As we have seen, the gospel orients us for a walking relationship with Jesus in which we follow him as disciples. But once we hear the call to follow it still remains for us to openly commit or dedicate ourselves to this relationship. The way we make this commitment is through baptism.

In this section we will explore the spiritual realities expressed in baptism, and our commitment to them. We will also look at issues involved in the walk of discipleship, namely what it means to live by the Spirit and the means the Spirit uses to channel God's grace for living.

8. An Act of Discipleship

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus commissions his followers to make disciples by first baptizing them. In this we see that baptism is an act of discipleship.

1. In your experience, is baptism practiced as an act of discipleship? In what ways has baptism been explained to you?

Baptism and the Gospel

Before we further explore baptism as an act of discipleship we need to be clear on how it relates to the gospel.

Distinguished from gospel proclamation

In 1 Cor. 1:14-17 Paul asserts the important distinction between the act of proclaiming the gospel (what is commonly called *evangelism*) and the act of baptism. Paul's commission was to evangelize and not to baptize. In fact, the apostles as a whole focused on the proclamation of the gospel, or the "witness" of Jesus (Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8). Baptism was not their distinctive task. The fact that the act of baptizing is held off from the act of proclaiming the gospel is of critical importance. Faith, by which we are justified, comes through hearing the word (Rom. 10:17) and not through baptism.

The apostles' proclamation *resulted* in people being baptized.

The result of proclamation

Though the act of baptism is carefully distinguished from that of gospel proclamation, it is also clear that the apostles' proclamation *resulted* in people being baptized. In the first evangelistic event of the church all who believed were brought to baptism (Acts 2:41). In fact, it was only those who were baptized that were counted and added to the company of believers.

This means that though the apostles themselves were not focused on the task of baptizing, converts *were* baptized and there were those who did it. Paul lets us know that where he himself evangelized there were others who usually took up the task of baptizing (1 Cor. 1:14-17). However, Paul’s converts were clearly *prepared* for baptism by his proclamation.

The gospel and the teaching of baptism

...the *teaching* of baptism is not separated from the gospel.

The preparation for baptism by the New Testament evangelists brings up an important point, namely that the *teaching* of baptism is not separated from the gospel. This is evident in Acts 8:35 where we are told that Philip preached (literally, “evangelized” or “told the good news of”) Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. In other words, Philip told him the gospel of Jesus. As a result of this evangelization, the eunuch learned about baptism and requested it (v. 36). It is also evident in Paul’s letters that baptismal teaching is part of the full presentation of the gospel. Whenever he refers to baptism, he assumes that all in the church were baptized.

The reason baptismal teaching is part of the full gospel presentation is that it focuses our response to the second call of the gospel, the call to follow. It is the element of the gospel that prepares us for the first act of discipleship (as presented in the New Testament)—baptism.

2. How would you respond to the claim that baptism is necessary for salvation?

3. Why has a person who has not been taught baptism not been completely evangelized in the New Testament sense, even though he may have repented and believed?

4. Is it always the case (as it was in Acts 2:41 and 8:36) that people hear the call to follow and are baptized right after they come to repentance and faith? Why or why not?

Committing Our Present Life in the Body

In the New Testament people received baptismal teaching as part of the good news about Jesus and were then baptized as their first act of discipleship. We will now look at just how the good news that God raised Jesus from the dead puts baptism into focus.

Faith in bodily resurrection

...faith receives Christ's total resurrection life for one's whole being, including the body.

We know that the gospel proclaims Jesus risen and exalted as Lord. We also know that faith in the risen Lord involves recognizing and accepting all that God has achieved in Christ for us. This includes the resurrection of the body. Salvation is not received as a gift for the spirit or soul only. Rather, faith receives Christ's total resurrection life for one's whole being, including the body.

Dedication to resurrection truth

Full salvation as we see it in the risen Christ presents the disciple with a unique challenge. Our spirits have been made alive but we have not yet received our resurrection bodies. Our bodies are still mortal—part of a creation fallen in sin. They have not yet been re-made as part of God's sinless and eternal heavenly order. The Bible tells us, though, that our bodies will be changed (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:42-44; 50-53). We live in hope, looking forward to this event at the second coming of Christ when we will enter the full resurrection life (1 Thess. 1:9-10; Rom. 5:1-2; 8:24). The resurrection of Jesus and our hope to have glorified bodies means that our bodies, though still subject to sin, are claimed by God.

The fact that God has claimed our bodies raises the first need of faith. We must live our new life in our unchanged bodies. Jesus affirmed his claim on our whole life by commanding that disciples be baptized and taught to *observe* all that he commanded (Matt. 28:20). This means that in our present bodies we are to live out God's will.

We now come to the role of baptism. In the context of Jesus' commission baptism is the way we commit ourselves to walk as disciples in our relationship with Jesus. We dedicate our present life in the body to the truth of Christ's total achievement for us.

5. What will be different about life in our heavenly bodies? How is this part of the believer's hope?

6. What do you think is the point of actually participating in a rite such as baptism rather than merely making a verbal statement of commitment and hope? Does it make any difference?

Reality Check: The Unchanged Body

Baptism does *not* represent a commitment to now live out our salvation in our own strength and as our own achievement.

Though we may commit our present life to the truth of Christ's achievement for us, it does not take long for the reality of living with an unchanged body to sink in. The body just will not, of its own impulses, go along with our desire to please God. In fact, the opposite is true. The body is ever driven by its own impulses against our spiritual wishes. This reality has the potential to bring us to despair (see Rom. 7:14-25).

Walking by grace

In order to deal with this reality we must come to terms with how God has set up our present experience of salvation. The key is to understand the truth of discipleship that baptism expresses. We have been saved by God's grace alone through faith. Baptism does *not* represent a commitment to now live out our salvation in our own strength and as our own achievement. That would be foolish (see Gal. 3:3). Rather, we dedicate ourselves to walk with Jesus by grace as well. Salvation is God's work alone. This means that the reality of salvation in our daily walk is also God's work alone (Phil. 1:6). We must learn to live by a faith that actually makes us surrender our whole being to what God has done in Christ (Gal. 2:20-21).

Over the next several studies we will explore some aspects of salvation expressed in baptism that should help us deal with our present reality.

- 7. New believers often experience sudden liberation and victory over sin in certain areas of their lives but find that this does not extend to all areas. Can you relate to this? Comment.

- 8. Why is it natural for us, after being saved, to try to carry out our walk with Jesus in our own strength and as our own achievement?

- 9. Read Col. 2:6-7. In what way do we “receive Christ Jesus the Lord”? How do we then likewise “walk in him”?

10. Consider Gal. 2:20. What does the statement *it is no longer I who live* mean? What is now different about the believer's self or "I"?

Mini-Study: 1 John 3:2-3 — Focusing on the End

Consider 1 John 3:2-3.

1. What is the certain hope for the believer that John speaks of?
2. Does every believer have this hope?
3. What does this hope produce in the believer's life?
4. The phrase *purifies himself* indicates a part that the believer plays. What is it?

Before you go on...

Are you baptized? If so, how has baptism focused the rest of your life? Think of a journey. Was baptism a station you passed through and left behind? Or was it a doorway to a house through which you entered to live? Do you need to fill out your understanding of baptism? If so, take the full force of baptism and re-apply it to your life. How does this change the way you think and live?

9. United With Christ

In baptism we commit our present life to the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Since resurrection only comes through death, in baptism we must also understand and commit to the meaning of Jesus' death for us. We will approach this subject by first looking at the New Testament practice of baptism *in the name*....

Baptism *in the Name*

In Jesus' commission to his disciples he says to baptize "in (literally, "unto") *the name* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Likewise in Acts people were baptized "in (unto) *the name* of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5). What does this mean to be baptized *in the name*? The answer points to an essential aspect of living by grace.

The different names used

As we look at the above passages the question arises as to why there are two different *names*. If we pause to consider the answer, we see foundational truths for our walk.

In Matthew the three-fold (but singular) name—*The Father, Son and Holy Spirit*—is used to indicate that the Son (as well as the Spirit) is indeed God along with the Father. This also affirms that disciples in being united with Jesus are united with the whole Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit.

In Acts the apostles baptize simply in the name of *Jesus*. This is because in their preaching they have already brought out the truths highlighted by the three-fold name in Matthew. They present Jesus in the position of God (as Lord) by introducing him as the object of faith and the one who grants forgiveness and salvation. As well, Jesus' position within the Trinity is declared in their proclamation of his enthronement at the Father's right hand and his giving the Holy Spirit. In the context of this preaching it is already clear that those who are joined to Jesus are joined to him in his divine position and in his inseparable relation to the Father and Spirit.

To be baptized unto a name or person means to be united with him and take one's identity from him.

To be united

To be baptized unto a name or person means to be united with that person and to take one's identity from him. We see this in 1 Cor. 1:12-15 where Paul says that if a person were to be baptized unto the name of Paul they would be "of Paul" (v. 12). So baptism unto Christ expresses the truth that we are of Christ—that we are united and identified with Christ, the divine Son of God, and in Christ we live within his

relationship with the Father and Spirit. As we will see, to be united to Christ and all that is in him, we must be united to him in his death.

1. Is it important who baptizes us as Christians or in what church we are baptized? If not, what is important about our actual act of baptism?

2. The three-fold name *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* is used most often in baptism. Why do you think this is?

Dead to Sin

Romans 6 is the only passage in the New Testament that develops the significance of what it means to be baptized unto Christ, which as we have seen means to be united with him:

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase?

2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,

6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

8 *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*

9 *knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.*

10 *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

11 *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,*

13 *and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Here we see just how in baptism we are united to Christ in his death and how we commit to the meaning of his death for our walk. It is important to note that the passage begins with the question of the believer’s relation to sin (v. 1). Hence the entire discussion of baptism which follows addresses the real struggle of discipleship—the struggle against sin

The entire discussion of baptism...addresses the real struggle of discipleship—the struggle against sin.

The effect of Jesus’ death

The key to the matter is stated in v. 2. There Paul makes the amazing statement that the believer has *died to sin*. We saw in Study 2 that this is one of the truths of Christ’s death for believers—we died to sin with him. We used to be willing slaves to sin and were under its control (vv. 13, 16, 19). Paul calls this former state of existence the “old self” (v. 6). Through faith the old self was crucified with Christ. It is only because the old self was crucified that we could be raised to walk in newness of life (v. 4), free from the control of sin (vv. 6-7).

Baptized into his death

At this point (v. 3) Paul asserts that all who have been baptized *into* (or *unto*) *Christ* have been baptized *into* (or *unto*) *his death*. Baptism, then, acknowledges and declares that we are united to Christ in his death (see v. 5), in other words, that we have died to sin. It is not that our death to sin is actually brought about through baptism; rather it comes solely through the death of Christ (vv. 8-11) in whom we have believed. Baptism, though, expresses and acknowledges the fact that in Christ we have died to sin.

3. Consider Rom. 6:2, 7, 14. What are the implications of being dead to sin? What is the goal of discipleship regarding sin (see 1 John 2:1)?

4. What difference does it make that our death to sin is not dependent on anything we do, such as getting baptized?

5. How important for the Christian life of discipleship is this baptismal teaching concerning death to sin? Explain.

Getting On With Life

...we need an *active* response to the truth of our death to sin.

We are united with Christ in his resurrection only because we are united with him in his death. We could not live out the resurrection life if we were not dead to sin in Christ. However, in baptism we do more than simply *acknowledge* that we died with Christ and so died to sin. In order to actively pursue the new life we need an *active* response to the truth of our death to sin. Romans 6 presents this active response in that baptism is portrayed as a burial ceremony (v. 4).

A burial ceremony

Burial, of course, only takes place after a person has died. In the act of burial we commit the person's body, through which he is a part of this world, to the *reality* of his death. Let us see how this relates to baptism.

We saw in the last study that through the resurrection God claims the believer's present life in the body. We now know we can only respond to this claim because the old self is dead and we are no longer under sin. However, sin still makes its demand on the body through its passions that we feel (v. 12). In this way sin claims that our bodies should still be the instruments, or organs, of sin.

How do we oppose sin's claim on the body and instead respond to God's claim? The answer is seen in baptism as burial. In baptism, as in burial, we commit the

body to the reality of death, in this case our death to sin (v. 6). Our bodies are no longer the captive instruments, or organs, of sin. That was the case with the old self, but the old self is now dead. Through baptism we say *no* to sin’s claim to ownership of the body. Only through this commitment to death can we give our bodies to God as instruments of his will in this world.

Accordingly, Paul’s exhortations in this passage are all about getting on with life without any obligation to sin. We are to consider ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God (v. 11). This means we are to present the members of our bodies as instruments of righteousness and not unrighteousness (vv. 12-13). We can now do so as a result of our active response to the truth that we have died to sin.

- 6. What would happen if we did not commit our bodies to the truth that, as baptism portrays, we are dead to sin? How would it affect our subsequent life of discipleship?

- 7. How does the burial depicted in baptism relate to taking up the cross?

A change of clothes

The newness of life that comes through the believer’s action in baptism is described in another way in Gal. 3:27: “For all you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Let us reflect on the image used here.

First, the action is not God’s but the believer’s. Baptism declares that we ourselves have actively put on Christ. As we saw in Romans 6, this comes as we consciously respond to the truth of our death to sin and chose to dedicate our bodies to righteousness. Second, clothing has to do with how we present ourselves—how we show our identity. In being baptized unto Christ, we consciously and deliberately take on the identity of Christ in an outward way. On the basis of this we are to take on the detailed characteristics of that identity.

Baptism declares that we ourselves have actively put on Christ.

8. When a police officer, for example, puts on his uniform does it change who he already is? If not, what does change? Reflect on how this relates to baptism as a change of clothes (Gal. 3:27).

9. In Eph. 4:20-24 what does Paul assume that the believers learned when they were taught Christ? What does he say about what was put off and what was put on?

10. In Col. 3:9-11 Paul appeals to the Christians' past action of putting off and putting on. What does he now expect as a result of this action (see the surrounding verses)?

Before you go on...

Baptism is a once for all commitment that is to govern the way we think about ourselves and the choices we make. Answer the following questions for yourself from the passages indicated: How do you relate to sin (Rom. 6:1-11)? What is your identity before God (Gal. 3:26-28)? What choices do you make about the way you act (Eph. 4:22-24)?

10. Living by the Spirit (1)

A sin principle continues to operate within our yet unchanged bodies.

In Romans 6 we learned that by faith in Christ we have died to sin. Our old self, which was a willing slave to sin, has been crucified. Yet even though we commit to this truth in baptism, it is all too true that as believers we still feel the pull of sin. A sin principle continues to operate within our yet unchanged bodies. In order to overcome it we must learn what it means to live by the Spirit.

1. How has your relationship to sin, or evil, changed since you have come to faith in Christ? What has changed about (i) your awareness of it, (ii) how you define it, (iii) how you deal with its presence in your life?

The Spirit and the Flesh

Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) underscores the fact that discipleship involves not only union with the Son, but also with the Spirit. We have already seen that the indwelling Spirit makes our relationship with Christ real by being our inner teacher and leader (Study 5). Gal. 5:16-26 now opens up for us the way in which the Spirit leads us to victory over sin:

16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*

17 *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*

19 *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,*

20 *idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,*

21 *envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

23 *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

24 *Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

25 *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

26 *Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*

The familiar image of leading and walking marks the teaching in this passage. The Spirit leads (v. 18) and we walk (v. 16) and keep in step with the Spirit (the literal image in v. 25—see NIV). But here we see that the Spirit is in conflict with the *flesh* (this is the literal term; NIV translates it as “sinful nature”). In the letters of Paul the flesh is put in opposition to the Spirit of God (note that it is *not* a contrast between our flesh and *our* spirit, even though the Spirit of God has now made our spirits alive).

The flesh

In its opposition to the Spirit of God the flesh is our human nature with its passions controlling our lives.

In its opposition to the Spirit of God the flesh is our human nature with its passions controlling our lives. As such our human nature fights against the rightful place God has in our lives. We can capture the ideas involved in this biblical expression with the phrase *sinful human nature*. It is ego-centered and is the source of the whole set of human desires and passions that control us apart from the Spirit of God.

Being in the flesh

Before conversion we are *in the flesh*. That means we are human beings separated from God and are directed in all we do by our human nature. In this state, people have an awareness of God and the principle of God’s law. At bottom, we know that our nature is pitted against God’s law and that God’s law condemns us. But rather than bowing to God, we seek to justify ourselves and to fashion an idolatrous understanding of God which is suitable to our self-directing human nature (i.e., the flesh). This is the essence of religion.

It is important to remember this religious aspect of the flesh. As believers we must learn to contend with its idolatrous conceptions of God. In the ongoing conflict within us between the Spirit and the flesh, it seeks to hijack our Christian walk and again lead us after idols.

Receiving the Spirit

When we come to repentance and faith through the gospel, we receive God’s Spirit (Gal. 3:1-2). The Spirit gives us an awareness of a new relationship with God in Christ (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16). Now, rather than relating to God by fashioning an understanding of God adapted to what we are in the flesh, we relate to God as our Father who has redeemed us from what we are in the flesh and has given his life to us and shapes in us his character likeness.

...the flesh, with its ego-centered passions and desires is in open conflict with the Spirit .

The conflict

The disciple has received the Spirit of God but he still has the sinful human nature. As a result the disciple's life is an arena in which the flesh, with its ego-centered passions and desires is in open conflict with the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). The war, however, is not between equal though opposite forces. The flesh is the nature of the old man who has been crucified, while the Spirit represents who we now are in Christ and activates the desires of Christ in us. As sure as God has redeemed us, the Spirit will prevail in the end when Christ comes again. At present we must by faith gain that victory in each step of our walk (more about this in Part 2).

- 2. What are some of the ways in which humanity fashions an understanding of God suitable to itself? Can you think of some religious views and practices which have resulted?

- 3. What difference does it make that the conflict is between the Spirit of God and human nature, and not between a higher and a lower part within humanity itself?

- 4. Consider Paul's warning in v. 21b. Is he speaking about what it means to be particularly spiritual or simply what it means to be saved? What does this tell us about the place in our salvation of the Spirit's battle against the flesh?

Seeing the Difference

The flesh and the Spirit produce very visible and very different results. It is important that we be certain of these so we can know what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh. Only if we are certain about this can we follow the leading of the Spirit and not follow the flesh.

The deeds of the flesh

Gal. 5:19-21 is a catalogue of the deeds of the flesh. This catalogue is not exhaustive—in v. 21 Paul adds the clause, "...and things like these." The Bible does not allow us to limit forbidden behaviour to a specific list. However, as we survey this catalogue we should gain a good awareness of the wide-ranging deeds of the flesh.

The sins fall into four categories:

- a. *Sexual sin.* This category is first in other lists as well (1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:3f.; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3). One reason for this is that the Gentile (non-Jewish) world to which Paul brought the gospel was sex-soaked like ours. Another reason is that sexual sin is the perversion of love, the first and sum of all virtue. Three terms are used here:
 - **Immorality** or **fornication**: sexual activity outside of marriage; this is against God's design in creation (Gen. 2:24).
 - **Impurity**: a mindset which prevails even when not engaged in the act.
 - **Sensuality**: unrestrained living and indulgence in which people give themselves over to immorality and impurity.
- b. *Religious sins.* This area is covered by two terms:
 - **Idolatry**: the sin of man making or shaping his God or gods, whether or not it includes physical images, and whether or not the god(s) he serves and lives for is 'religious' or 'secular' (in Col. 3:5 covetousness, or greed, is idolatry).
 - **Sorcery**: all occult activity in which man seeks to manipulate divine or spiritual powers and states at his own will and by his own means.
- c. *Social sins.* These sins, which violate relationships, form the largest category. The first two terms describe prevailing states which pit people against each other.
 - **Enmities** or **hostilities**: a hostile state of mind.
 - **Strife** or **discord**: the action of fighting against one another.

Following this description of a general state of conflict is a succession of specific behaviours which tear relationships apart:

- **Jealousy**: selfishly wanting the good that others have.
- **Outbursts of anger**: the first expression of aggression toward others.
- **Disputes** or **selfish ambition**: aggressively pursuing self interests rather than seeking the interests of others or of the community as a whole.
- **Dissentions**: disassociating oneself from rivals.

- **Factions:** the resulting rival parties.
- **Envy:** the above progression ends in this state of begrudging others any good they may enjoy and wishing only evil on them.

d. *Giving up self-control.* There are two items in this last category:

- **Drunkenness:** the state of being intoxicated in which people give up self-control and give themselves over to irrational sinning.
- **Carousing:** the wild partying which is tied to drunkenness.

The fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit stands in contrast to the deeds of the flesh.

The fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23) stands in contrast to the deeds of the flesh. In many ways these qualities answer to the deeds of the flesh that have been listed and are their direct opposites.

- **Love:** the primary virtue by which the whole Law of God is fulfilled (v. 14). The action of love is to serve one another (v. 13) by seeking and giving ourselves for the good of others.
- **Joy:** Biblical joy is always joy in the Lord. It is the experience of being in a full and conscious relationship with God as he is revealed to us in scripture.
- **Peace:** the absence of hostility toward others that comes out of a state of well-being and wholeness, which in its true sense is given by God. The next five social graces specifically make for peace.
- **Patience:** Patience is exercised in the face of persistent and enduring difficulties that prevent us from enjoying the good we desire and need. It accepts the denial of one's pleasure and rights.
- **Kindness:** giving of oneself to meet the needs of others.
- **Goodness:** doing good to others whether they have a specific need or not.
- **Faithfulness:** the character of being true to one's commitments to others and to relationships through difficulties and trials.
- **Gentleness or meekness:** a combination of gentleness and humility.
- **Self-control:** not being driven by any irrational or uncontrolled passion. The Spirit brings our entire being into a controlled obedience to God.

5. Consider the sins listed in passages such as Gal. 5:19-21 and 1 Cor. 6:9-10. Do you understand why each is a sin and cannot be tolerated in your Christian life?

6. Can you identify items of the fruit of the Spirit that specifically answer to and are the opposite of the sins or groups of sins listed in the deeds of the flesh?

7. Why do you think the various social sins and social graces form such a large part of their respective lists (also v. 26)? What does this tell us about this aspect of life?

8. The word *fruit* is singular. Is this significant? Can we pick and choose the qualities of the fruit that we think are important? Does growing in the Spirit mean growing in all the qualities?

Before you go on...

The works of the flesh are plural. That means people can be enslaved to the flesh in some of its works and not others (e.g., not all are drunkards or sorcerers). Before you were a Christian which works of the flesh marked your life? As a Christian are there any areas in which you are particularly vulnerable? On the other hand, remember that the fruit of the Spirit is singular. You cannot counter a specific vice by trying to only develop the opposite virtue. Rather you must walk by the Spirit to bear the whole fruit.

11. Living by the Spirit (2)

Once we have learned to see the difference between the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit we must learn to live the difference. We will continue to look to Galatians 5:16-26 (see last study) to show us the way.

1. Which is harder for you as a Christian: knowing what is the right thing to do, or doing what you know is the right thing? Why?

Life in the Battle Zone

If the fruit of the Spirit comes from the Spirit, and the Spirit is in us, why are these qualities not automatically produced in us?

Walk by the Spirit

He informs our mind with the truth, which in turn presents our will with a call to obedience...

The Spirit is not some supernatural force that sweeps our life into victory as if by magic. He is a divine person who indwells us to lead us, and the fruit is borne as we *walk by the Spirit* (v. 16). He does not use us as robots, bypassing our mind and will, to carry out his way in us. Rather, he engages our whole being in his way. He informs our mind with the truth, which in turn presents our will with a call to obedience, and our obedient will must then direct our action.

A battle of desires

The Spirit does not negate or destroy the flesh. That will not happen in this life. What he does, though, is generate his opposing desire within us (v. 17). When we follow this new desire we short-circuit the deeds of the flesh—they are arrested at their source, which is at the level of desire.

This means we continually have two sources of desire within us. If we follow the desire of the Spirit, we must go against the desire of the flesh, and vice versa. The consequence for us is that it is never simply a matter of doing what we want to do. Whatever we do will involve a struggle.

2. Is there anything to suggest that we, by perfecting some spiritual discipline or achieving spiritual maturity, can transform our flesh or at least distance ourselves from it?

3. Will victory over the flesh at one step in our walk remove or improve the flesh at the next step? Can we ever relax or is our life a continual battle zone?

Experiencing God's Victory

The Spirit turns us against the desires of the flesh. By this, the Spirit gives us the experience of God's conflict with human nature. However, we do not only experience his conflict, but as we follow the desires of the Spirit we also experience his victory. The Spirit makes our walk an experience of participating in God's victory over sin. The battle within us is actually an occasion to know God through our experience.

Distinguishing the desires

In order to experience victory we must be able to distinguish between the desires of the Spirit and those of the flesh. As we have seen, the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are clear. Many times we know which desires are of the flesh and which are of the Spirit because we already know the deeds and the fruit that will result from them. It is simply a matter of being honest with ourselves.

The desires of the Spirit...do not arise naturally within us. They are known only through an awareness of being in Christ.

We can further distinguish the conflicting desires by understanding *how* they arise. The desires of the flesh arise impulsively; they are our automatic reactions to stimuli around us. For this reason our first urge is usually of the flesh. The desires of the Spirit, on the other hand, do not arise naturally within us. They are known only through an awareness of being in Christ. Though every believer has this awareness it can easily fall into the background. We need to keep this awareness in the forefront by reading and reflecting on the word, by praying and by having fellowship with other believers (more on this in the next study). To summarize, we can further distinguish the desires of the Spirit in that (1) they only come through the awareness of who we are in Christ, (2) we must follow them as a deliberate act of faith in Christ, in opposition to the natural, impulsive desires of the flesh (i.e., they call us to deny self and take up the cross to overcome our ego-centered human nature).

4. Remember the flesh is religious; it can produce a false, idolatrous awareness of being "in Christ". Can you give any examples of this? How can we distinguish desires that arise out of such a false awareness from those that arise from a true awareness?

Being clear about sin

Through the conflict we must realize that the fleshly desires themselves which press on us are not our personal sins. They will continue to be with us in this life and we must learn to live with their presence. Personal sinning only begins when we bow our will to these desires and act on them—whether it be an act of the body or simply an act of the mind. We ought not, therefore, to see the mere presence of the desires as our guilt. If we do, we will never be able to see the Spirit's way to victory and we will be absorbed by the flesh within us.

Continual dependence on the Spirit

By engaging us in a continual struggle the Spirit keeps us dependent on him step by step. Relaxing our attention on the Spirit results in failure. Through him, we must maintain an ongoing awareness of being in Christ. Our faith must continually focus on our position in Christ, who never succumbed to human nature (see v. 24). This sensitizes us toward the desires of the Spirit, which lead us to victory. Continual dependence on the Spirit, which is required for a consistent walk, is what God rightly claims from us.

We must not despair of the struggle with the flesh. This struggle is not a sign that the Spirit is not leading. On the contrary, it is evidence of the Spirit's work. The battle is initiated and sustained by the Spirit and is the context in which we are to

experience the Spirit. The moment-by-moment dependence on the Holy Spirit, which is necessitated by the battle, is our true holiness. It is the Spirit's way of bearing his fruit in us.

- 5. If victory over the flesh does not mean the absence of fleshly desires, state in your own words what it does mean.

- 6. Are you humbled by your struggle against the flesh? What is the danger in believing we should not have to be humbled by this struggle?

- 7. How can we positively channel our genuine spiritual longing to be free from the flesh?

The Commitment Supplied: Our Faith

Obviously the Spirit demands a great commitment from us in the struggle with the flesh. We ourselves cannot produce such a commitment. But God has given it to us in our faith. Paul appeals to this in vv. 24-25.

It is an essential conviction of faith in Christ that we live, not by the flesh but by the Spirit.

Faith and the flesh, faith and the Spirit

In v. 24 we are told that through faith in Christ (the means by which we “belong to Christ”), we have crucified the flesh with its desires and passions. This means we have decidedly put aside the flesh from our relationship with God. We do not relate to God through what we are by nature (i.e., through our flesh). Rather, we recognize our nature is sinful and we surrender it to the death of the cross.

On the positive side, we know that we live by, or are alive by, the Spirit. It is an essential conviction of faith in Christ that we live, not by the flesh but by the Spirit. If we accept the Spirit as the source of our life, then we must let the Spirit be the source of the way we live. Paul puts it this way: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25; NIV).

Faith sees only who we are in Christ

The position of faith in relation to the flesh and the Spirit has real practical force. We see the flesh as that which we have surrendered to the cross and as what no longer defines us. This gives us a needed perspective on the desires of the flesh we feel within us. These desires no longer define what we are. They are alien to what we know ourselves to be by faith. Conversely, we see the desires of the Spirit as the desires that belong to us as people who are in Christ.

Faith puts us in the position of having our identity by the Spirit of God and having surrendered the flesh and its desires to the death of the cross. Thus, faith involves a decisive identification with the Spirit against the flesh. This faith-position gives us the foothold to successfully overcome the flesh in our daily experience by walking by the Spirit. The Spirit’s work in us is to activate in our daily experience what we know to be ours in Christ.

8. Explain in your own words how faith inclines us to the Spirit and away from the flesh.

Before you go on...

Take a good look at your inner life. Do you know the Spirit’s war against the flesh? If so, how? If you do, see it as a sign of the Spirit’s indwelling. Have you matured spiritually and come to know God better by engaging in the conflict? Rom. 8:4-5 tells us that to walk by the Spirit we must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. In view of this, look at your walk from the point of view of your thought life. What do you see?

12. Channels of Grace

We must receive the word, pray and give ourselves to fellowship if we are to walk by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit uses three means to lead us in our walk: the word of God, prayer and fellowship. These are channels through which we receive God's grace for living.

Through each channel the Spirit activates our relationship with God in Christ. As we become consciously aware of this relationship we sense the desires of the Spirit, which lead us to victory over the flesh. We must receive the word, pray and give ourselves to fellowship if we are to walk by the Spirit.

1. When do you sense the desires of the Spirit most strongly?

1st Channel: The Word of God

The Spirit works with God's word in our lives. This relationship between the Spirit and the word is established in the reception of the Spirit. The Spirit is received by hearing the word of the gospel with faith, and God continually supplies the Spirit on this basis (Gal. 3:2-5).

The focus on Christ

The Spirit uses the word to focus us on Christ and our salvation in him. As we saw in Study 4, this is the Spirit's function as our inner teacher (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). As a member of the Godhead (i.e., the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit), he takes what God has revealed and done in Christ in history, and makes that known to us in our personal experience.

Thus, it is not enough to simply read the Bible. We must read the Bible as focused in Christ. The Bible is about God revealing himself in the human story, and this revelation has its centre in Christ. Jesus said that the Old Testament scriptures bear witness to him (John 5:39) and that he came to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). After he

To read the Bible for its true subject, it is necessary that we be focused on Christ by the Spirit.

had risen, he presented himself as the subject and fulfillment of those scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46). As for the New Testament, it was written through the apostolic ministry, which was commissioned by Christ, and it is explicitly about Christ.

The Spirit himself is the divine author of the word and we are in fact dependent on him to show us Christ as the centre. Both the Old Testament (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16) and the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:10-13; 1 John 4:1-6) were written by men moved by the Spirit. As such we cannot understand them, and the Christ they reveal, apart from the Spirit of God in us (1 Cor. 2:6-16).

To read the Bible for its true subject, it is necessary that we be focused on Christ by the Spirit. The disciple must follow the Spirit in this focus if he is to be led by the Spirit through the word.

2. In what way do you think different parts of the Old Testament—such as the Law, the Prophets (including the historical books) and the Psalms (Luke 24:44)—are concerned with Christ (Luke 24:17)?

3. According to 1 Cor. 2:14 can unbelievers teach us anything about the meaning of the Bible? Why or why not?

The function of God’s word in our lives (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

The scriptures must not only be understood by the focus on Christ but also by the purpose and function that God’s Christ-centered scripture is to have in our lives. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 shows us that this function is two-fold:

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 *All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;*
17 *that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

i. To give wisdom that leads to salvation (v. 15)

As we have seen, the subject of scripture is Christ and the salvation he brings through faith. But, scripture does not simply present the facts that give us the knowledge about salvation. They are designed to enable us to become wise. That means they enable us to understand *why* salvation in Christ through faith is necessary and *how* we can come to faith and obtain and experience this salvation. All parts of scripture contribute to gaining this wisdom, and we must read them for this wisdom.

ii. To equip (vv. 16-17)

The second function shows how the scriptures are to benefit the disciple. They are designed to achieve a result in our lives: that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

There are four facets to this equipping function:

1. **Teaching**—they give us the truth
2. **Reproof**—they show us where we are wrong
3. **Correction**—they show how we can go from being wrong to being right
4. **Training in righteousness**—beyond having our errors corrected, they will train us in righteous living.

We must learn to read scripture for the effect of scripture on our lives. Any interest in mere head knowledge, as well as the pursuit of speculative issues, must be avoided.

We must learn to read scripture for the effect of scripture on our lives.

4. Take the account of David and Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:17-54 and answer the following:
 - a) How does the passage make us wise unto salvation and focus us on Christ?

- b) How do the four facets of equipping apply?

2nd Channel: Prayer

In prayer our relationship with God is activated as we communicate with him.

Pray to receive

The Bible tells us we *receive* from God through prayer. In fact, Jesus made it very clear that we must pray to receive (Matt. 7:7-11; John 14:13-14; 16:24). If we do not pray, we do not receive (Jas. 4:2).

Realizing our life in Christ by the Spirit

Through prayer we receive, as God's children, all that he has for us. This includes all we need to realize victory over sin. In fact, Jesus made it clear that prayer activates his great achievement in going back to heaven, and through prayer what Jesus has gained for us becomes real in experience. We see this in John 14-16:

John 14:12-14. The basis for the disciple's prayer life is the fact that Jesus returned to the Father. Jesus calls us to realize the full significance of his glorification through prayer in his name.

John 15:7. Jesus taught that our prayer life is to take place in our relationship with him, as we abide in Christ and his word abides in us.

John 16:23-24, 26-27. Jesus also taught that through prayer we enter into the meaning of our relationship with God through Christ and have our joy as disciples made full.

The Spirit draws us into prayer and enables us to pray effectively.

Since the Spirit's work is to make what we have in Christ real in our experience, he plays a vital role in our prayer life. Christians are called to pray at all times *in the Spirit* (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20). The Spirit draws us into prayer and enables us to pray effectively. Prayer is an essential part of life in the Spirit.

The model prayer

Jesus did not leave prayer up to the disciple to figure out. He gave a model for true spiritual prayer in Matt. 6:9-13. Notice the progression through the three parts of the prayer:

9 *"Pray, then, in this way:
'Our Father who is in heaven,*

Hallowed be Your name.

10 *'Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.*

11 *'Give us this day our daily bread.*

12 *'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

13 *'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'*

1. **Addressing God (v. 9a).** Our prayer should be focused by an awareness of who God is and of the nature of his relationship with us.
2. **Praying for God's interests (vv. 9b-10).** God has brought us into a relationship with himself in which our true calling is to participate in his interests and business on earth. To have a daily share in God's work we must pray daily for God's business.
3. **Praying for our needs (vv. 11-13).** Jesus taught that we must seek God's kingdom and righteousness first and then all our needs will be met (v. 33). This is to be reflected in our prayer life. So, our needs come last. Jesus only allows for three areas of need: (1) our present physical needs (worry about tomorrow is not allowed (vv. 25-34)), (2) forgiveness of sins, and (3) preservation from temptation. It is good to keep to these areas of need so we do not bring misdirected and wrong desires and worries into our prayer life.

Prayer prepares us to receive what God has for us.

Prayer is more than making requests. Prayer prepares us to receive what God has for us. Praying within the spirit of the model the Lord gave will keep our faith focused on God's will for us. Remember, this prayer is only an outline that we must fill in with the details of our involvement with God's work and our personal needs.

5. Why do you think it is the case that if we do not pray, we do not receive (Jas. 4:2)?

6. What do you usually pray about? How do your prayers line up with the model prayer of Matt. 6:9-13? How does it change our outlook and our prayer life to pray for God's interests first?

7. Read 1 Thess. 5:17; Luke 18:1; Phil. 4:6-7. How can we continually be in prayer?

3rd Channel: Fellowship

The Spirit brings us into a life of fellowship. In fact, he goes further. He makes us dependent on this fellowship for all that he has for us. This includes both what he has for us to *receive* and what he has for us to *give* in turn.

The fruit of the Spirit is love

God's will is summed up in love, and the principle quality of the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit leads us to love. However, you cannot love in isolation. In leading us to love, the Spirit moves us out of ourselves to others.

Love by serving one another

Through love we are to *serve one another* (Gal. 5:13). Where does this interchange of service happen? Yes, we are to love those who do not love us. Many scriptures teach that. But, the Spirit works to realize a fuller experience of love: a community in which love functions fully by people serving each other. This can only be experienced in the fellowship of Christians.

We can only be engaged in the full sharing of the life in the Spirit with other believers.

Love is sacrificing of oneself to give the good that one has to another. The riches we have in Christ cannot be given to those outside of Christ. Without faith they cannot be received. We can only be engaged in the full sharing of the life in the Spirit with other believers. Thus, it is only in the fellowship of believers that there is the potential and duty for a full activation of the love of the Spirit.

Created inter-dependence: the body of Christ

The Spirit does not only save and lead us as individuals. He also brings about a new community of all believers as the body of Christ. This is the function of the baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). All believers are immersed in the one Spirit (immersion is the idea in baptism) and so are brought to function as one body. In bringing us

into one body, the Spirit gives different gifts to different members so that we are dependent on one another to receive all of the grace the Spirit has for us. We need to be served and to serve in order to fully enter into what the Spirit has for us.

The Spirit indwells us and leads us in our personal walk in the Lord. But he indwells all other disciples and leads them too. He does this leading in such a way that his work in others is part of his work in leading each one.

The experience of fellowship actually begins with the process of making disciples. The Spirit uses disciples to guide new believers into the truth and the walk in the Lord. By this process, the disciple is drawn into the dynamics of fellowship.

- 8. How do you feel about being dependent on the body of Christ? How does it relate to our dependence on God?

- 9. What do you think the effect of not having church fellowship would be on a believer?

* * * * *

A three-legged stool

A stool needs at least three legs to stand. If you pull out one leg, the stool cannot stand. To sit on a two or one-legged stool would require a fine balancing act that few could perform, and even they could only do it for a little while.

Our spiritual life needs three supports: the word of God, prayer and fellowship. Pulling any one of these from our life will lead to an inevitable fall. At first, we may try to keep our balance, but the fall will happen and become evident.

A person's spiritual life needs three supports...



THE LORD'S SUPPER: WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:42

The Lord's Supper or "breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42), like baptism, signifies a key element of our walking relationship with Jesus.

Baptism focuses on our personal walk. This is clearly seen in that we are baptized as individuals. Accordingly, the teaching brought into focus by baptism concerns the believer's own walk.

The Lord's Supper brings into view another and fuller aspect of Christ's work. The Supper was instituted as a supper for all of the disciples. Here we are not individuals but a fellowship (as we saw in the last part of Study 10). This highlights an important point about Christ's work. Christ did not come only to convert individuals. He came to bring about a new people—the church. The new creation in Christ includes both new persons and a new people. We are not only individual disciples, but members of the community of disciples.

In order to be functioning disciples, we must enter into this corporate aspect of our walk in addition to the individual aspect. To do this, we need to understand the nature of the church and our place in it.

This last section of our study looks at the basic teaching brought into focus by the Lord's Supper. We will look at what the church is and at the purpose of its gathering. As well, we will explore the commitments involved in identifying with the church, and the way forward to spiritual progress amid the potential distractions and pitfalls of church life.

13. Introducing the Church

Jesus introduces two aspects of the church...the one universal church and the church as a gathering of disciples.

Jesus' announcement and introduction of the church is found in the Gospel of Matthew. We will begin there. The doctrine of the church is worked out in the letters of the apostle Paul, but it is best to begin with Jesus' statements on the church. Jesus introduced the church, and every aspect of discipleship must take its lead from him. Furthermore, Paul, in his letters, does not do what Jesus did. He does not introduce the truth of the church but only elaborates it.

Jesus only made two statements about the church. In the first he makes the announcement that he will build the church (Matt. 16:18), and in the second he introduces the role of the church as a gathering of disciples (Matt. 18:17). The two statements are brief and to the point. They introduce two aspects of the church found in the rest of the NT: the one universal church and the church as a gathering of disciples.

The Church Announced (Matt. 16:13-18)

Jesus' first statement concerning the church is contained in the passage of Matt. 16:13-18:

13 *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

14 *And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."*

15 *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

16 *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

17 *And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

18 *I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Jesus says he will build his church. The word *church* means *assembly* or *congregation*. The distinctive use of this word in the Old Testament is to indicate the people of God gathered before the Lord (e.g., Deut. 9:10; Psa. 22:22; Neh. 5:13).

1. What can we learn about the nature of the church from the distinctive Old Testament usage of the word to indicate the people of God gathered before the Lord?

Upon this rock: confessing Christ

The rock Jesus builds on is the confession Peter has just made (v. 16). This confession consists of the revelation from the Father that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 17). All who make this confession become part of the Lord’s church.

The confession marks the disciples off from the masses who saw in Jesus merely a prophet (vv. 13-14). A prophet is only recognized for what he says, but the confession identifies Jesus for who he *is*—the Son of God, the one in whom God does his work in the world. For this confession Jesus was crucified (Matt. 26:63-68). In his resurrection and exaltation, Jesus is seen as the Son of the Living God, seated at the right hand of God the Father, and so is equal to the Father (Matt. 26:64; 28:18). We are disciples of the risen Christ by being identified with Christ as one with the Father and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

The confession that Jesus announced as the foundation of the church is not a dead creedal citation.

The confession that Jesus announced as the foundation of the church is not a dead creedal citation. When truly made, it is the result of the Father revealing the Son to a person. Jesus points this out in Matt. 16:17 (see also 11:27). It is not a human interpretation of Jesus since flesh and blood did not reveal it. The church is not based on a traditional creed. Rather, it is based on the truth of Christ as revealed to us by God. As we respond in faith to Christ revealed we are collectively linked with him and marked off from the world as his church.

2. When do we become part of the church? Why?

3. What is the significance of the fact that Christ, and not people, builds the church? How should this affect the way we view the church?

The gates of Hades will not overpower: participating in Christ's life

Hades is the realm of death. Here Hades is envisioned as a walled city that takes in all of the living in this world into its gates, i.e., into death. The whole world succumbs to the power of death. However, the church is being built in this world, but will never succumb to the power of death. Why? The answer is given in the rock.

The confession...gives the church that ultimate security against the force of death.

The rock is the bedrock that provides a solid foundation against the forces of destruction. Jesus brings out this point about building on a rock in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). Now Jesus is saying that the confession that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God is the bedrock that gives the church that ultimate security against the force of death. This points to the essential nature of the church.

Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, rose from the dead and conquered death. We as disciples are related to him by faith. Through this faith, Christ defines us as a people apart from the world, which is under the rule of death, and he communicates his life to us. Thus, the church participates in the life of Christ, which is resurrection life, and so triumphs over the power of Hades.

4. What difference does it make to us that we are saved from the power of death and possess eternal life not as isolated individuals but as members of the church?

The Gathered Church (Matt. 18:15-20)

Jesus makes us part of the church—the gathering before the Lord. But how do we live this truth out now, in this life? Jesus gives us the answer in Matt, 18:15-20 as he introduces the church in another way:

15 *“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*

16 *“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.*

17 *“And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.*

18 *“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

19 *“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.*

20 *“For where two or three have gathered in My name, I am there in their midst.”*

He does not now speak of it as the one church he will build in the world, but as a small gathering of disciples.

5. Is there a contradiction if we say we are part of the one, universal church but are not part of a local church or gathering of disciples? Explain.

Care for one another

Disciples are to be careful not to cause others to sin and are to seek to restore those who stray.

Matthew 18 gives the context for understanding the purpose of the gathered church. Jesus begins by characterizing the disciple as a child (v. 3). This child must be received by the other disciples (v. 5). Within the fellowship Jesus focuses on the problem of stumbling, or sinning (vv. 6-9). Disciples are to be careful not to cause others to sin and are to seek to restore those who stray (vv. 10-14). Thus, they are to focus on keeping each other in the way of following Jesus. The church is to provide this care for one another.

6. Consider Matt. 18:5. Why must the child-disciple be received? According to the passage, what are his needs?

The role of the church in discipline

In order to keep one another in the way of Jesus, we must work at restoring the sinning brother (vv. 15-17). This brings us to the role of the church in establishing discipline. The primary role of the church is to restore the straying disciple. Only when the church's call is rejected is the straying person considered to be outside the fellowship. What is involved here are the parameters and integrity of the fellowship. Only the church as a whole can maintain the boundaries when they are called into question by sin in the fellowship. Jesus' instructions here show how this is the case.

If a brother sins, you have a responsibility to tell him with a view to winning him (see also Gal. 6:1). However, just because he does not listen to you or even to you along with others, does not mean that he is to be regarded as someone who is outside of the church. Only the church can play that decisive role. Though he did not listen to you and those with you, if he listens to the church he is to be received as one inside the fellowship of disciples. If he does not listen to the church, then he is to be regarded as one who is outside of the church (i.e., in Jewish terminology, a Gentile or tax-collector).

- 7. What difference does it make that it is the whole church that decides on discipline and not one person or group of persons?

The church has been given authority to implement on earth the decisions God has made in heaven.

Implementing God's decisions

Let us reflect on the church's role. The church does not decide what constitutes sin. The church, like the disciple, learns that from Christ. However, the church has been given authority to implement on earth the decisions God has made in heaven (v. 18). It does this through the call to repentance, which is decisive as to whether a person is in the fellowship of disciples or not. Through this call, the church can declare a person forgiven and restored if he repents by listening to the church, or it can declare a person outside of the fellowship of disciples because he has not listened to the church. The church's decisions are to be backed up and made effective through united prayer (v. 19). The reason why the church can carry out the role of defining who is in the fellowship rests in the nature of the church set forth in v. 20.

Where two or three are gathered...

We can now understand Jesus' promise to be in the midst of his gathered disciples (v. 20). It means he is there with his authority to judge sin and restore those who have strayed. He implements this authority through the church. Our commitment to

fellowship must be such that we are willing to submit to and carry out the grace and authority of the Lord to deal with sin in discipline and restoration.

To be in fellowship we do not have to be sinless, but we have to be repentant when we sin and receive the help of the fellowship in our walk. As we walk in the Lord we are also called to care for others in their walk. In the church there must be unconditional grace with a commitment to uncompromised holiness.

8. Consider 18:20. Does it mean that wherever two or three are gathered in his name that Jesus endorses all they do? If not, state in your own words what it does mean.

9. Are people naturally receptive to correction and discipline? Considering the purpose of Jesus' presence in the gathering, what should our attitude be as we gather?

10. How do vv. 21-22 of Matt. 18 contribute to the discussion on the role of the gathered church?

14. Called to Supper

In the New Testament, the church meeting was the gathering to break bread or to eat the “Lord’s Supper.”

We have seen that our life as members of the one, universal church is lived out in the gathering of disciples. But exactly how are disciples brought together? The only command the Lord gave that actually brings disciples together in one space is his call to supper—the command to eat of the bread and drink of the cup in remembrance of him (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

After Jesus returned to the Father we see the disciples coming together in the way Jesus had commanded. In the New Testament, the church meeting was the gathering to break bread (Acts 20:7) or to eat the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor. 11:17-20). This Supper that draws the disciples together brings into focus just what the fellowship of the church is.

The Supper and Its Significance (Matt. 26:26-28)

Let us look at the occasion on which Jesus instituted the Supper: his last supper, as recorded in Matt. 26:26-28:

26 And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you;

28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

We will note some key features and their significance.

Jesus with his disciples

Jesus chose to have his last supper with his disciples (26:18). To appreciate this fact, we must understand the setting. The occasion was the Passover instituted in Exodus 12. The Passover was a meal in commemoration of Israel’s redemption from Egypt. The people were to eat it as families or households (Exod. 12:46), the basic units of the nation, which is itself an enlarged family. Instead of eating his last Passover supper with his biological family and having his disciples eat it with their families, Jesus ate it with his disciples. This is significant.

The time came for Jesus to fulfill the meaning of the Passover by the sacrifice of himself to bring about the true redemption. The redeemed people now are not Israel but his disciples. At this last supper he instituted a new supper in commemoration of

himself. This was to be eaten not in the setting of the biological family but in the fellowship of disciples.

Jesus had already denied his earthly family and affirmed as his family the disciples who do the will of his Father in heaven (Matt. 12:46-50). This new family is the setting for what became known as the Lord's Supper.

1. What is the significance of the fact that the setting for the church meeting is a family meal?

The bread and the cup

At his last supper Jesus consecrated the bread and the cup (through the blessing and thanksgiving) to represent his body and blood. The focus is on his sacrifice for us. It is through his sacrifice that Christ's life is imparted to us. Without the sacrificial death, we could have no participation with Christ.

Importantly, Christ did not just set before them the bread and the cup; he gave the command to eat and drink. This is because the bread and the cup alone, as symbols merely to be looked at, cannot tell the truth of Christ's death. The significance of his death is that he died *for us*. We show this by partaking of the bread and the cup as signs of his body and blood given in sacrifice.

All of you

Concerning the cup, Jesus stressed that they must all drink. The stress on *all* brings out a key aspect of this supper. They all had to eat and drink, because Christ died for all. The Lord's Supper is not a private meal that is taken to only fulfill a private need. Rather, it is for the church, and it expresses the truth of the church.

One aspect of this truth concerns the unity of the body. The fact is that through our common share in Christ's body and blood all disciples are brought together. The Lord's Supper expresses this. Paul makes the point in 1 Cor. 10:17 in saying "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."

Another aspect of this truth is that the fullness of Christ can only be found in the church as a whole. In Eph. 1:22-23 the church is described as the fullness of Christ. No individual can receive this fullness by himself. Only as a part of his body can we receive all that is in Christ. This means that our involvement and participation in the church is a vital part of our experience of Christ.

Through our common share in Christ's body and blood all disciples are brought together.

2. Does taking the Lord's Supper affect or stimulate your relationship with Christ? If so, how?

3. Does taking the Lord's Supper affect or stimulate your relationship with the church body? If so, how?

In remembrance of Jesus

In Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor. 11:24-25, we read that we are to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. The words *in remembrance* might be better translated *as a memorial*. At the supper Jesus ordained a commemorative act as a memorial, just as the Passover feast was a memorial of Israel's redemption (Exod. 12:14; 13:9). The meal as a whole is a dramatized memorial to Jesus. It shows forth the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26).

The meal as a whole is a dramatized memorial to Jesus.

As a remembrance or memorial, the focus is not simply on the state of mind—that we think of Jesus when we eat and drink. The focus is on the *action* of eating the bread and drinking the cup. By participating we take in, declare, and commit to the meaning and reality of the sacrifice—that Jesus died for all.

Through the Supper, the church does not show or declare itself, but rather the Lord's death. All is a witness and memorial to Christ, who shows himself in and through the church. The church is a living and dynamic trophy to Christ for his glorious self-sacrifice.

This supper is the only act that we can carry out that in itself sets forth the essential meaning of the church—believers as one in their common share in Christ. Preaching, praying, worship and serving are only acts of the church or things that happen within the church. They do not enact what the church is. This is only done in the Lord's Supper.

4. In your experience has the Lord's Supper been given its full place and force in church life? Why or why not?

Brought Together

The Lord's Supper brings the people of God together in one place in a visible unity in Christ. As a dramatized memorial to Christ and his sacrificial death for us, it summons us to enact the basis for our gathering together. In this way, as we gather we declare and commit ourselves to what we are together in Christ.

The basis for church activity

The common share in Christ established by the Supper then becomes the basis for all the activity of the church. This includes the activity of the gathered church at the church meeting as well as the interaction and service of the members at all times. It all flows from the truth of our inter-relatedness that is expressed and affirmed in the Lord's Supper.

5. What should the affect on the church meeting be of convening it around the memorial to Christ and his death? How should it affect activities such as worship, teaching and fellowship?

6. Read Acts 2:46. Considering the church's role regarding discipline and keeping one another in the way of Jesus (Study 12), why did the disciples break bread and meet as a church in houses and not as the group of thousands (v. 41) who met in the temple to hear the apostles preach?

Before you go on...

Do you partake of the Lord's Supper? If not, why not? If so, do you take it to express your identity as a member of the church, and to acknowledge that you receive the fullness of Christ only as a member of his body? Review your activities in the church and see if the truths expressed in the Supper can have any further impact on them.

15. The Body in Action

The unity we have as believers through our common share in Christ is described as that of a body (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 12:4; Eph. 4:12). Just as the human body is a living organism made up of many members with a great diversity of functions, so is the church body. These functions are to be carried out in the gathering of disciples.

Before we consider the activity of the entire body as it gathers, we will first see how the body is shaped and equipped to grow. Then we will look at the way the Spirit enables each member in the body to serve and how that service is to be carried out.

The Church Takes Shape

The church is shaped using the word of God as taught by the apostles.

In Acts 2, when the Spirit was given and the church was born, we read that “they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (v. 42). This description gives us a snapshot of how the Spirit shaped the church. Notice that the progression begins with the word of God in the teaching of the apostles and ends with a functioning church body:

1. *The apostles’ teaching.* The church is shaped using the word of God as taught by the apostles. Today we have this word in the New Testament. Only where it is preached and taught can a gathering function as the church.
2. *Fellowship.* As the apostles’ teaching is received by people, they become sharers in Christ as disciples. This is the meaning of fellowship. The common share they now have in Christ is the basis for them to come together.
3. *The breaking of bread.* As we saw in the last study, the Lord’s Supper, or breaking of bread, sets forth the essential meaning of the church and is the occasion to actually meet together as disciples. Here fellowship is activated and expressed.
4. *Prayer.* As the disciples gather together, they pray. In prayer all members are active. The whole body is now functioning. As we will see, it functions in other ways as well.

The Supply Line

In Ephesians 4 we get another picture of the crucial role played by the word of God in producing a functioning body. A chain made up of certain members of the body acts as a supply line to bring the word of God to the body. Vv. 11-16 describe this supply line and its effect:

11 *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

12 *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

13 *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

14 *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

15 *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the Head, even Christ,*

16 *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

As these members supply the word, the saints are equipped to serve...

The supply line members are gifts given by the risen Lord (v. 8). As these members supply the word, the saints are equipped to serve (v. 12) since they learn to speak the truth in love (v. 15). As the saints then function as members of the body, the body is built up (v. 12). The growth that occurs is a growth in the knowledge of Christ and into his fullness (v. 13). It is vital for the very survival of the body (v.14).

1. Consider Eph. 4:14. What happens to those who remain as spiritual children? Why?

2. Is there any way a believer can go through the maturing process apart from the gathered church? Why or why not?

Supply line members

The first two members of the supply line are *apostles* and *prophets*. They are the ones through whom the revelation of Christ, which we have in the New Testament,

was given. In this sense they are referred to as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). The other members of the supply line work with the word originally given through the apostles and prophets.

Third in the supply line are *evangelists*. They proclaim the word of the gospel by which people come to repentance and faith, are established as part of the body and receive their initial shaping by the word. Fourth are *pastors* (lit. “shepherds”) and *teachers*, paired together. Their role is to continue to minister the word to the members of the body so that those members are finally equipped to serve and make their own contribution to the body.

...the gathering is dependant on the ongoing ministry of shepherds and teachers to equip the saints to actually function as the church.

The supply line and the gathering of disciples

The supply line of the church is vital for the existence of each gathering of disciples. The gathering would not exist apart from the word given through the apostles and prophets, and apart from the proclamation of that word in evangelization. As well, the gathering is dependant on the ongoing ministry of shepherds and teachers to equip the saints to actually function as the church. Such a ministry is essential for a church congregation. Without it the process of growth into the fullness of Christ cannot take place.

The place of leadership

The shepherds, or pastors, mentioned in Eph. 4:11 are the leaders of the gatherings of disciples (commonly referred to as the local church) and are responsible for their growth. They are elsewhere referred to as *elders* or *overseers* (KJV “bishop”). The three terms come together in Acts 20 where Paul addresses the *elders* of Ephesus (v. 17) and reminds them of their appointment by the Spirit as *overseers* to *shepherd* the church of God (v. 28).

Church leaders are to be leaders in discipleship. This they do by teaching (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9; see also their pairing with teachers in Eph. 4:11). As they fulfill their role in the supply line the saints are able to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). As they spend time with the members (to *oversee* means to visit or attend to), they also lead by being examples of Christ-like character (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). While Jesus is our Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4; Heb. 13:20), he works through those he calls as shepherds in the church to guide believers into maturity.

- 3. How is the role of church leaders portrayed in Heb. 13:17; Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Cor. 16:15-16 and Phil. 3:17? How are we to respond to them? Why?

The Gifts of the Spirit

In addition to the supply line members, Ephesians 4 also makes mention of gifts given to each member of the body (v. 7). 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that these gifts are particular abilities given by the Spirit. Here it is not just the supply line ministries in view, but the ministry of the entire body. In Ephesians 4 we saw that as members are equipped by the supply line ministries, they are able themselves to serve and build up the body. In 1 Corinthians 12 we see that this ability is according to the spiritual gift each has received:

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...

7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

All members have the Spirit and have a role in the church by the Spirit's operation through them.

No one person has the fullness of the grace to meet the needs of the church. In other words, the body is not one member. Also, no member is without a function in the body. All members have the Spirit and have a role in the church by the Spirit's operation through them.

Empowering the church

This endowment of the Spirit answers to the key concept of the church. The church is related to Christ in such a way that Christ imparts his life and power to the church. Through the gifts of the Spirit the church receives from Christ whatever is required to carry out his life on earth.

Paul mentions some of the gifts of the Spirit in vv. 8-10 and vv. 28-30 (see also Rom. 12:6-8 and Eph. 4:11-12). They are given according to the will of the Spirit (v. 11), by grace (Rom. 12:6). They become evident in our lives as we give ourselves over to discipleship and are transformed (Rom. 12:1-3).

4. Consider 1 Cor. 12:11 and Rom. 12:6. Do we have any say in what spiritual gift we receive? Why do you think this is?

5. Summarize in your own words what Rom. 12:1-3 says we must do to enter into our own effective service?

6. What is the problem Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 12:12-26? Are the “less honourable” members (v. 23) less necessary? How do we avoid the problem that arose there?

A Walk of Service

It is clear that our service is an integral part of our walk with Jesus. We are made members of a body and given spiritual gifts to serve. The path we take to entering into effective service may not be quick or simple. It requires patience and humility. Above all we need to be single-minded in our devotion to following Christ so that we are not striving to realize our own goals and ambitions.

We will now look at important principles regarding how our gifts are to be used and how they fit into Jesus’ work of discipleship.

Love and edification (1 Cor. 13-14)

To serve the good and the growth of the body we must serve in love.

To serve the good and the growth of the body we must serve in love (1 Cor. 13). Love is a very fuzzy concept in the world. But the portrait given in vv. 4-7 gives us a very clear picture of what love means in the Bible.

Love seeks to edify or build up others through the gifts (1 Cor. 14). We must use spiritual gifts for this end—to build up the whole body of Christ.

The promise of discipleship fulfilled

The call to discipleship comes with a promise, “...and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). The ministry that is carried out as a result of the gifts of the

The fishing is not simply making converts but making disciples.

Spirit activated within the fellowship of the church brings that promise to fulfillment.

Christ calls us to follow him. The focus in this call is on us as disciples giving ourselves to the way of Christ. The path leads us from repentance and faith, through baptism, and finally to fellowship. By taking this path, we enter the practical life of the body in which we discover that through the gift of the Spirit we have been brought into a fellowship of service and have a part in the great operation of fishing men. The fishing is not simply making converts but making disciples. The whole church and all of the operations within it are committed to this one work.

- 7. What is the effect or value of exercising a spiritual gift without love (see 1 Cor. 13:1-3)? Why do you think this is?

- 8. Consider the character of love laid out in 1 Cor. 13:4-7. How does love practically make a difference in the exercise of spiritual gift?

- 9. 1 Pet. 4:11 mentions the two basic types of gifts. How does each contribute to the one work of making disciples?

16. Commitments at Supper

The Lord's Supper dramatizes the truth that believers are one in their common share in Christ. By partaking, we do not merely acknowledge this, but we commit ourselves to living it out in our fellowship-life. 1 Corinthians presents three essential commitments involved.

The Commitment to Purity in the Fellowship (1 Cor. 5)

We have already made a commitment to purity in our repentance—as we confess and turn from sin. We further this commitment in baptism, which is an act of putting away what belongs to the old man and putting on features of the new. Now this commitment must be made at the Supper as a commitment to purity in fellowship.

The need for cleansing

People who live in vices must be removed so the fellowship that keeps the Supper is holy.

In 1 Cor. 5 Paul characterizes the Lord's Supper as a Christian Passover where we partake of Christ, our Passover sacrificed for us. Just as at the Israelite Passover Jews were to clean the house of all leaven, or yeast (Exod. 12:14ff.), at the Christian Passover disciples are to cleanse the fellowship of malice and wickedness (v. 8). This cleansing means removing from the fellowship the "immoral, covetous, idolater, reviler, drunkard or swindler" (vv. 10-11). People who live in vices must be removed so the fellowship that keeps the Supper is holy.

1. Describe what you think (or know) would happen within the fellowship if sin was not addressed.

Stopping the infection

It is of vital importance to purge the fellowship of the practice of sin. As v. 6 states, a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. In the same way, corruption in the

fellowship will corrupt the whole church so the church no longer is a fellowship in discipleship and holiness.

Recall that the process for addressing sin is outlined in Matt. 18:15-17. It is only once the offender has refused to listen to the whole church and repent of his sin that he is to be removed.

2. What affect do you think known church members who persist in sin have on unbelievers around them?

3. Consider vv. 9-13. What is the difference between the way we are to relate to immoral people in the church and immoral unbelievers? Why?

4. How are we to actually remove the immoral person from the fellowship?

The Commitment to Communion in Christ Alone (1 Cor. 10:14-22)

In coming to faith in God through Christ, we turn from all idolatry. In baptism, we identify with the full revelation of God in Christ as Father, Son and Spirit. Through the Supper, we must now commit to a fellowship-life in Christ that excludes all other spiritual fellowship. Without this exclusion, the fellowship in Christ experienced in the church would be mixed up with the false gods of the world and so be open to demonic influence.

Idolatry and the demonic

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 states that our communion or fellowship (NASB has “sharing,” NIV has “participation”) with Christ in the Lord’s Supper involves a commitment to abstain from any communion around a different idea of the divine, which is idolatry. While the idol is only a human creation, there is a demonic reality behind the false gods and believers are not to have fellowship with demons.

Paul is referring to the common idolatry of paganism in which images are worshipped. However, the principle of idolatry goes beyond that to any human creation or distortion of the divine nature. The New Testament makes clear that Satanic and demonic influences lie behind a different Jesus being preached (2 Cor. 11:2-4) and behind the denial of the essential truth about Jesus (1 John 4:1-4).

The New Testament makes clear that Satanic and demonic influences lie behind a different Jesus being preached...

5. Why would Satan and his demons promote idols?

6. How does 1 John 4:1-6 describe anyone or any spirit that does not confess Christ as he was revealed to the apostles? Comment.

No conception or confession about the divine is spiritually neutral.

Zero tolerance

No conception or confession about the divine is spiritually neutral. Any understanding and worship of the divine that is contrary to the truth about God and Christ in scripture is incompatible with devotion to the Lord. This means that the Supper calls for a commitment to abstain from any communion that is based on a false God or different Jesus. This includes explicitly religious communions and quasi-religious societies that confess some mystical or vague view of the deity and deny the revelation of God in Christ presented in the Bible. Inter-faith communions must also be abstained from. Such communions may profess a tolerance that makes room for participants to hold the biblical view of God as their private understanding of “the Spirit” or “Divine Being.” However, we must not be deceived by such tolerance. Such communions are not a fellowship in the truth of God revealed in Christ and want to fit the biblical teaching on God and Christ into an unbiblical and even intentionally anti-biblical understanding of the divine.

A Jealous God

1 Corinthians 10:22 draws in a key theme of the Old Testament—the Lord is a jealous God. He will not have his people participate in idolatry. The God of the Bible will not tolerate any conception of the divine aside from the truth that comes through his self-revelation.

7. What sort of statement does a Christian make if he is part of a group that merely requires or encourages a general belief in God or the divine?

8. What do you think would happen to a church that allowed its people to participate in such communions?

The Commitment to Unity (1 Cor. 11:17-34)

At the Supper we must make a commitment to the unity of believers and give visible expression to that unity.

The commitment to unity is also based in both faith and baptism. Our faith is not our private grasp of Christ. Rather, faith comes about by hearing the one gospel preached throughout the world (Rom 10:17-18) and this one faith is expressed in the communion. In baptism the believer commits his present life in the body to the one Lord. This baptism is the same for all believers and so involves a commitment to walk the same walk with all disciples. Through the Lord's Supper the commitment to the one faith and the one walk is raised to a commitment to a united fellowship-life.

At the Supper we must make a commitment to the unity of believers and give visible expression to that unity. Paul's response to the problem that is addressed in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 presses this truth.

The problem at Corinth

The church at Corinth was coming together for the worse rather than for the better (v. 17). This was the case because in their meetings there were actual divisions (v. 18). Their observance of the Lord's Supper reflected this division and was even used to establish the division (vv. 20-22).

At Corinth the Christians were celebrating the Supper in the context of a meal. But it was not a communal meal in which the objective is to have all eat together. Some were eating and drinking for themselves. The result was that the poorer members went without and so were given no share in the Supper.

The Supper is to bring believers together in a visible unity. However, in excluding some from the Supper, the Corinthians were directly violating its meaning and purpose. Thus Paul says that it is not really the Lord's Supper they were eating (v. 20). By their actions they were despising the church (v. 22). The Lord's Supper must be eaten in a manner that honours the whole church as the body of Christ. Hence, in order to genuinely observe the Supper the Corinthians were to wait for one another and ensure that all ate together (v. 33).

Eating and drinking in a worthy manner (vv. 23-32)

The eating of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Lord's death. As we saw earlier, the whole act of eating and drinking is a memorial to Christ and his death for us. To eat in a selfish manner is to give a wrong portrayal of the death of Christ. By eating this way, one eats in a manner that is unworthy of the Lord and thus presents a wrong memorial to him. As a result, he is guilty of the body of Christ. Through partaking in such a manner, one eats and drinks judgment to himself.

We can only partake of this Supper as a true memorial of Christ if we eat and drink in a manner that shows the true meaning of Christ's death—that he died for us all and we all are one in him. We must meet together and partake of the Supper with a conscious understanding of the Lord's relationship to the whole church and with a commitment to making that unity of the church visible. In other words, before eating and drinking we must examine ourselves to ensure that we are partaking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

9. Some believe v. 28 calls us to search our lives for any and every sin we may have recently committed before we partake. How would you respond to this?

10. Why do you think the judgment on those who “do not judge the body rightly” (vv. 29-30) is so severe?

11. Does this teaching on unity mean we can have no disagreements with fellow believers? Explain.

Before you go on...

What commitments have you made in partaking of the Lord's Supper? Review your spiritual life in light of the three commitments we have studied.

17. Staying Focused

The church must never become the focal point of faith in any way.

The church is inseparably linked to Christ. Through the church, Christ operates and makes himself known on earth. In the church, Christ is heard and seen. This is a tremendous blessing for the communion of disciples. We must hold this blessing, however, with a determined focus on Christ and not the church. The church must never become the focal point of faith in any way. The church only holds its position and carries out its function by focusing all attention on Christ.

Faith, baptism and the fellowship all affirm that we must be focused on Christ. However, since it is the church that is visible, there is the danger that our faith and service gets its reference point in the church—the people who we see and hear talking about Christ and are in an immediate relationship with us—rather than in Christ who can only be seen by faith. This shift in focus subverts true discipleship which must ever and only be a relationship with Jesus in which we follow him and relate to him through everything in our life.

1. Have you ever felt disappointed or let down by the church? If so, how did it affect your relationship with God?

The Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:10-15)

How do we keep our involvement in the church focused on Christ? 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 gives us a total perspective that keeps everything lined up with Christ.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But let each man be careful how he builds on it.

11 *For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

12 *Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*

13 *each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.*

14 *If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.*

15 *If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

At Corinth, the Christians began to see the fellowship as belonging to people (v. 4). The focus was on people and not on Christ. The apostle uses the image of the church as a building (v. 9), specifically a temple (v. 16), to refocus the Christians on Christ. A temple belongs to God. The idea in a temple is that through the temple God is present among his people. This brings into focus the key idea in the church: God in Christ present among his people, imparting to them his life and power. Let us see what this means for our involvement in it.

Christ the foundation (vv. 10-11)

Jesus Christ, as preached and taught in the apostolic gospel, is the only foundation. Any society of people that is not based on this foundation is not a true church and does not have the divine presence in Christ. We must keep in mind that Christ is God among us and only in him do we find the temple of God. We should be conscious of Christ as the foundation at all times.

We must keep in mind that Christ is God among us and only in him do we find the temple of God.

The truth of the church's one foundation raises an important point. A gathering of believers on the foundation of Christ is a church, no matter what its other failures are. As we move through life, we must choose again and again where we will fellowship and on what basis we will fellowship. The answer must be decided by the one and only foundation of the church. As long as the foundation is there we can look to it, stand on it and build on it.

2. How should the truth of Christ as the foundation of the church condition our attitude toward church gatherings and all that goes on there?

3. How do you know if a church truly has Christ as its foundation, and thus is a true church?

A construction site (v. 12)

We now come to a feature that we must appreciate. The foundation of the temple is complete, but the superstructure is in the process of being built. Hence, the church is not complete. It is under construction. We must not expect a finished product but rather a work in progress.

We must not expect a finished product but rather a work in progress.

Not only is the building incomplete, on this construction site people are building with radically different materials. Some are building with gold, silver and precious stones—materials that are appropriate to the foundation of Christ and that will pass the test of God’s judgment. Others, however, are building with wood, hay and straw—common materials that do not belong in the temple and will be consumed in God’s trial by fire. We must be prepared for this reality in church life.

In the midst of this reality we are to participate in the life of the church by contributing to the building process. In coming to a church you do not come to a finished house to enjoy rest but you come to a construction site to share in building the temple of God. Each member must build on the foundation of Christ. But, we must be careful how we build. What we build must be fitting for God’s holiness and it must make real in the fellowship what it means for God to be present among his people. The point is not to build anything that can be built into the temple or to get the job done. Nor is the point to build in a way that is agreeable to other people. These approaches will inevitably lead us to build with common materials rather than precious or holy ones. We must only build into the fellowship, and so into the lives of the Christians, that which is according to God.

4. How should the fact that the church is still a work in progress affect our expectations of the church?

5. Can you give some examples of building with common materials vs. precious or holy ones?

What we have done that is suitable to God will pass his judgment and for that we will be rewarded.

Evaluation (vv. 13-15)

During our life, we make our contribution to the temple. That contribution will be judged when Christ comes again. He will glorify our bodies and will judge all that we have done in the body (see also 2 Cor. 5:10). What does not pass his judgment is burned up. It makes no contribution to the eternal glory. What we have done that is suitable to God will pass his judgment and for that we will be rewarded.

The prospect of judgment means that we must make our contribution to the building of the church with a view to Christ's judgment of our work. The standard of work is not what other Christians are doing or what they think should be done. Often, the church as a whole gets into building with wood, hay and straw. The standard is the Lord's will. But, we must not think that we can achieve this in isolation. We are building into the unity of God's people and must do that in the spirit of unity.

6. How should we decide what sort of work we will do in the church?

7. How should the future judgment of Christ affect our attitude toward our work?

Until He Comes

Our service in the church takes place between the death of Christ, through which he carries out his complete work, and the judgment at his second coming. Our celebration of the Lord's Supper takes place in the same interval: we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). On the basis of Christ's completed work we fellowship and live by him on earth. This work continues until he comes. Then the church will be complete. All that Christ has done in and through us to make the church the full and perfect abode of God will be finished. Whatever we have done that is not suitable for God will be removed, and that which truly added to the building of the church will remain.

A share in Christ's work and glory

In the way we contribute to building the church as the temple of God we see the real wonder of the church. Christ placed us within the church to give us a share in the building of the church by working through us. Thus Christ gives the church as a whole a full share in his work and glory, and each member, by participating in the work, is given his own share in this.

Christ placed us within the church to give us a share in the building of the church by working through us.

Our walking relationship made complete

Only when we see Jesus and are changed to be like him (1 John 3:1-3) will the call to discipleship be completely fulfilled. Jesus said, "If anyone serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be" (John 12:26). We will yet follow the Lord all the way into his glory but only after we have a share in following him in his work that brings the church into that glory. Our service in the church must be controlled by that hope. Only in this way is discipleship—our walking relationship with Jesus—made complete.

8. What is the point of 1 Cor. 3:6-7? Why does God involve us in the planting and watering?

9. How would our relationship with Jesus be affected if we did not seek to contribute to building the church?

Mini-Study: The Seven Churches of Asia (Rev. 2-3)

In Rev. 1 the Lord appears to John in a vision and gives him messages to send to seven churches in Asia Minor. Read those messages in chapters 2-3.

1. In each case what must the Christian do to be rewarded by the Lord (vv. 7, 11, 17, etc.)?
2. In how many of the seven churches does the problem that must be overcome originate *inside* the church? What does this tell us about the nature of church life?
3. Does the Lord ever call the overcomer to leave the church? Why or why not?
4. Consider the various rewards mentioned. What sort of picture do they create of the one who overcomes?
5. What sort of motivation do these rewards provide for persevering and following Christ as a member of his church on earth?

Before you go on...

What is your involvement in church life? What have you been taking as your basis for contributing to the church? What kind of approval do you look for? Do you need to re-orient yourself with Christ as the foundation on which you must build and the judge of what you contribute?



EPILOGUE

...And I will make you fishers of men.

Matt. 4:19

Jesus initiated the theme of discipleship with the simple call, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” We have unfolded what this call involves for the Christian who is saved by faith in the risen Lord, receives the gift of the Spirit and lives in the fellowship of the church. Now, let us go back and reflect on the original call to put our studies into perspective.

Jesus’ call has two parts: a command and a promise. The command, “Follow me,” is what all disciples must obey. They must focus on Christ and live in a walking relationship with him. The promise to be made fishers of men is not the disciple’s responsibility to fulfill. It is a true promise. Christ will make us fishers of men as we follow him.

In this study, we have opened up the call to follow. We have followed the three reference points the Lord set for people to enter into the fullness of their relationship with him: the proclamation of the gospel, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But, as we follow Christ, he works through the changes he brings about in us to engage us in his work of fishing men. What is involved in fishing men? The Great Commission answers this question—making disciples. The Lord never envisioned a mission in which people were simply brought to a profession of faith. Through faith people are brought into a vital relationship with Jesus, and this is a walking relationship because Jesus walked in this world.

To make disciples, we have to be disciples, and that means we have to walk the walk into which we guide others. In our life on earth, we are never finished with learning to walk. The Lord gave us the Spirit to lead us but left us with the flesh. That means we will ever struggle against sin and have to gain new victories. We are not to think that only after our walk is perfect will we be able to reach out to others. No, as we are walking with Jesus, he will engage us to touch others. But, we must always keep the dynamic order of the call in mind. Our duty is to walk, the work of God through us in reaching others will follow. In this we must ever yield to God's way of working.

The Lord did not call sports fishermen who work alone, each with his own line in the water. He called commercial fishermen who had to work in a team. Some had to work the oars, others had to handle the nets and others had to pay attention to further duties. The task of making disciples requires the working together of a fellowship of disciples. The Lord sealed this fact by not calling one disciple or several who had to be disciples alone, but twelve. The number twelve corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel and represents the complete people of God. The Lord made the first disciples within a fellowship and engaged them in the work of making disciples in the setting of that fellowship.

True discipleship involves the individual's direct relationship with the Lord and his active life in the fellowship of disciples. Both aspects of discipleship are necessary and are brought into focus by baptism and the Lord's Supper. As we are engaged in following Christ individually and collectively, we are dedicated to the Lord for him to work through us and fulfil his promise—"I will make you fishers of men."

We have not explored the biblical teaching of witnessing and serving others. This makes for a worthwhile study. But, first things first. We have to begin by learning the walk. As we learn to walk with the Lord, we will gain the experiential knowledge and wisdom to reach others.