

Study 7 – The Christian Life 2: growing up 1

As we have seen the only way to possess the Christian Life is to be ‘born again’ or ‘born from above’ (of the Holy Spirit) (John 3v3-5). We cannot become a Christian simply by praying, reading the Bible or trying to live a good life (cf. John 1v12). Nor can anyone make us a Christian through christening, baptism or confirmation. A Christian is one who has trusted in the sacrificial death of Jesus and accepted Him as Lord and Saviour. At that moment he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and receives the Christ (Christian) Life. (cf. John 3v8; Titus 3v4-7; 1 Peter 1v23).

Growing as a Christian

“When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun” (2 Corinthians 5v17, Living Bible).

If we are to grow as a Christian we need to die to our old life (nature) (Galatians 2v20) and feed our new life (nature). To demonstrate that we have put an end to our old nature i.e. ‘put it to death’ as Paul puts it, and to indicate that we now have resurrection life, God instituted baptism.

The Importance of Baptism

Just as a wedding signifies publicly the love and commitment of two people, so baptism publicly declares love for and commitment to Jesus as Lord. However, the couple being married on their wedding day have loved each other before then and have already made a commitment to each other privately. It is the same with baptism. A private commitment to Jesus should already have been made, otherwise the public confession is invalid.

Baptism declares:

a) Our obedience to Jesus Christ

Baptism is not an optional extra but a command (cf. Matthew 28v19; Mark 16v16; Acts 10v48). We do not have to wait for a ‘personal word’ from God - He has already given it! (Acts 2v38)

b) Our Allegiance to Jesus Christ

In a very clear way, we confess publicly our commitment to Jesus Christ (Matthew 10v32-33). Baptism is a sacrament which seals the promise we have made to God. It is a great help in realising who we belong to when the enemy attacks (cf. Luke 9v62; 2 Timothy 2v4).

c) Our Identification with Jesus Christ

Jesus was identified with us in baptism “to meet all the Law’s demands” (Matthew 3v15) even though He was sinless. In baptism we are identified with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15v3-4 with Luke 12v50 and Romans 6v4-5; Galatians 2v20).

The Mode of Baptism

Below are five reasons why baptism should be by immersion:

1. The Greek word 'baptizo' (baptise) means to submerge or overwhelm

The Jews immersed Gentiles who wished to become members of a Jewish community, which was the practice of John the Baptist, and which the Early Church followed (cf. John 3v23).

2. The baptism of Jesus who "went up out of the water" (Matthew 3v16).
3. The experience of the Early Church (e.g. Acts 8v36-39).
4. The teaching of the Apostles which gives the symbolism of baptism in terms of death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6v1-11). This would not be clear in any other form of baptism.
5. Though 'sprinkling' is permissible it should only be practiced if 'immersion' is inappropriate, e.g. someone very elderly etc.

New Life

Once we possess this new life, God wants us to grow - to become mature (Ephesians 4v13; Colossians 4v12; Hebrews 5v11-14). The Bible likens us to babes (1 Corinthians 3v1), to children (1 John 2v12-13), to young men (1 John 2v13-14), and fathers (1 John 2v13-14). Physically a baby needs feeding, cleaning, clothing and conversation. At first the parent has to do everything for the child but gradually he learns to do things for him or herself. It is similar spiritually for the babe in Christ.

Feeding

Peter says, "Long to grow up into the fullness of your salvation; cry for this as a baby cries for his milk" (1 Peter 2v2). The food we need is the Word of God. Daily we need to feed on Jesus (the Living Word - John 6v51) through the Bible (the Written Word - Matthew 4v4). Just as with natural food we need to:

1. Be regular in our 'eating' habits. Set apart a time each day to read and meditate (see supplement No. 2) on the Word (Acts 17v11)
2. Be systematic in our reading - picking up scraps of 'food' does not lead to a healthy life.
3. Be sensible in our reading - don't 'eat' too much. Don't eat the wrong food, e.g. a baby does not eat fish and chips immediately!. Some books of the Bible are easier than others. If you come to difficult parts of the Bible, don't worry if you don't understand them straight away. After all, we do not throw fish away because it has bones in it.
4. Be balanced in our diet - learn to read 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20v27 R.S.V.) even if you need help to understand it at times. Paul encourages a young man, Timothy, to "study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved ... a workman who correctly analyses the Word of Truth" (2 Timothy 2v15 Amp. Bible) (see supplement No 3).

May our 'eating' of the Word of God be similar to that of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3v3; Jeremiah 15v16; cf. Psalms 119v103).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the only way to become a Christian? (John 3v3-5)

2. What does baptism signify?

3. Why should baptism be by immersion?

4. What does God require of us once we become a Christian?

5. In what ways is a Christian like a newborn baby?

6. On what should a Christian feed the most?

7. How should a Christian feed?

8. What is the Bible likened to :-

a) Ephesians 5v26

- b) James 1v23
- c) Ezekiel 3v3
- d) Jeremiah 13v29
- e) Ephesians 6v17
- f) Matthew 4v4 (cf.. John 6v35)

9. a) Have you been baptised by immersion?

b) Have you learned to meditate on the Word of God?