

More Like Jesus

We are coming out of the season of Advent and the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. Now is as good of time as any to remind ourselves that looking at and reading about the life of Jesus should serve to guide us to living more like Jesus. The celebration of His birth should not be an academic exercise where we seek to learn some obscure piece of information that we may have missed in the previous years.

We call ourselves Disciples of Christ. Let's take a moment to understand exactly what it means to be a disciple. The Greek word found more than 250 times in the Bible is μαθητής and is pronounced (math-ay-tes'). According to Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary (1996), it means one who learns. A disciple is not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher. Being a disciple involves action and not just study. We are to be actively trying to be more like Jesus each day.

In the early days of the church, the disciples were called Christians. This came about as the church began to include Gentiles and Jews. It was noted by Luke **the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26b NASB)** This was initially a term of derision and signified that the disciples were acting like "little Christ."

How do we go from living in the world and doing the things of the world to becoming "little Christ"? Paul, in his letter to the church in Colossae, shares some insight into the process. Let's look in Colossians the 3rd chapter as we begin with verse 5.

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. (Colossians 3:5-7 NASB)

When we became a Christian (or disciple) we are told that we put to death our old self (Romans 6:3-7). This death should be manifested in a changed behavior. For some this may be a painful experience. As we read, some of the things we are to lay aside are those things which we may find pleasurable. The list seems to detail mostly sexual sins. However, the last one is greed. Greed is in the same category in that we are seeking to fulfill our appetite through means that are outside of God's plan.

Paul then reminds us that God will move against those who are practicing sinful behavior. He also reminds us that, in our life before Christ, we may have been guilty of some of these same sins.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— (Colossians 3:8-10 NASB)

While the sins mentioned earlier were actions that are practiced, Paul now moves to sins of attitude and speech. The first three terms—"anger," "wrath" (rage), "malice"—speak of sins of disposition. The first of these may be the settled feeling of anger; the second, the sudden and passionate outburst of that feeling. "Malice", a general term for badness, seems here to denote a vicious disposition, the spirit that prompts one to injure one's neighbor. "Slander" denotes insulting and slanderous talk against one's neighbor. "Abusive speech" may denote either filthy or abusive speech.

Lying is in a class by itself. Lying is likely the most common sin that is practiced. We may even excuse lying to avoid hurt feeling. The structure of this sentence is emphatic "stop lying."

Paul then moves to tell us why we should stop practicing evil behaviors. Becoming a Christian involves a radical, life-changing experience. We have put off the old self with its practices (i.e., habits or characteristic actions) and have put on the new self. The metaphor again is one of clothing. The "old self" is like a dirty, worn-out garment that is stripped from the body and thrown away. The "new self" (i.e., the regenerate self) is like a new suit of clothing that one puts on and wears.

The new self is described as "being renewed in knowledge." That is, the new self does not decay or grow old but by constant renewal takes on more and more of the image of its Creator. "Being renewed" expresses a continuous process of renewal. "Knowledge," the sphere of this process, denotes true knowledge and not human derived knowledge. We may note that we cannot find that true knowledge outside of His word. True knowledge does not come through osmosis.

As we pick back up in verse 11, we see that the renewal process does away with the various classifications we use to divide and distinguish people differently.

a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

(Colossians 3:11 NASB)

Differences do exist in the Christian community, but not in such a way as to be barriers to fellowship. To the extent that we (Christians) permit them to be barriers, we are acting out of character. "Christ is all, and is in all" suggests that Christ is the great principle of unity. In him all differences merge, all distinctions are done away. Loyalty to Christ takes precedence over all earthly ties.

Doing away with all of the bad things sounds easier than we may find. How do we manage to lay aside all those "dirty clothes"? We must replace the old with the new. We must realize that we are not the same as we were before we "put on" Christ. We are included in God's family and are adopted children of God.

Paul tells us how we are to replace our former traits with new behavior. The idea of doing away with the old and putting on the new, as expressed in the Greek language, is one of urgency.

Delaying will allow us to retain or return to our old familiar habits.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Colossians 3:12-13 NASB)

There are five virtues mentioned in this passage. All are building up to a more perfect person.

They are similar to the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 and 23.

Then there is an injunction that we are to forgive each other. This seems to be very difficult for many of us. We tend to hold on to hurt feelings and store up resentment toward those whom we believe have done a wrong in our opinion. Yet, Paul tells us to look toward the example we see in Jesus. Jesus forgave us and therefore, we should forgive others. God, through Jesus, forgives freely and we should follow that same example and freely forgive others.

Perhaps the thing that is more difficult than forgiving is the commandment to love. As we continue to read in this letter to the church in Colossae, we find that love is that quality that cements us together into a unified unit. We are one in Christ only when we allow love to form that bond.

Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and

admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:14-17 NASB)

The oneness of the church is emphasized by the fact that **the peace of Christ** is to rule in our hearts. Our conversations should be marked by the celebratory atmosphere of songs and thanksgiving. In fact, everything we do should be measured against the example we have in Jesus. Truly, we are to live, act, speak, and think like Jesus. Will we be perfect? No. Yet, each day we should be able to see that we are becoming more like Jesus in all we do. How do we measure up?