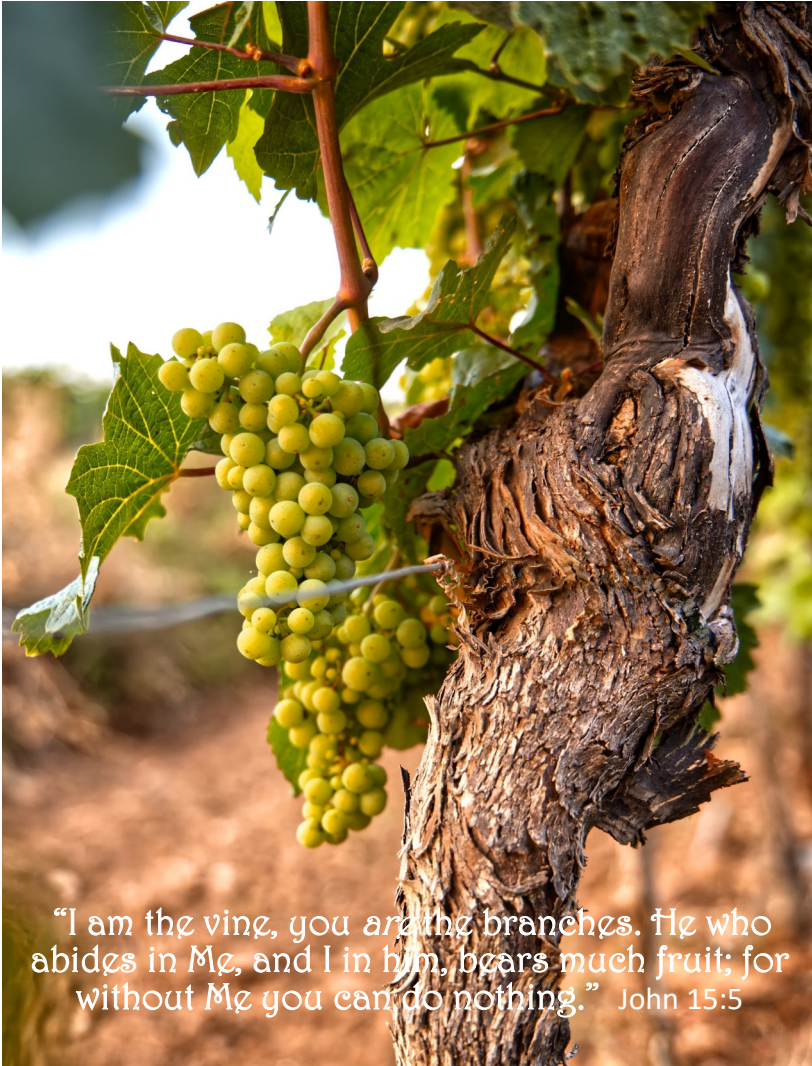


To Be Like Jesus

Another Way to Look
at the Christian Life

Book 2

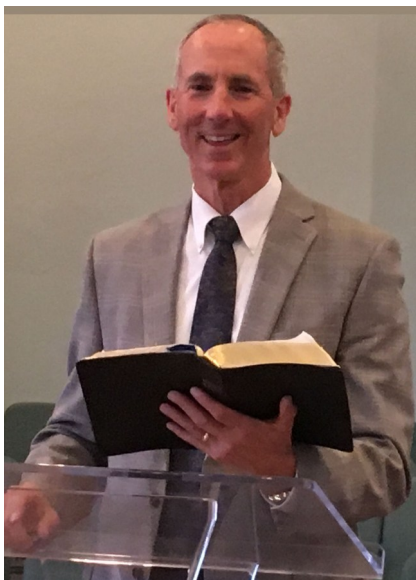


"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

I have observed two places where it would seem God's people err. First, there are those who are so focused upon the content of spiritual growth, that they forget there is meant to be a practice of the Christian Life which is compelling to others. Then there are those who seek to live a *saintly* life, apart from the knowledge of what God intends for that to be!



I do not mean to be critical. Rather, my simple goal in teaching a series entitled *To Be Like Jesus*, is that the rich content we regularly enjoy would lead to the result that the lost in our periphery would see the life of Jesus—in us. And, I do indeed mean His actual life, and that they really do see it on display right in the midst of our tragic and fallen world.

I trust such a lofty goal is more than enough reason to read on!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'K' and 'R'.

Kevin Redig, Pastor-Teacher

Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NIV (1984 edition) or the NKJV (1982 edition).

Introduction

As we continue to pursue our study *To Be Like Jesus*, let's pause for a moment to take stock of where we are. Surprisingly, we have not yet focused upon the character or behavior of our Lord. Nonetheless, I would tell you that the bulk of the work is done for the Christian who stands firmly upon his or her position in Christ, takes up the call to steadfastly *abide in Christ*, and regularly spends time in prayer to make sure the trials and tests of this life do not distract. The Christian who does all these things will progressively become more and more *like Jesus!* Such individuals, as they keep their focus upon the Lord:

... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

II Corinthians 3:18

This is a promise from God!

Now as you think through what we have learned, you are going to ask yourself: *Could it really be this simple? Is this really true?*

As you study the Scriptures and the pieces fall into place, you are going to realize that the emphasis in our Christian walk has shifted from *doing* to *abiding* (being). It is a walk of faith more than anything else. We are

going to have to trust the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot, and the glory will belong to the Lord for any success that occurs!

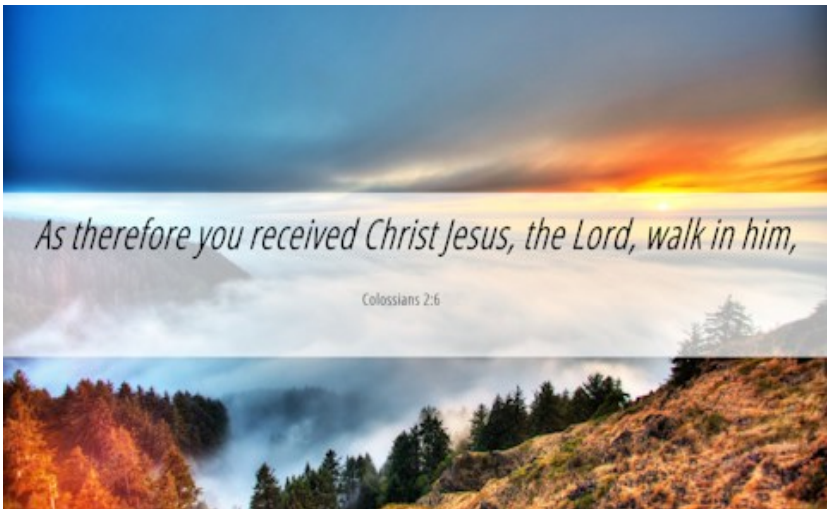


When you begin to understand this line of thinking, my response is: "Now you're getting it." That understanding pretty much sums up the Christian Life. It is God's doing, leading to His glory. Our responsibility is to walk by faith in the power of the Spirit! Too often, we spend years trying to live the Christian Life and to squeeze out fruit from the source of self.

Thankfully, the Lord is patient with us and, in our failures, He is leading us to the truth of resting in our position and learning to abide in our Savior. Perhaps you can see this very truth hitting home in the life of a well-known saint of the past:

*By various maxims, forms, and rules,
That pass for wisdom in the schools,
I sought my passions to restrain;
But all my efforts proved in vain.
But since my Savior I have known
My rules are all reduced to One,
To keep my Lord by faith in view,
This strength supplies and motives too!*

John Newton



Thus, after laying the groundwork, we are now ready to begin carefully considering the quality of our walk. This is to examine the life we are actually living day-by-day and moment-by-moment. We will be ever so careful to do so from the perspective of our position in Christ and how we are manifesting His life as the result of steadfastly abiding in Him.

To Walk As Jesus Did!

As the Scriptures have a habit of doing, they confront us with direct and convicting truth!

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

I John 2:6

The one who claims to *live in Him* is claiming to abide. John's Gospel is for the most part about how we come into a saving relationship with God through faith in Christ, while John's first epistle is about how we maintain fellowship once saved. As I hope you can see, this verse is a marvelous bridge to our study. It will keep us *honest* before the Lord! It will keep us from fooling ourselves about our walk because the one who is abiding in the Lord is going to manifest the character and behavior of the One in Whom he or she abides!

Let me make this as clear as possible. The message of I John 2:6 is very simple. If we claim to *abide in Christ*, then our lives would be characterized by such things as self-sacrifice, compassion, love, forgiveness, humility, and so on. If those things are not present in your life, then don't be fooling yourself by thinking that you are abiding in Christ. The message is that straightforward.

Here is an equally important corollary. If we happen to notice that we are the opposite of these things, and instead are selfish, critical, unloving, holding grudges, and proud, we don't need to try harder to squeeze out

Christ-like character. We will never be able to do so. Rather, our efforts should be focused on learning to *abide* following the confession of sin. For as we do, His life will begin to be manifest in ours!

Do you see both the diagnostic capability and the cause and effect relationship in this simple but very enlightening passage of Scripture? We can look at our lives and obtain a sense of how well we are doing in terms of learning to *abide in our Savior* and at the same time stand in awe of what God will do in a life that is caught up in His life. Let me reinforce what I am trying to say with this wonderful quote:



ROMANS 8:29 WEB

For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God expects us to strive to speak and think and act exactly like Christ, because the life that is in us is exactly the same as that which was in Him. We have a life like His within us; what more natural than that the outward life should be like His too? Andrew Murray

Perhaps you are thinking this is too lofty a goal and not really possible! It most certainly is impossible if we seek to do so from the source of self. But, since we have recently completed a study of the spirituality contained in the Book of Romans, let me simply remind you, that God has provided:

- The Cross of Christ to separate us from our nature to sin.

- The Life of Christ as a replacement for who we were in Adam.
- The Spirit of Christ as the enabling power for the new life that is ours.
- The Blood of Christ to cleanse us from any and every failure along the way!

With this clearly in mind, we should understand that "*the fruit of a life in Christ is a life like Christ.*" (Murray)

Let's Be More Specific

Now, here's what you have been waiting for. Let's turn to the Scriptures and begin to saturate our minds with what the life of Jesus looked like during His First Advent. We won't do this in order to try to imitate, but so that we will know what the Holy Spirit within is trying to reproduce in us!

God has given us the blessing of being able to participate in the Life of Christ and not just seek to imitate that life externally. Of course, to the extent that we see the Jesus of the Scriptures manifest in our own life, we will have a measure of the effectiveness of our learning to abide!

Let's start with what Jesus told His disciples:

" ... But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:27

To be like Jesus is to understand the call to serve which is inescapably tied to self-sacrifice! I think it will be very helpful, as we seek to understand the characteristic of sacrificial service, if we keep in mind the following contrast: *Selflessness versus Selfishness*.

One of these is the characteristic of the life of Christ, the other is of the flesh. Just to make sure we understand the terms: *Selflessness* is the quality of caring more about what other people need and want than about what you yourself need and want. On the other hand, *Selfishness* is to make yourself the center of your universe, manipulating events to your advantage, seeking your own comfort.

Do we ever read of Jesus, when the multitudes came to Him to receive ministry, saying, "*I'm sorry, now is not a convenient time for Me ...*"? Hardly!

Selfless Rather Than Selfish

Jesus is quite clear on this subject!

Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them ... But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:25-27

Jesus is the Son of God and King of kings, and yet at His First Advent He came to serve! And, I remind you that service always requires sacrifice! Even at the point when Jesus could reasonably have been completely preoccupied with the cross to come, still we find Him serving!

... He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet ...

John 13:4-5

There was no servant available, and all of the disciples felt this act of servitude was beneath them. Instead, we

find the Lord of glory humbly serving. In doing so, He left us a very challenging example to follow:

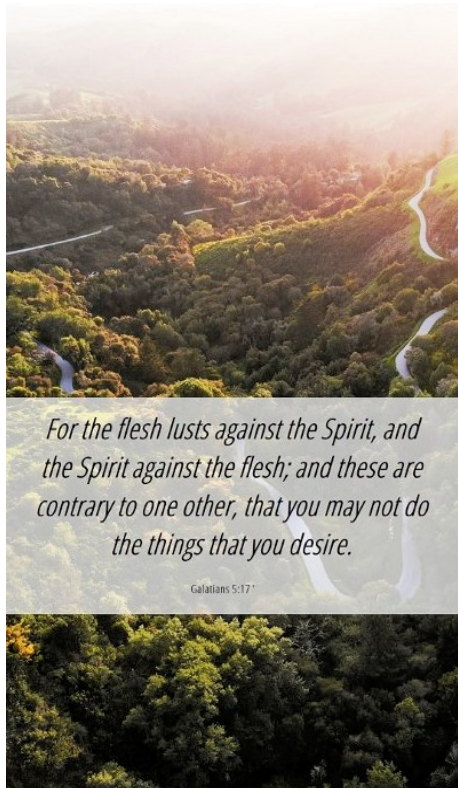
... "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked them. "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you ... Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them."

John 13:12-17

Perhaps there are some areas in which we might be willing to serve or some acts of service we might be willing to undertake. That is good, but not enough! For you and I need to realize that there is no greater gap between our actual status and our acts of service than the gap between the person of Jesus Christ and His service to mankind!

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Philippians 2:5-7



For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one other, that you may not do the things that you desire.

Galatians 5:17

Jesus came from glory to the cross. If that was not beneath Him, then what act of service should we see as beneath us? If the Lord leads, we should follow in sacrificial service. That would be to have *the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus!* If we are abiding in Him, it can be no other way.

The Struggle. The struggle between selflessness and selfishness is the struggle between the Spirit of Christ within and the diametrically opposed tag-team of the flesh and the world. You can count on it—when you feel a resistance to engage in service, it is some combination of the flesh and the world seeking to dissuade you!

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other ...

Galatians 5:17

... You quarrel and fight ... When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ... friendship with the world is hatred toward God.

James 4:2-4

Allow me to give you a simple illustration. Does your typical television commercial encourage you to make a sacrifice on behalf of others, or does it seek to stimulate you to gratify some aspect of self?



First, The Service. Let's be more specific. What service did Jesus perform and what did His service cost Him? I am making this a two-part question to once again remind you that service always requires self-sacrifice, which is the cost!

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. John 3:17

The service is stated as clear as it could be: to provide salvation for you and me! Here is the cost:

... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

In His service, did Jesus model selflessness, the quality of caring more about what others need than about self? I think it fair to say that He did to the maximum extent possible! So, if we are abiding in Christ, we should most certainly expect His Spirit to lead us to meet the needs of others, along with the associated costs!

Then, the Cost. Now to be certain—we can't save anyone! So what is our service, and what will it cost us? I can't give you specifics for your life, but I can certainly provide you with the general case from God's Word. First, your service is most certainly going to have a relational component.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21

This verse is a statement of principle that precedes a discussion of the role of wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters, and their responsibilities toward one another. The principle is that every functional relationship in life requires submission in order to make it work!

The call to submit is in reality a call to serve at a sacrifice to self. In truth, we should already understand this principle. A marriage will not function as designed unless both the husband and wife are willing to serve each other, and that requires sacrifice. To properly raise children requires a sacrifice on the part of both parents. Here is another observation: we don't mind making these sacrifices for the potential beneficial outcome for both our marriages and families.

Second, your service will have a daily cost!

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. II Corinthians 4:11

Given over to death for Jesus' sake. That's the call to sacrificial service. Why would we do that? In order to manifest His life towards all with whom we interact!

Lastly, our call to serve will contain the Gospel of Christ!

"... You will be My witnesses ..." Acts 1:8

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all ... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. ... II Corinthians 5:14, 20

We know the cure for what ails lost mankind! In following Jesus' example of service, we are most certainly called to share it—no matter how the world pushes back!

The Mindset. To walk as Jesus did requires a certain mindset:

A crucified Savior is going to have crucified followers!

What does that mean? It means that followers of Jesus must be willing to serve in any way in which they are called and to have the expectation that such service will always be sacrificial in nature!

There will always be those who respond: *I would like to be a follower of Jesus without cost!* It is true that you can be a saved child of God by simply receiving God's gift of salvation by faith. For that, there is no cost! But Jesus has been very clear: To be His disciple requires one to deny selfishness, take up God's calling upon one's life, and follow after Him. To follow Him means to engage in service, which is always going to have a cost!

I hope you are asking—why the picture of wheat? It is



meant to remind us that *Christianity isn't a call to protect the new life, but to continually give it away until we come into our Father's house!*

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the

ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

John 12:24

I remember clearly trusting in Christ for eternal life, and the joyous early days of growing in Him as a new Christian. I was a shiny kernel of wheat, high on the stalk. I like orderly and shiny, but a kernel on the stalk produces nothing. It is not until it falls to the ground, becomes scuffed, muddy, and germinates, that it truly begins to grow and is on its way to fruitfulness.

We aren't called to live isolated and protected lives as followers of Jesus! We are called to serve as He did. There are a hundred and one ways for us to serve our spouses, the lost on the street where we live, those with

whom we recreate, our extended families, and those with whom we have divine encounters—and every bit of service to all of these will require sacrifice on our part. It is what Jesus did throughout His earthly ministry, and:

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

I John 2:6

Now, perhaps you are thinking, *"This is asking too much. I could never do this. It is beyond me. I am just a regular old Christian and this is talking about those super-Christians!"* Here is one response to that thinking:

There is nothing that weakens the power of Christ's example so much as the thought that we cannot really walk like Him. Do not listen to such thoughts. The perfect likeness in heaven is begun on earth, can grow with each day, and become more visible as life goes on.

Murray

Are the life of the Vine and the Spirit of Christ adequate to produce the quality of life to which we are called?

Yes or No! You see our choosing to follow the Lord in sacrificial service is really a matter of belief or unbelief. That is always the first controversy that must be settled. It reduces down to this:

Will I trust God to do what He has said He will do, and what only He can do—through me?

More Character Qualities

Thus far we have considered just one of many character qualities displayed by Jesus—His selfless service to others at great sacrifice to Himself. As we continue, I would like us to consider a number of additional qualities, and as we do, it is going to create somewhat of a dilemma for us.

On The One Hand.

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not extinguish, till He leads justice to victory."

Matthew 12:20

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Matthew 14:14

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another."

John 13:34

"... yet not My will, but Yours be done."

uke 22:42

I encourage you to study the context in which these scriptures are found. As you do, you will readily see Jesus putting on display: humility, compassion, love, submission, and service. Before we consider any of these further, let's add some additional examples of Christ-like character.



On The Other Hand.

"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."

John 18:37

In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers seated at their tables. So He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts. ...

John 2:14-15

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness."

Matthew 23:23



Again, review the context in which these are found. Having done so, we find that Jesus also exhibited: truth-telling, zeal for God, and moral courage. Now look carefully at these two lists of character qualities—both displayed by Jesus. Do you see that they are somewhat at odds with each other—or at least not possible to do all at the same time? When Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the money-changers from the Temple, it is hard to see His humility and compassion, but we certainly see His zeal for God and His moral courage.

The Dilemma. Here is the dilemma as we seek to follow Jesus: How do we know which quality to put into practice and in which circumstances? Should we be compassionately listening or boldly speaking the truth?

Perhaps you have had experiences similar to mine: After a well-meaning but unproductive encounter with a lost person, I feel as if I *zigged* when I should have *zagged*! To *Be Like Jesus*, how do we know what aspects of His character He would like to manifest through us in the midst of our many interpersonal relationships and the myriad other circumstances that come our way? This is going to be a significant challenge for us, especially as the list of character qualities grows further. The solution to this dilemma can be found in the following text of Scripture:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us triumphantly as captives in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one, we are an odor of death and demise; to the other, a fragrance that brings life. And who is qualified for such a task?

II Corinthians 2:14-16 BSB

This is an incredibly rich passage of Scripture which will require our careful investigation. To begin, consider the following: We are facing a very difficult situation. Perhaps we ourselves are in great distress, or we long to help another. We want to be like Jesus, but we don't know where to start.

Start Here

When we face that difficult situation, what does our text tell us to do? Give thanks to God! How could we possibly do that? Because Christ has already triumphed over this and every situation. Note carefully, this triumph is only *in Christ*! We are right back to our position in Him. There are no spiritual victories in our lives that are not first His! There are no independent victories in the Christian Life—only His victories.

We dare not miss the depth of meaning associated with the Greek word translated to *lead in triumph*. This word first described a procession of revelers engaged in pagan celebration. In time, it came to mean the city-wide triumphal procession for a victorious Roman general. Picture it: The victorious general riding in the chariot drawn by white chargers. He has overcome all obstacles to achieve a complete victory, and those he has conquered follow in submission behind his chariot.



The reference to aroma or fragrance is because of the special incense that was burned on the day of the triumphal processional, so that everyone would know to gather and cheer the victor. This is enough to get us started on spiritual application, so let's consolidate our understanding in order to make application.

Understand The Spiritual Message. First, to correct a common misunderstanding regarding the spiritual message in II Corinthians 2:14-16: Neither you nor I are in the chariot!

Jesus is the singular triumphant victor.

**And having disarmed the powers and authorities,
He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing
over them by the cross.** Colossians 2:15

... seated Him (Jesus) at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but in the one to come.

Ephesians 1:20-21

Let me ask: What role does the child of God play in the triumph won at the cross? None whatsoever! These passages make it very clear that we are not the ones who are going to triumph over circumstances or win the day. We are not the victor, Jesus is! But as we continue, do not forget for an instant your position in Him—that's the reason you can share in His victory!

The Christian's place in the triumphal procession is as those who have been conquered, those trailing behind the chariot in submission to the One who has won the great victory! You see, any spiritual victory we have in this life is going to be grounded in the victory of the *Victorious One*. That would be the Lord Jesus Christ!

When Romans 6:13 says: ... *present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life ...*, the word translated *present* means to put yourselves at another's disposal, or under orders to him. This is a command to place our new life in Christ in submission to the will of the Father—just as Jesus did! Let me summarize it this way:

As a "new creation" in Christ, I have a new Life in which I am to abide, a new Source of Enablement to which I am to bind myself, and a new Master whom I am to serve. My place is to see myself as drawn along in the train of His triumph ... chained to His chariot ... abiding in Him!

A Common Reaction. It is very common for Christians to resist or even reject the image of the Christian Life portrayed in II Corinthians 2:14-16. For it is one of being conquered, in submission, and making sacrifice associated with service. Perhaps even now you are thinking, "Oh no! That's not the Christian Life as I understand it." Let me show you something—here is Paul's understanding of the Christian Life, and it is very much in keeping with our passage:

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

II Corinthians 4:10-12

Do you see the call to death? What a contrast this is to a Christianity that teaches prosperity as the right of the Christian, or teaches the lesser error that we ought to carve out a comfortable existence while we wait for the Lord's return. If we desire to *Be Like Jesus*, we must understand God's call on our lives.

Read the above passage again, and you will see that it is teaching that just as Christ set aside His will in order to accomplish the will of the Father, that as His followers we are called to do likewise. In Jesus' case, the Father's will was His death on the cross. In our case, it is a call to service that is going to cost us. That cost, whatever it might be, is what it means to be *given over to death for Jesus' sake*. But take heart, our service puts on display the life of Christ and that means life for others! There are two reasons we resist this idea of sacrificial service:

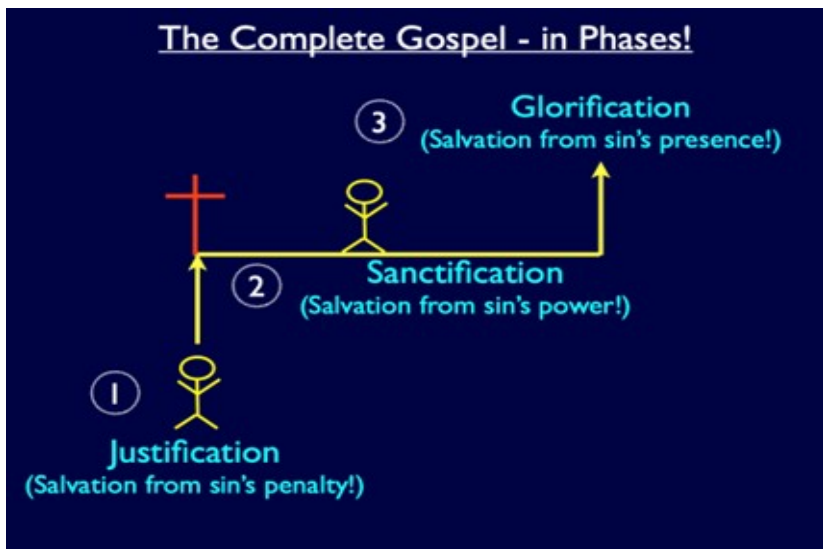
1. Bad teaching! Some promote the idea that blessing from God includes living a life to gratify self.

2. Confusing our walk as Christians with our position as Christians. Our position in Christ is a marvelous and permanent possession that we take everywhere we go. Our walk, on the other hand, may at times include suffering and persecution.

Clarifying Our Submission. Let's see if I can bring clarity to this idea of following in submission to the triumph of Christ. We understand the salvation that God has provided has three phases as illustrated below:

- Our *justification* that occurs at the moment we place our faith in the person and work of Christ.
- Our *progressive sanctification* which is to be a daily process until we go home to be with the Lord.
- Our *glorification*, which is our glorious future in the presence of our Savior.

We love our forever justified status before our holy God—clothed with the very righteousness of Christ and therefore acceptable to our heavenly Father. This is a



forever status that cannot be lost or diminished. Then, of course, our glorification is awesome to behold. It promises a resurrection body like that of Jesus, an eternal inheritance, a place in the Father's heaven! What a fantastic hope we have.

When it comes to our sanctification, we are going to have some questions. It is one thing to talk about becoming conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), but it is another thing altogether to embrace it:

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body.

II Corinthians 4:11

This does not sound very appealing, does it? Let me suggest that it is exactly because we are studying what it means to *Be Like Jesus* that we are in the perfect position to understand and respond as God intends.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in great humility, left His place of glory in order to provide a way of redemption and reconciliation for lost mankind. In order to do this, He humbled Himself—even to death on the cross. Now, having accomplished the will of the Father, He is the Triumphant One! At His Name, every knee in heaven and earth shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of the Father. We are simply called to follow His example.

On the one hand, we have our marvelous position in Christ. We are seated with Him in the heavenlies and are able to abide in Him day-by-day. On the other hand, His call upon our lives, while we sojourn on this earth, is to always and everywhere be the aroma of Christ—to some we will be the sweet fragrance of life as the lost respond to our Gospel witness and are saved. To others we will be the fragrance of death as they reject God's salvation in order to go their own ways.

This call to sacrificial service will cost us. It will mean *death* in time. But note two things:

1. In the midst of a life being given over to death for Jesus' sake, we can have the abundant life in time!
2. That brings us back to our glorification to come.

... our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

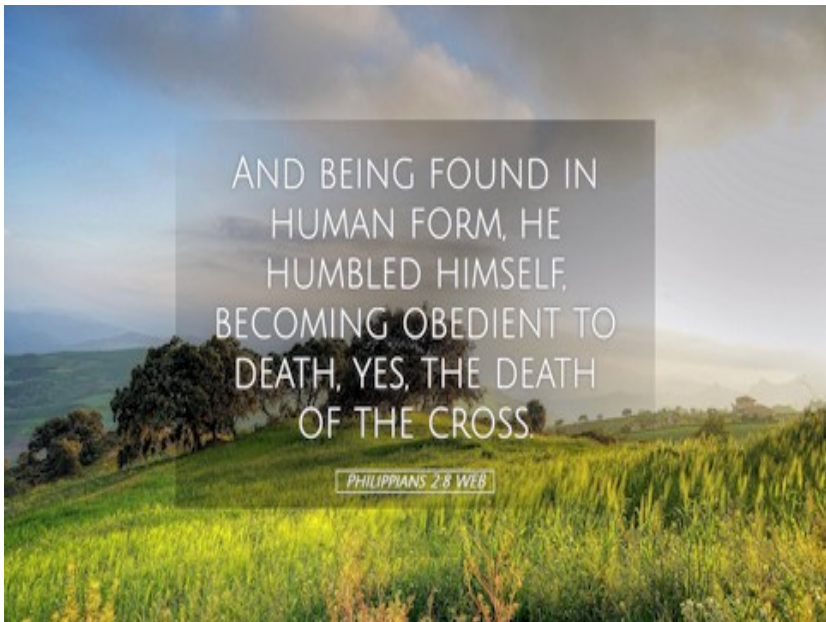
Romans 8:18

You see, to *walk as Jesus did* is to spend our sojourn on this earth with a clear understanding of the order:

First the cross, and then the crown!

... He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name ... Philippians 2:8-9

This is not the least bit complicated. It is just hard!



The First Advent of Jesus was one of Him giving Himself over to death in sacrificial service. His obedience to the will of the Father resulted in His triumph over sin and His elevation to the place of highest honor in all the universe. The call on our lives is exactly the same! First, the cross (sacrificial service), and then the crown (an eternal weight of glory to come). This would be far too much for us were it not for our already being *in Christ*, highly favored in the Beloved, with the daily ability to abide in Him and walk filled with His Spirit!

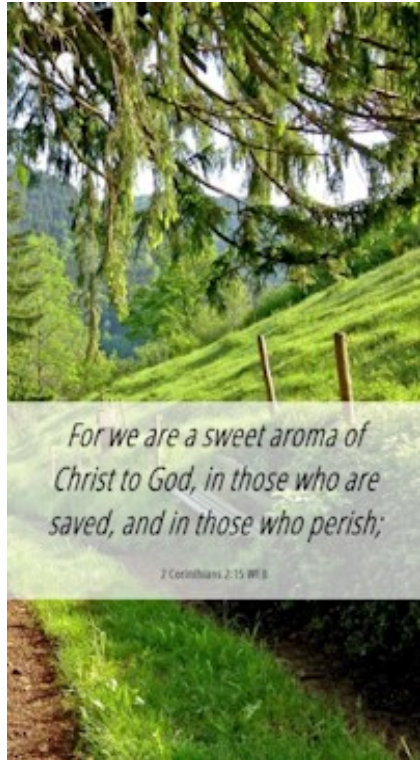
Being the Aroma. I touched earlier on our calling to be the *aroma* of Christ. Let me add one item of information. Look again at our text:

For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one, we are an odor of death and demise; to the other, a fragrance that brings life ...

II Corinthians 2:15 BSB

Here is the challenge you and I will face: *Will we choose to be the aroma of Christ to the world around*

us? This text is very clear: That is what God intends for us to be! Why would we choose not to? We might avoid our calling because we are going to be the aroma of death to many, and they are going to vociferously



complain about it! For many a Christian, that will be enough to shut them up. So the question becomes where are we going to focus—on our heavenly Father or on the lost? If we keep our eyes on the Father, we will be ambassadors for Christ everywhere. If we see only the cranky lost, we will lose our aroma! Let me say it as plainly as I can: *God is not looking for fragrance-free Christians!* To *Be Like Jesus* we must represent Him and bear witness to His name always and everywhere!

Who Is Qualified?

We must consider one last portion of our text:

And who is qualified for such a task?

II Corinthians 2:16

Pause for a moment, and let the weight of what this verse is asking sink in. Who is capable of always and everywhere sacrificially following after Jesus because of the realization that he or she will be victorious in any and every circumstance? Who can manifest the life of Christ always and everywhere such that it can be said they are the living aroma of Christ to everyone—saved and lost alike?

There are many ways to answer these questions. Let me pick one that I want to take hold in your thinking!

Who is able to meet such a high calling? Only the one who is abiding in Christ, which is to:

- *By faith see yourself in Him where He is, and by faith know He is in you where you are.*
- *Think His thoughts, share His affections, engage in His purposes by means of knowing "His mind"—the Word of God.*

- *By faith trust the Spirit of Christ to put to death the misdeeds of the flesh while at the same time manifesting the fruit of the Savior's life in you.*
- *Stand firm, unwavering in the one and only source of life, as a new creation, such that every failure is a reminder you need more of Jesus and less of self!*

In short, only the believer who is abiding in Christ is able to live up to God's calling upon us in Christ Jesus!

The Short Answer

Now, I have given you a very lengthy answer to the challenging question raised earlier: Specifically, how do we know, as we seek to *Be Like Jesus*, when to be humble or bold, compassionate or truth-telling? How do we know what portion of His character to apply to the situations we face daily? I took you to II Corinthians 2:14-16 to provide an answer, and although we learned much, I suspect the answer is not yet clear. Here is the short answer:

As we abide in Christ, He will lead us in the train of His triumph such that our ministry to others will meet them at their point of need. For He always knows the path forward, so that whether people respond or reject, they will have come in contact with the life of Jesus. That is our calling!

Illustrations from John's Gospel

Let me give you an illustration from God's Word, using John Chapters 3 and 4, to show you the benefit of abiding in Christ.

First, Nicodemus. You might find it helpful to read through John 3:1-15 to get the full picture of the interaction with Nicodemus.

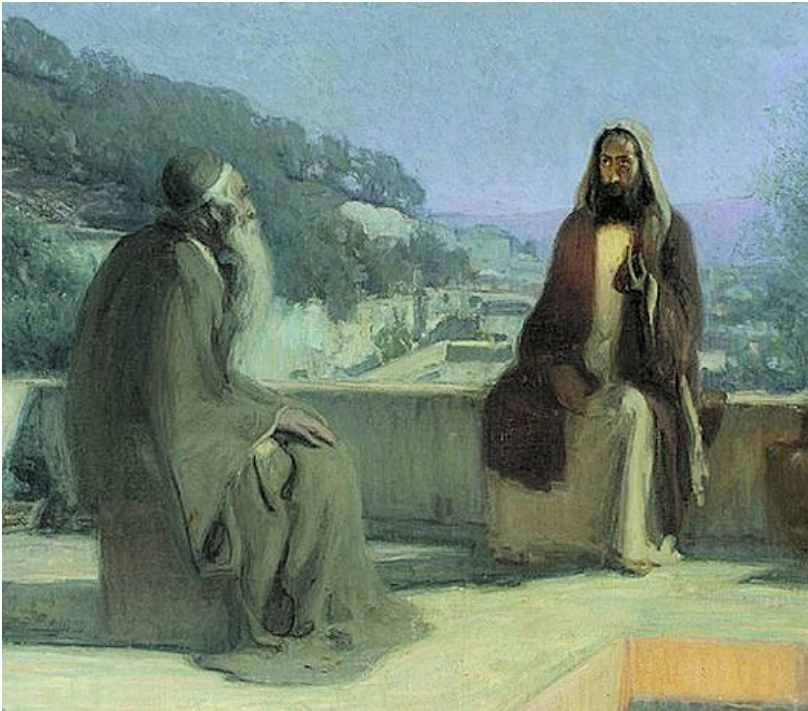
In the first two verses of John Chapter 3, Nicodemus, a very important and influential member of the Pharisees, comes to Jesus with something he just can't resolve. He treats Jesus with respect and even bestows on Him the honorary title of Rabbi. But note Nicodemus's conundrum. It isn't about what Jesus is teaching; it is about the miracles He is doing. In Nicodemus's mind, miracles would be an authentication that the teacher was from God, but Jesus is not one of the *avored* religious elite.

So how can this be? What is going on?

First, notice that Jesus does not return Nicodemus' greeting with the same polite flattery. He gets right to the key issue:

"... no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

John 3:3



As the dialogue continues, Jesus makes it clear to the proud religious man that he is lost.

Nicodemus came thinking himself certainly in the kingdom of God, and Jesus makes it clear that he is out. As Nicodemus expresses his puzzlement, Jesus says:

"You are Israel's teacher ... and you do not understand these things? ... I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

John 3:10-12

Wow! Jesus is not beating around the bush with Nicodemus. He has been very blunt with the truth of Nicodemus's lost condition, and his ignorance of spiritual truth.

The ending of their time together is phenomenal. For Jesus leaves Nicodemus with this thought to ponder:

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life."

John 3:14

Nicodemus would have known the complete backstory of Moses lifting up the snake from Numbers 21. I think it very likely this was the seed of truth planted in the soul of Nicodemus that eventually brought him to salvation.

Second, the Samaritan Woman. Let's move to the Samaritan woman of John Chapter 4. Again, let me suggest that you read John 4:4-38 to get the full story. The scripture states that Jesus *must* go through Samaria despite the fact that no self-respecting Jew would go there. But Jesus knows there is someone there who will respond to the Gospel—in fact, many people. Consider how shockingly different is the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman than with Nicodemus:

... Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

John 4:7

No self-respecting Jewish rabbi would speak to a woman he wasn't married to, and not to a Samaritan of any kind! Yet Jesus opens the dialogue with this woman of questionable moral character, and you have most probably missed the most shocking thing of all. Jesus is willing to drink from whatever drinking vessel she gives him. It is probably not an exaggeration to say a Pharisee would have died before drinking from a cup given him by a Samaritan woman!



This is just the beginning. Jesus patiently and carefully draws her into a conversation on spiritual things until they reach the point that Jesus can tell her:

"... Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13

Then, later in the same dialogue when the woman brings up the topic of the Messiah, Jesus simply responds,

"... I who speak to you am He."

John 4:26

The woman now has everything she needs to know in order to get saved.

Note how even when Jesus brings up the woman's immoral lifestyle, it is not to rebuke her or even to tell her to leave the man she is currently living with. He brings this up simply to show her His omniscience! So, what happens? This woman gets saved and points the men of the nearby town to Jesus.

After those men interact with Jesus, their response to the woman was a wonderful testimony indeed:

"... We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

John 4:42

The way Jesus interacted with the religiously lost of John Chapter 3 and the down-and-out lost of John Chapter 4 is completely different. Yet both were eventually saved. I don't think we can come to any other conclusion than that Nicodemus was saved as we are told in John 19:38-39, that he was one of two *pall-bearers* of our Lord following the crucifixion.



How can we know when to directly confront the lostness of a person with the truth of the Gospel, or when to gently lead them to the person and work of Christ? Do you see the answer to which I have been leading you? The answer is to *Abide in Christ*, stay firmly connected to the *triumphal One*, and He will lead you, through His Spirit. He knows to perfection what the lost most need to hear. He did with Nicodemus, although his believing took a while. And, He did with the Samaritan woman who responded much more quickly.

In short, we simply want the life of Jesus to be manifest through us always and everywhere as He leads!

Two Other Books

This is the second in a three book series. Book 1 lays the groundwork for what we need to know in order to *Be Like Jesus*. This book provides the first part of the practical detail on the topic. We have two more practical topics to cover before we conclude our brief study into what it means to *Be Like Jesus*. I think you will find these two topics to be a surprising addition, and a powerful conclusion. Thus, I invite you to join us for the conclusion of our study in Book 3.





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