

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE NEW LIFE

The magnitude of the change that accompanies becoming a disciple of Christ is described thus: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were *dead* in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . ." (Eph. 2:4,5, ESV).

It is further emphasised by Paul, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having *no hope and without God* in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been *brought near* by the blood of Christ" (vv. 12,13, ESV).

Before belief we are dead; by belief and baptism we are made alive. Another analogy emphasises the change: "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (5:8, ESV).

A new birth

The start of the Christian life is a new birth. It is the result of the Word of God acting on the mind of those who will hear it: "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever'. And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23-25, ESV).

The newborn also needs feeding, and the Word of God is provided for that purpose also: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby . . ." (2:1,2).

Children of God

Because the Word believed comes from God, those who are begotten of it are children of God. This is confirmed when faith is shown by belief of the gospel and by baptism: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26,27).

Baptism relates us to Christ by re-enacting Christ's death and resurrection as a symbol of our intention to live a new life patterned upon Jesus: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3,4).

Indeed, it is God's intention that all believers should develop characters like that of Jesus: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (8:29); "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17, ESV).

Taking up the cross

Jesus made clear the challenge of the new life: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Lk. 9:23,24).

It is a life of putting oneself second to the doing of God's will and meeting the needs of others. The disciple's aim is to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness", knowing that "all these things [the necessities of life] shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). This new focus means that "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). The believer is now a 'stranger and pilgrim' in this world, for "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20,21, ESV).

Living the new life

Learning from Jesus' example encourages the disciple to make a conscious move from behaviours that are described as the "old self", driven by "deceitful desires", to "the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24, ESV). Following deceitful desires results in the works of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19-21); the new self develops the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (vv. 22,23, ESV), because "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (v. 24, ESV). Support for the new life comes from reading and meditating on God's Word (Ps. 119:105,130; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17); prayer (Mt. 6:5-15; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17); remembering Jesus' death and resurrection in the memorial emblems (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:23-33); and fellowship with other believers (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 10:24,25; 1 Pet. 2:17).

Our relationship with the state is one of obedience to the laws of the country we live in (Rom. 13; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). If the occasion arises that the state requires disobedience to God's law then the example of the apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), should be followed. Our relationship with others is, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Indeed, Jesus requires us to "Love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]; that [we] may be the children of [our] Father Which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:44,45).

Our new life should be evident to others and thus become a witness, enabling us to "[hold] forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Pet. 3:15). Our focus will not be a trust in uncertain riches, but rather, "having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8).

A positive benefit

The new life is very worthwhile. Following God's ways saves us from the physical and mental afflictions that are often the consequence of sinful living. Paul reminds us that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). It enables us to benefit from God's providential care (Heb. 1:14), for He has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (13:5). And, even if we are required to suffer for the faith, we are assured "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Jesus himself set the example, because his focus was clear: ". . . Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

The new life is the school in which we learn to develop balanced spiritual characters that God will find fit to clothe with immortality and able to share in His Kingdom.