



Growing in Christ

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6, 7 NIV).

Once a famous artist wanted to draw a painting of Jesus and the twelve disciples. Before he chose the models to pose for the characters, he studied each one carefully and noted the characteristics, features, expressions, and every possible detail that each character should reflect. He began with Jesus. He did all the research necessary, then set about choosing a model—someone who would reflect the greatness, dignity, compassion, love, divine spark, and human touch that were some of the marks of Christ that the artist knew. After a long search, he found a person who fitted the artist’s conception.

After drawing the Master, the artist set about painting the disciples—John, James, Peter, Andrew, and so on. The painting took quite some time, but the artist was pleased that his work was turning out to meet his expectations. After several years, he was ready to complete the Master and the Twelve, and he had only one more painting to do—that of Judas. This was no easy task. The artist read as much as he could from all available writings on Judas. How does one paint someone who had every promise to be a disciple, but failed? How can ink and paper reveal treachery, betrayal, and the slow path toward suicide? The artist made as wide a search as possible in every hamlet and town that his journey could take, and after a long and arduous struggle, he found a man whose face was a mixture of promise and failure, an urge to excel and a willingness to betray, a search for leadership and a readiness to crush anything that came his way. He was a pitiable, hopeless, and ignominious man, with selfishness and hatred etched on every line of his face.

The artist invited this one whom he considered a desperate creature to come to his studio and pose for a painting—for a generous fee. The man accepted the invitation, walked with the famous painter to his studio, and sat down for his pose. The painter took his brush and colors, steadied his canvas, and searched the man’s face. But before he could put his first stroke, he heard his model sobbing, tears trickling down his unkempt face.

“Why are you crying,” the artist asked. “Your pay will be great.”

“You cannot really pay me for what I am or rather what I have become,” the man said in agony mixed with self-pity. “You see, years ago, I came to this studio, and posed for you as a model for a painting you were doing then.”

The artist was stunned. “No, it can’t be. I’ve never seen you before.”

“That’s precisely the point,” the man said. “Years ago you brought me here to pose for Christ. But over the time, I walked away—far away—from Christ. The farther I went from Him, the more despairing my life became.”

From looking like Jesus to looking like Judas is a journey of choices—small choices, to be sure, but a steady stream of choices to leave the fellowship of the Master, to forsake His teachings, to refuse to follow Him, to abandon the demands of discipleship, to refuse to take up the cross, and instead betray Him and His relationship.

Discipleship cannot be sustained without constant abiding and growing in Christ.

Preview

Christian discipleship is a call to grow to be like Christ. Often, we want to be His disciple. We may even become His disciple, but we don't remain in discipleship. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4, NKJV). Abiding in Jesus, and He in us, is the secret of growing in Christ and becoming like Him. "The true seeker who is striving to be like Jesus in word, life, and character, will contemplate his Redeemer and, by beholding, become changed into His image, because he longs and prays for the same disposition and mind that was in Christ Jesus... . He longs after God. The history of his Redeemer, the immeasurable sacrifice that He made, becomes full of meaning to him. Christ, the Majesty of heaven, became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich; not rich merely in endowments, but rich in attainments" (Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 61).

If daily fellowship with Christ makes us grow in Him, grow to be like Him, what would be the disastrous consequences if we did not have that fellowship?

Points to Ponder

1. List below some of the ways you can maintain a growing fellowship with Christ. Ask yourself whether your discipleship life meets those demands:
2. Growth is indispensable to life. Where there is no growth, death sets in. Is this true in Christian life? If so, how?
3. Christian life begins with death. In fact, two deaths. What do you understand by this? (See pp. 150, 151 of the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe....*)
4. Salvation is a free gift of God, but it is not cheap. It has a cost to the Giver as well to the receiver—to God as well as to us. Do you agree? Explain your answer.
5. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30, NKJV). If one is against Jesus, on whose side is that person?

Nuts & Bolts

Without the death of Christ on the cross there is no cleansing from sin, and without the cleansing of sin there is no possibility of new life.

1. John 1:7: "The blood of _____ his Son _____ us from all sin."
John 3:16: "For God so _____ the world, that he gave his only begotten _____, that whosoever believeth in him should not _____, but have _____."

2. Life in Christ demands that we die to our self.

Galatians 2:20, 21: "I am _____ with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ _____ in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the _____ of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

3. If we are dead to sin, what are we to live for?

Romans 6:6, 11: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve _____. For he that is dead is freed from sin." "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but _____ unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

4. Growing in Christ has at least seven significant marks.

A life of Spirit, bearing fruits of the spirit. Read Galatians 5:19-21 and list the nine fruits mentioned there:

A life of love and unity. (John 13:34, 35): "A new _____ I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also _____ one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my _____ if ye have _____ one to another."

A life of Bible study. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17): "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for _____, for _____, for _____, for _____ in righteousness: that the man of God may be _____, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

A life of prayer. Paul speaks about six principles of prayer life in Ephesians 6:18: Pray always, pray in the Spirit, pray with supplication, pray watchfully, pray with perseverance, pray for all the saints.

How is your prayer life?

A life of fruit bearing (Matthew 7:20): "Wherefore by their _____ ye shall know them."

John 15:4-5: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, _____ ye _____ in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much _____: for without me ye can do nothing."

A life of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12): "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against _____, against _____, against the rulers of the _____ of this world, against _____ wickedness in high places."

How are we to engage in this war with satanic forces? (Ephesians 6:13-17): “Wherefore take unto you the whole _____ of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with _____, and having on the _____; and your feet shod with the preparation of the _____; above all, taking the shield of _____, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the _____ of _____, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”

A life of worship, witness, and hope (Hebrews 10:14, 15): “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the _____ of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day _____.”

Matthew 28:19, 20: “_____ ye therefore, and _____ all nations, _____ them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

5. Life in Christ is a series of battles. With whom is our battle? How real is this warfare?

Matthew 16:24: “Then said Jesus unto his _____, If any man will come after me, let him deny _____, and take up his _____, and _____ me.”

Jesus issues three calls to His disciples: self-denial, taking up one’s cross, and following Jesus. These are not one-day or one-time acts. They are a daily act, as growth in Christ is an on-going process of maturity. In this daily growth, disciples are called upon to be prepared to meet the wiles of the devil.

1 Peter 5:8: “Your adversary the _____, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may _____.”

One who experiences growth in Christ will be able to say what Christ said: “The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:30-31, NIV).

Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against _____, against _____, against the rulers of the _____ of this world, against _____ in high places.”

Words to Remember

“Disarmed principalities and powers” (Colossians 2:15). Paul’s expression of what Christ accomplished on the cross includes this dynamic phrase. Principalities and powers represent Satan and his agents responsible for sin and its results. The Greek for “disarmed” literally means “stripped.” By His death on the cross, Christ stripped Satan of all his demonic powers over God’s people. Those who abide

in Christ need not fear Satan or his agencies. In and through Christ, Satan stands as a defeated foe. Christ's victory over Satan is our victory.

Reconciliation: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Sin has separated humanity from God and has made us subject to its wages, which is death (Romans 6:23). But through His death on the cross, Christ defeated Satan and has obtained forgiveness and redemption for our sins. By what Christ did on the cross, those who accept Christ are no longer separated from God but reconciled to Him. Those in Christ are now part of God's family.

Cheap grace: We are saved by the free grace of God, and our salvation has nothing to do with our works of obedience—it is a gift of God (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7, 8). While salvation comes to us through faith in God's free grace, the after-salvation experience demands a new lifestyle that is in accordance with God's will. A call to obedience is the new life of the Christian. If we say that we are saved by grace, and therefore we are freed from the law of obedience, then that grace is called cheap grace. Faith without works is dead (James 2:27). Grace without a life in tune with God's will is cheap grace and is of no effect.

I Truly Believe

Before I accepted Christ as my personal Saviour, I was in the bondage of sin. I was helpless, I was burdened, I was lost. But by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for my sins on the cross, I fully believe I am saved and that I belong to God's family. It is my commitment that I want to be a part of that family and be saved in His kingdom.

I also believe that Christian discipleship is a battle and a warfare. Satan is wandering like a "roaring lion" seeking whom he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). As part of God's family, I am aware that while life is a daily battle against Satan and sin (Ephesians 6:10-12), God has made sufficient provision for me to be victorious through Christ (Ephesians 6: 13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:57).

I believe I can lead a victorious life over sin and Satan through the enabling power of my Saviour. Christ is my victory. I fear no evil.

My Prayer

Dear Father:

I thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to this world, to die for my sins, and to make me part of Your family of saved ones. I accept Your salvation through faith, and I pray for Your power through Your Spirit so that I can be a faithful, obedient, and witnessing disciple. I also pray for peace of mind and for You to enable me to overcome every wile of the evil one. In the battle we are engaged in daily, with self and Satan, may the power of Jesus give us the victory to overcome all evil and to lead a life of being Your children. In Christ's name and for His glory, Amen.