COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 12

Foundations *of* Discipleship

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 7:

New Life in Christ

An overview of new birth and life in Christ.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

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- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

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PREFACE

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The Foundations of Discipleship module begins with the most important foundation of all: new life in Jesus Christ. Everything that follows in discipleship begins with this spiritual life.

Discipleship does not begin with religious habits, church attendance, outward practices or learning a set of rules. Before a person can truly follow Jesus Christ, that person must first receive spiritual life from Him.

Jesus made this clear when He spoke to Nicodemus. He said in **John 3:7**:

> *"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

The new birth is a spiritual transformation in which God gives new life. The person who was spiritually dead becomes alive unto God and becomes a new creature in Jesus Christ.

Paul described this new life in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

This is the beginning of true discipleship. Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the born-again believer and lives His life through them.

From this new life comes everything that follows in discipleship. Faith, prayer, understanding the Word of God, worship, fellowship, service, love, holiness and spiritual growth all flow from the life received in Jesus Christ.

In this first Study Guide of Foundations of Discipleship, we will consider what it means to be born again and how God draws a person to Himself. We will also consider the place of conviction, repentance, confession and faith, and what takes place when a person receives the Spirit of Christ and becomes a new creature.

Before we can learn how to live as disciples, we must first understand how the life of a disciple begins. Discipleship begins with life, and that life is Jesus Christ within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a disciple first receive new life in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Where have you treated religious habits as the source of spiritual life? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Think about one religious activity you value. How will you change your attitude towards it so that it expresses the life already received from Jesus Christ rather than a way of obtaining life?

INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH LIFE

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Before we consider how a disciple should live, we must begin with the life from which true discipleship flows. A person cannot truly follow Jesus Christ without first receiving spiritual life from Him. Discipleship begins with the new birth.

Christianity is not simply a collection of beliefs, religious duties or moral rules. It is the life of Jesus Christ within the born-again believer. The disciple does not begin by trying to improve the old life or by attempting to imitate Jesus through human effort. The disciple begins by receiving new life from Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Paul's testimony was not simply that he had accepted a new teaching or joined a new religious movement. He declared, *"Christ liveth in me."*

This is the foundation of the Christian life. Jesus Christ does not remain outside the believer as an example who must be copied through human strength. At the new birth, He comes to dwell within by His Spirit, and the believer begins to live from the new life received from Him.

Paul expressed this same truth in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Salvation therefore brings a real spiritual change. The person is not simply encouraged to become a better version of what they were before. A new creature comes into being, the old life of sin is left behind, and a new life in Jesus Christ begins.

This is why Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, worship, service and other Christian practices cannot produce spiritual life. These things are important, but they belong to the life that follows the new birth. They flow from the life of Christ already dwelling within the believer.

Jesus said in **John 10:10**:

> *"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*

Jesus came to give life. This is not simply a better natural life, improved circumstances or a more religious way of living. It is spiritual life received through Him.

A true disciple has therefore first been born again. The believer has received the Spirit of Christ and now learns to walk according to the life of Jesus Christ within. Salvation comes first, and discipleship follows from that life.

This order is important because we do not practise discipleship in order to earn salvation. We are saved by the grace of God, and then we learn to live, grow, obey, serve and follow Jesus Christ as His disciples.

Everything that follows in this module rests upon this foundation. We will consider the Word of God, faith, prayer, discernment, service, fellowship, spiritual growth and making other disciples. All these things must flow from the same beginning.

Discipleship begins with new life in Jesus Christ. The life of the disciple begins when Jesus Christ comes to dwell within through the new birth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the new birth come before learning to follow Jesus?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever thought that becoming a better person could produce the new birth? What does Jesus' teaching reveal about that belief?

Action Step

Examine whether you have linked salvation to good behaviour. What belief needs correcting, and how will you explain to another person that new life in Jesus Christ comes first?

SALVATION IS A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

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When the Bible speaks about salvation, it is speaking about much more than being rescued from the consequences of sin or receiving the hope of Heaven. Salvation brings a person into a completely new life in Jesus Christ.

God does not simply forgive the old life and then leave the person unchanged. He gives new spiritual life and brings the believer into a new relationship with Him.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Notice the words *"new creature."* Salvation is not the repair or improvement of the old sinful life, but the beginning of a new spiritual life in Christ.

The person who was separated from God is brought into a completely new relationship with Him. Only God can make a person new.

This is why salvation cannot be reduced to joining a church, changing outward behaviour, accepting a religious teaching or deciding to become a better person. These things may change habits and conduct, but they cannot produce spiritual life.

God Promised an Inward Work

Long before the Gospel Day, God promised through Ezekiel that He would perform an inward work that outward law could never accomplish. He promised to change the heart and place His Spirit within His people.

Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 36:26-27**:

> *"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."*

The promise contains three important truths:

- God gives a new heart;
- God gives a new spirit;
- God puts His Spirit within.

Salvation therefore reaches far deeper than outward religion. God changes the person from within and gives the spiritual life needed to walk with Him.

What could never be produced by human effort is accomplished by the power of God. The New Covenant work is an inward work within the believer.

Salvation Is the Gift of God

This salvation is entirely the gift of God's grace. It cannot be earned or produced through human effort.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

> *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*

Salvation cannot be earned by religious works, good behaviour, ceremonies or personal effort. It is the gift of God, and therefore no person can produce salvation for themselves.

No person can give themselves a new heart, make themselves a new creature or place the Spirit of God within themselves. This is God's work from beginning to end.

Christ Lives Within the Believer

The new life is centred completely in Jesus Christ. Paul did not describe Christianity as a life lived independently for God, but as Christ living within the believer.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

The words *"Christ liveth in me"* bring us to the heart of New Covenant salvation. The believer is not left to produce holiness, righteousness, love and obedience through natural strength.

Jesus Christ comes to dwell within as Spirit, and His life becomes the source from which the disciple lives. The believer possesses the Person.

This does not remove the disciple's responsibility to obey God. Instead, it explains how a born-again person is able to walk with Him.

God does not command His children to live a new life while leaving them dependent upon the strength of the old life. He gives them His life within, and the disciple learns to walk according to that spiritual life.

Complete in Jesus Christ

This is why Paul could also say that the believer is complete in Christ. Salvation does not leave the born-again believer spiritually incomplete and waiting for another necessary work.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The new life does not need to be completed by an outward ceremony or another spiritual experience. At salvation, the believer receives Jesus Christ and becomes complete in Him.

Complete means complete. The believer has received the Person in whom spiritual life is found and does not need something additional to complete salvation.

The Beginning of Discipleship

This is the proper beginning of discipleship. A disciple does not begin with rules, duties or outward practices, but with new life in Jesus Christ.

Everything that follows in the life of a disciple must flow from that reality. Prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, service, obedience and spiritual growth belong to the life that has already been received.

Jesus Christ gives the life, and Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer. He becomes the source from which the disciple learns to walk and live.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does salvation require a new heart and God's Spirit instead of improved outward conduct?

Personal Reflection

Does your confidence rest entirely in Jesus Christ, or have you relied upon a religious activity or personal effort? What needs to change in your understanding?

Action Step

Consider whether you have placed confidence in your own efforts. How will gratitude for God's complete saving work change the way you approach Him and live today?

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

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The foundation of discipleship is the new birth. Before a person can grow as a disciple, serve Christ, understand spiritual truth or become part of His body, that person must first be born again.

Jesus made this absolutely clear when Nicodemus came to Him. He explained that without the new birth, a person cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God.

John recorded the words of Jesus in **John 3:3-7**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Jesus did not present the new birth as one option among many. He said plainly, *"Ye must be born again."*

The new birth is therefore essential. Natural birth brings a person into the natural world, while spiritual birth brings a person into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' reference to being *"born of water and of the Spirit"* must not be understood as teaching that literal water produces the new birth. Jesus immediately explained the nature of the birth when He said, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* The new birth is spiritual, and only God can produce spiritual life.

A person therefore cannot enter the Kingdom of God through natural birth, family background, church membership, religious education, water baptism or any other outward ceremony. An outward act cannot produce the inward spiritual life that comes from God.

A New Creature in Jesus Christ

When a person is born again, that person becomes a new creature in Jesus Christ. God does not simply improve the old life, but gives new spiritual life.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

This new birth brings the believer into a completely new relationship with God. The person who was once separated from Him becomes His child.

John explained that those who receive Jesus Christ become children of God through spiritual birth.

John wrote in **John 1:12–13**:

> *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

These verses connect receiving Jesus Christ directly with becoming a child of God and being born of God. This relationship does not come through natural descent, human effort or an outward ceremony.

The believer becomes a child of God through the spiritual work of the new birth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Jesus tell Nicodemus that he must be born again?

Personal Reflection

Have you confused water baptism, family background or church attendance with being born of the Spirit? What has this teaching clarified?

Action Step

Ask yourself whether you have confused an outward act with the new birth. What will you change in your understanding, and how would you explain Jesus' words to someone seeking salvation?

Brought Into Jesus Christ

Paul expressed the same truth when writing to the Galatians. He showed that those who belong to God have been brought into Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:26-28**:

> *"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. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The believer is brought into Christ. This is not accomplished by natural descent or by joining a religious organisation, but through the spiritual work of God.

Natural distinctions do not create different spiritual peoples in Christ. Those who have received His life are *"all one in Christ Jesus."*

Brought Into One Body by One Spirit

Paul also explained how believers are brought into the body of Christ. The work is accomplished by the one Spirit of God.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The new birth therefore brings the believer into the one body of Christ, which is the Church. The believer becomes part of God's spiritual family because the Spirit of God has given new life.

There is no separate spiritual body for Jew and another for Gentile. By one Spirit, those who are born again are brought into one body in Jesus Christ.

The Household of God

Paul described this new relationship again in **Ephesians 2:19**. Those who were once separated from God are now brought into His household.

Paul wrote:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"

This is one of the great changes that takes place at the new birth. The believer is no longer a stranger to God because through Jesus Christ the believer becomes part of His household.

The new birth is therefore much more than making a decision to become religious. It is a spiritual birth produced by God in which the sinner becomes a new creature, a child of God, a member of His household and part of the one body of Christ.

This is why discipleship must begin with the new birth. Before we can learn how to follow Jesus Christ, we must first receive His life and be born again.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the new birth bring a believer into God's household and Christ's one body?

Personal Reflection

Where have you treated another born-again believer as outside your spiritual family? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Is there a born-again believer you have kept at a distance because of background or difference? How will you express the unity Christ has already given through one meaningful act of fellowship?

EXCEPT THE FATHER DRAW YOU

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The new birth begins with God. A person does not simply decide one day, through human reasoning alone, to make themselves spiritually alive. Before anyone can come to Jesus Christ, God must first draw that person to Himself.

Jesus said in **John 6:44**:

> *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."*

The word *"draw"* is important because God reaches into the heart and makes a person aware of their spiritual condition and need of salvation. This drawing is the gracious work of God bringing the sinner to Himself as He is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:9**:

> *"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."*

God's purpose in drawing a person is not simply to make them feel guilty. He is calling them into fellowship with Jesus Christ, and the conviction that accompanies His drawing is intended to bring a person towards repentance, forgiveness and new life.

The Spirit Brings Conviction

Jesus explained one part of this work when He spoke about the Comforter. Through His Spirit, God brings conviction concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.

Jesus said in **John 16:8**:

> *"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:"*

To reprove is to bring conviction. Through His Spirit, God makes a person conscious of sin and of their accountability before Him.

Things that may once have seemed acceptable begin to be seen differently when brought into the light of God's truth. Conviction helps the sinner recognise the true spiritual condition of the heart.

The Word Reveals the Heart

The Word of God also has an important part in bringing conviction. God's Word reaches beyond outward actions and reveals the thoughts, motives and intents of the heart.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 4:12-13**:

> *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

Under the light of God's Word, excuses begin to disappear. A person begins to recognise not only wrong actions, but also wrong motives and the true condition of the heart.

God's Word therefore helps bring the sinner to an honest recognition of spiritual need. What may have been hidden or excused becomes exposed before God.

Pricked in Their Heart

This can be seen clearly on the Day of Pentecost. Peter preached Jesus Christ to the people in Jerusalem, and the Word reached their hearts.

Luke wrote in **Acts 2:37**:

> *"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*

They were *"pricked in their heart,"* showing that conviction had taken place. They recognised their guilt and understood that they needed to respond to God.

Their question, *"What shall we do?"*, shows that conviction was moving them towards a response. They could no longer remain unconcerned about their spiritual condition.

God's Goodness Leads to Repentance

God's drawing should never be understood as God seeking to destroy the sinner through condemnation. His purpose is salvation, and He reveals sin because He desires to deliver the sinner from it.

Paul explained that it is the goodness of God that leads a person towards repentance. He wrote in **Romans 2:4**:

> *"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"*

God reveals sin because He desires to deliver the sinner from it. He brings conviction because He desires repentance, and He draws because He desires fellowship.

Peter expressed the heart of God in **2 Peter 3:9**:

> *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

God's desire is that people should come to repentance rather than perish. His drawing and conviction must therefore be understood within His purpose of bringing people towards salvation.

Conviction Requires a Response

This helps us understand the beginning of salvation. God draws, and His Word and Spirit bring conviction so that the sinner becomes conscious of guilt and begins to recognise the need for Jesus Christ.

Conviction itself, however, is not salvation. A person may feel guilty and still refuse to turn to God.

The drawing of God brings us to the place where we must respond. That response is repentance, and this becomes the next important step in understanding how a sinner comes to Jesus Christ.

God draws us to Jesus Christ, conviction reveals our need, and His goodness leads us towards repentance. The sinner must then respond to the drawing of God by turning towards Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Father's drawing and the work of the Word and Spirit lead a person towards repentance?

Personal Reflection

How have you responded when God's Word has brought conviction to your attention? Have you received the correction or sought to excuse it?

Action Step

When God's Word exposes a wrong attitude or conduct, how do you usually respond? Identify what you need to acknowledge and how you will respond honestly rather than excuse it.

TRUE REPENTANCE

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Conviction brings a person face to face with the reality of sin, but conviction alone is not repentance. A person may feel guilty, troubled or ashamed and still refuse to turn from sin. True repentance requires a change of heart that produces a change of direction.

Jesus made the necessity of repentance very clear. He said in **Luke 13:3**:

> *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

Repentance is therefore not an optional part of salvation. When God brings conviction to the heart, there must be a response, and the sinner must turn from the old life and turn towards God.

The prophet Ezekiel expressed this plainly. He wrote in **Ezekiel 33:19**:

> *"But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby."*

Repentance therefore involves two directions:

- Turning from sin and wickedness;
- Turning towards God and what is right.

A person cannot truly repent while intending to continue living in the same sinful way. Repentance means that the old direction is rejected and a new direction is chosen.

Godly Sorrow and Repentance

Repentance should not be confused with simply feeling sorry. A person may regret the consequences of wrongdoing without truly wanting to leave the wrongdoing itself.

Sorrow may come because someone has been exposed, embarrassed or punished. That sorrow does not necessarily mean that genuine repentance has taken place.

Paul distinguished between two kinds of sorrow. He wrote in **2 Corinthians 7:10**:

> *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

Godly sorrow produces repentance. It comes when a person recognises that sin is not simply a mistake or an unfortunate choice, but rebellion against God.

Under conviction, the sinner sees the true condition of the heart and recognises the need to turn. Godly sorrow therefore moves the person towards repentance rather than leaving them only with feelings of guilt.

The writer of Hebrews described how the Word of God exposes the heart. He wrote in **Hebrews 4:12-13**:

> *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

True repentance begins when a person stops defending, excusing or hiding sin and becomes honest before God. His Word reveals not only outward actions, but also the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Turning to God

Repentance is not complete when a person simply turns away from sin. There must also be a turning towards God.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 55:7**:

> *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

Notice the two movements again. The wicked person must forsake his way, but he must also return unto the LORD.

This is why repentance can be understood as turning around and going in a new direction. The sinner leaves the old way behind and turns towards Jesus Christ with a desire to live according to His will.

True repentance also produces a different attitude towards sin. What was once accepted, excused or enjoyed is now recognised as something that separated the person from God.

There is therefore a desire to leave the old way behind and walk in righteousness. The direction of the heart has changed.

Surrendering the Old Life

Paul described the new life that follows salvation in **2 Corinthians 5:17**. His words show the great spiritual change God produces in the person who comes into Christ.

Paul wrote:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Repentance prepares the heart to receive this new life. It is not an attempt to reform the old life through human strength, but a surrender of the old life so that Jesus Christ may make the person new.

True repentance therefore includes:

- Recognising guilt before God;
- Turning from sin;
- Turning towards God;
- Surrendering the old life;
- Desiring to walk in righteousness.

Repentance is more than saying, *"I am sorry."* Genuine repentance changes the direction of the heart and life. Where wrongdoing has caused loss or harm that can reasonably be put right, genuine repentance should also produce a willingness to make restitution where possible.

The repentant sinner is saying through both heart and direction, *"I am leaving the old way and turning to Jesus Christ."* This is the response God desires when His drawing and conviction bring a person face to face with the need of salvation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does repentance involve turning from sin towards God and, where needed, making a wrong right?

Personal Reflection

When you have recognised wrongdoing, has your concern been more about its consequences than turning towards God? What difference does genuine repentance make?

Action Step

Consider whether sorrow over consequences has ever replaced genuine turning to God. What change of direction is required, and what will you do to make a wrong right where possible?

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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True repentance brings a person to the place where sin is no longer hidden, defended or excused. The sinner becomes willing to acknowledge guilt before God and seek His forgiveness. Confession and repentance belong together because both require honesty before God.

John wrote in **1 John 1:9**:

> *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Confession means acknowledging our sin before God. This does not mean that a person must be able to remember and name every wrong action ever committed.

The important point is that the sinner recognises guilt, accepts responsibility and comes honestly before God. There is no place for excuses in true confession.

We do not blame other people, circumstances, upbringing, temptation or weakness for our sin. We acknowledge that we have sinned and need the mercy of God.

God Is Faithful to Forgive

The wonderful promise in **1 John 1:9** is that God is *"faithful and just to forgive."* When repentance is genuine and confession comes from the heart, the sinner can come to God with confidence that forgiveness is available.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 55:7**:

> *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

God does not call the repentant sinner back to Himself in order to reject them. He calls them so that He may have mercy and *"abundantly pardon."*

Forgiveness therefore rests upon the character and faithfulness of God, not upon the worthiness of the sinner. The sinner comes depending upon God's mercy rather than personal goodness.

The Conscience Is Cleansed

Sin produces guilt in the conscience. A person may try to hide that guilt, ignore it or cover it through religious activity, but only Jesus Christ can truly cleanse it.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:14**:

> *"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

The blood of Jesus Christ does what human effort cannot do. It purges the conscience, removing the guilt of sin so that the believer may serve the living God.

This is an important part of salvation. God does not simply overlook sin because the sinner is forgiven, cleansed and brought into a new relationship with Him.

The conscience no longer needs to remain under the guilt of the former life. Jesus Christ provides the cleansing that human effort and outward religious activity could never produce.

Confession Is Made to Jesus Christ

Confession for salvation is not dependent upon a human priesthood. Jesus Christ is the One to whom the sinner comes for mercy, forgiveness and cleansing.

Peter declared in **Acts 4:12**:

> *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."*

There is no other Saviour who can forgive sin and give spiritual life. The repentant sinner therefore comes directly to Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews gives this encouragement in **Hebrews 10:21-22**:

> *"And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."*

The words *"draw near with a true heart"* describe the spirit of genuine confession. The sinner comes honestly, without pretence, trusting in the mercy and saving work of Jesus Christ.

Confession therefore is not an empty religious action. It is the honest acknowledgement of guilt before God, joined with repentance and faith.

When the sinner confesses and turns to Jesus Christ, God forgives and cleanses the conscience. The repentant sinner can draw near with a true heart and receive the new life found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a person confess sin to God rather than hide it or shift blame?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever explained away wrongdoing or blamed someone else? What does honest confession require?

Action Step

Is there wrongdoing you have explained away or blamed on circumstances? What would honest confession to Jesus Christ require, and how will you put right any harm you can reasonably repair?

BELIEVE ON JESUS CHRIST

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Repentance and confession bring the sinner to the place of surrender, but salvation also requires faith in Jesus Christ. A person must believe that Jesus Christ is able and willing to save, forgive, cleanse and give new life.

Jesus said in **John 3:36**:

> *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

Notice the words *"believeth on the Son."* Saving faith is centred upon Jesus Christ.

It is not faith in ourselves, our goodness, our religious background or our ability to change. Our confidence must rest completely in Him.

More Than Knowing About Jesus

To believe on Jesus Christ means more than accepting that He existed or agreeing with certain facts about Him. A person may know many things about Jesus and still not place their life in His hands.

Jesus said in **John 8:24**:

> *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."*

True belief reaches the heart. It recognises who Jesus Christ is and places complete confidence in Him as Saviour and Lord. Jesus Christ is the one true God revealed through genuine humanity, and saving faith places our confidence in Him as God and Saviour. We are not simply believing facts about Jesus Christ. We are entrusting ourselves to the Person who alone can save us. John recorded one of the best-known statements concerning this faith.

Jesus said in **John 3:16**:

> *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

The promise is given to *"whosoever believeth in him."* Faith looks away from self and rests upon Jesus Christ.

Faith Depends Upon God

Faith is necessary because salvation cannot be produced by human effort. We cannot forgive our own sins, cleanse our own conscience, give ourselves a new heart or make ourselves spiritually alive.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 11:6**:

> *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

The sinner who comes to God must believe. Faith trusts that God is true, that His promises can be relied upon and that He will respond to those who sincerely seek Him.

Paul explained that salvation is received through faith because it is the gift of God. He wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

> *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*

We are not saved because we have performed enough good works or made ourselves worthy. Salvation is by grace through faith, and faith receives what God freely gives.

Calling Upon the Lord

Faith also brings the sinner to call upon Jesus Christ for salvation. The sinner recognises the need of salvation and looks to Him as the One who can save.

Paul wrote in **Romans 10:11-13**:

> *"For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

The promise is open to everyone. There is no difference of nationality, background, education or social position because the same Lord is rich unto all who call upon Him.

True saving faith therefore involves dependence and surrender. The sinner no longer trusts in self but places the whole life into the hands of Jesus Christ.

Faith says, *"Jesus Christ is my only Saviour, and I trust Him to forgive me, cleanse me, give me new life and make me His own."* This confidence rests completely upon Him rather than upon anything the sinner can accomplish.

Faith Receives the Gift of Salvation

Faith does not stand apart from repentance and confession. They belong together as the sinner responds to the drawing of God.

God draws, conviction comes, the sinner repents and confesses, and faith reaches out to Jesus Christ. These things may unfold differently from person to person and may take place over a period of time, but the new birth itself is a definite work of God. A person does not gradually become born again.

There comes a point when the repentant sinner places complete faith in Jesus Christ and God performs the work that no person can perform for themselves. He gives spiritual life, and the person is born again.

The sinner therefore cannot produce the new birth through personal effort. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the repentant sinner receives the gift of salvation and becomes a new creature in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does saving faith rest in Jesus Christ instead of personal worthiness?

Personal Reflection

Where have you rested on religious knowledge without trusting the Saviour Himself? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Identify an area where you are trusting yourself rather than Jesus Christ. How will you surrender that confidence in self and express your trust in Him in a real decision?

BORN OF THE SPIRIT - CHRIST IN YOU

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The new birth is a spiritual birth. Jesus made this clear when He spoke to Nicodemus. A person is not born again through natural birth, religious activity or an outward ceremony. The new birth is the work of the Spirit of God within the heart.

Jesus said in **John 3:6**:

> *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*

Natural birth gives natural life, while spiritual birth gives spiritual life. When a person is born again, God does not simply change the outward conduct because He gives spiritual life and comes to dwell within.

Jesus Promised to Come to His Disciples

Before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless. He promised that the Spirit of truth would come to dwell within them.

Jesus said in **John 14:16-18**:

> *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Notice the change Jesus described. The Spirit was *"with you,"* but He would be *"in you."*

Jesus then made the promise personal when He said, *"I will come to you."* He was not promising that another divine person, separate from Himself, would come to live in His disciples.

Jesus was promising that He would return to them as the Holy Spirit and dwell within them. This promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

The disciples who had walked physically with Jesus would now have Him dwelling spiritually within them. The presence of Jesus Christ would no longer be limited to His physical presence beside them.

Christ in You

Paul described this indwelling of Jesus Christ as a great mystery that had now been revealed. The New Covenant brought the reality of Christ dwelling within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The great New Covenant reality is *"Christ in you."* Salvation is not simply believing that Jesus lived long ago or admiring His teaching from a distance.

Neither is discipleship simply an attempt to follow His example through human strength. Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the born-again believer.

This is why the life of a disciple must come from within. The believer has received the Spirit of Christ and now lives from the spiritual life Jesus Christ has placed within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

When does a believer receive the Spirit of Christ, and what does that mean for new life?

Personal Reflection

Have you expected another spiritual experience to make salvation complete? What does receiving the Spirit of Christ at the new birth settle for you?

Action Step

How has the truth that the Spirit of Christ is received at the new birth corrected your expectations? What will you stop seeking as a missing part of salvation, and how will you rest in Christ's indwelling life?

The Holy Spirit Is Received at the New Birth

The Holy Spirit is not a second experience that must be received sometime after salvation. The Holy Spirit is received when a person is born again because without the Spirit of Christ there is no spiritual life and no belonging to Christ.

Paul makes this relationship between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ very clear.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul speaks of the *"Spirit of God"* and the *"Spirit of Christ"* in the same verse. The believer does not receive Jesus Christ at salvation and then wait to receive another Spirit later. To receive the Spirit of Christ is to receive the Holy Spirit, and without His Spirit a person does not belong to Him.

Paul explained that all believers are brought into the body of Christ through one Spirit. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Notice that Paul said *"we all."* Every born-again believer is baptised by the Spirit into the one body.

There is not one group of believers who have received Christ and another group who later receive the Holy Spirit. The same spiritual work that gives life also brings the believer into Christ and into His body.

God also places His love within the believer through the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote in **Romans 5:5**:

> *"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."*

The Holy Ghost is *"given unto us."* Through the new birth, the believer receives the life, love and Spirit of God within.

Baptised Into the Body of Christ

The spiritual baptism of the new birth also brings the believer into the Church of Jesus Christ. A person does not enter Christ through church membership, natural birth or an outward ceremony.

God Himself places the born-again believer into His body. By one Spirit, all who are born again are brought into one body.

This is why the new birth is so important to discipleship. A disciple is not simply someone who has decided to follow Christian teaching because a disciple is someone who has been made spiritually alive and brought into Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God.

The believer now belongs to Christ, is part of His body and has His Spirit dwelling within. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person is the source of the new spiritual life.

Everything that follows in the Christian life grows from this reality. Prayer, obedience, holiness, love, service, worship and spiritual growth are not attempts to produce the life of Christ from the outside.

They are expressions of the life already received within. The disciple learns to live according to the Jesus Christ who now dwells within as Spirit.

The new birth is the birth of the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Salvation is Christ in you, and this indwelling life is the foundation from which true discipleship grows.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does one Spirit bring every born-again believer into Christ's one body?

Personal Reflection

Where have you divided believers into spiritual classes according to a later experience? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Have you placed believers into different spiritual classes because of their experiences? How will you correct that attitude and show equal care to someone who shares the same Spirit of Christ?

A NEW CREATURE AND A CHILD OF GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

When a person is born again, a real spiritual change takes place. Salvation is not simply forgiveness for the past because God gives the believer a new life, a new identity and a new relationship with Him.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

The words *"new creature"* describe the work of God in salvation. The believer does not remain spiritually the same person with a new religious label because God brings forth new spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

The old life of sin is left behind, and the believer begins a new life in Him. Salvation therefore changes both the spiritual condition and the identity of the believer.

Now Are We the Sons of God

The new birth also brings the believer into the family of God. John did not describe this as something that happens at some future time because he wrote that those who have been born of God are His children now.

John wrote in **1 John 3:2**:

> *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."*

The word *"now"* is important. A born-again believer does not need to wait for an outward ceremony, a later religious experience or another spiritual work before becoming a child of God.

At the new birth, God gives life, and the believer becomes part of His family. This relationship begins when the person is born of God.

Paul expressed this same truth in **Galatians 3:26**:

> *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."*

Our relationship with God is therefore centred in Jesus Christ. We become children of God through faith in Him and through the spiritual work of the new birth.

Brought Into Christ

Paul continued by explaining the believer's new position. The person who has received new life is brought into Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:27-28**:

> *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The believer is *"baptized into Christ."* This is the spiritual baptism by which the Spirit of God brings the born-again believer into Jesus Christ and into His body.

Salvation therefore means more than Jesus Christ coming to dwell within us. We are also brought into Him, and our spiritual identity is now found in Jesus Christ.

Paul explained this further in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Every born-again believer is brought into the same body by the same Spirit. There are not different spiritual classes of believers because all who are born again receive the Spirit of Christ and become part of His one body.

Members of the Household of God

The new birth therefore changes where we belong. Those who were separated from God are brought into His spiritual household.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:19**:

> *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"*

Before salvation, the sinner is separated from God. Through the new birth, that person becomes part of *"the household of God."*

This spiritual household is not created by joining an organisation or by having a name placed on a membership roll. It is made up of those who have been born of God and brought into Jesus Christ.

A born-again believer therefore has a completely new spiritual identity:

- A new creature in Christ;
- A child of God;
- Baptised into Christ;
- A member of the one body;
- Part of the household of God.

These are not separate stages that must be received one after another. They describe the spiritual reality of the person who has been born again and brought into Jesus Christ.

Complete in Jesus Christ

The new birth also means that the believer is not spiritually incomplete and waiting for something else to finish salvation. The believer has received Jesus Christ and is complete in Him.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

This is an important foundation for discipleship. The believer grows, learns, matures and becomes stronger in understanding, but salvation itself is complete in Jesus Christ.

We do not grow in order to become children of God because we grow because we are already His children. Spiritual growth develops from the life and relationship already received.

We do not serve in order to enter Christ because we serve because we have already been brought into Him. Service flows from salvation rather than producing it.

We do not seek another spirit after receiving Jesus Christ because the Spirit of Christ already dwells within the born-again believer. Nothing further is required to complete the salvation already received in Him.

The new birth therefore gives the disciple both life and identity. We are new creatures, we are children of God, we belong to His household, and we are complete in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can a child of God be complete in Christ while still growing?

Personal Reflection

Where have you tried to earn a place in God's family through service or maturity? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Where have you felt you must earn what Christ has already given? What will you change in your approach to service so that you serve as one already complete in Him?

THE LIFE OF THE NEW CREATURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

When a person is born again, the change God has worked within begins to be seen in the way that person lives. The believer does not receive a new life from Jesus Christ and then continue willingly in the old life of sin. The life of Christ within produces a different character, different desires and a different way of living.

Peter described believers as becoming partakers of the divine nature. He wrote in **2 Peter 1:4**:

> *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

The new creature has received life from God. Therefore, the nature and character of God should increasingly be seen through the believer's life.

The Life of Christ Produces Love

One of the clearest evidences of the new birth is love. John directly connected loving others with being born of God.

John wrote in **1 John 4:7-8**:

> *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."*

This love is not something the believer manufactures through human effort. It comes from God Himself and becomes part of the new spiritual life within.

Paul wrote in **Romans 5:5**:

> *"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."*

At the new birth, the Holy Ghost brings the love of God into the heart. The disciple is therefore able to love in a way that goes beyond natural affection, including people who may be difficult to love.

Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**:

> *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

Love is therefore not an optional quality in the life of a disciple. It is one of the clearest expressions of Christ living within, and it should become visible in the way believers treat one another.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should Christ's life within a believer become visible in love towards others?

Personal Reflection

Where have you withheld love from a fellow believer you find difficult? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Consider a relationship where patience or love has been difficult. What attitude needs to change, and how will you allow Christ's love within to govern your next response to that person?

The Life of Christ Produces Forgiveness

The love of God also produces a forgiving heart. The person who has received mercy from Jesus Christ should be willing to extend mercy to others.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:19-20**:

> *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."*

The new creature does not live by hatred, revenge or bitterness because these belong to the old way of life. The believer has received the life of Christ and therefore learns to respond with mercy, love and forgiveness.

Jesus also made clear that forgiveness is not optional. He said in **Matthew 6:15**:

> *"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

A person cannot knowingly hold onto hatred, bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive while claiming to walk in the forgiving life of Jesus Christ. We must be willing to forgive because we ourselves have received mercy and forgiveness from Him.

Forgiveness does not mean that wrong becomes right. It means that we refuse to allow bitterness and vengeance to control our hearts. We entrust judgment to God and allow the love of Christ to govern our response, even when other people have treated us wrongly.

The Life of Christ Produces Holiness

The new life in Christ is also a holy life. Holiness is not an outward religious appearance or a system of human rules because holiness is the character of God expressed through a life that belongs to Him.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:15-16**:

> *"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."*

The word *"conversation"* refers to the manner of life. God's holiness should therefore be visible in how the disciple thinks, speaks, behaves and treats others.

Paul explained that the grace which saves also teaches the believer how to live. He wrote in **Titus 2:11-12**:

> *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

Holiness does not mean that a believer will never make a mistake. There is a difference between a mistake and knowingly choosing to disobey what God has revealed to be right. James wrote in **James 4:17**:

> *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

A mistake should be acknowledged and corrected when possible, but sin involves a heart that knowingly chooses against God's revealed will. The born-again believer should not willingly continue in sin because the new life produces a desire to obey Jesus Christ.

Holiness therefore belongs naturally to the life of the new creature. The God who gives new life also produces clean desires, right motives and a desire to live in a way that agrees with His character.

Jesus Christ Is Our Righteousness

The believer must never forget the source of this new life. Righteousness is not produced independently from Christ because Jesus Christ Himself is our righteousness.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:30**:

> *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

We do not become righteous by returning to our own strength or by trusting in outward religious performance. We walk in righteousness because we are in Christ Jesus, and He is our righteousness.

Paul expressed this again in **2 Corinthians 5:21**:

> *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

Notice again the words *"in him."* The righteousness of the believer is centred in Jesus Christ rather than in human ability.

The disciple therefore depends upon the life of Christ within rather than attempting to manufacture righteousness through natural strength. Jesus Christ remains the source of the new life and the righteousness expressed through it.

Putting On the New Man

Paul described the life of the born-again believer as putting on the new man. The outward conduct of the disciple should agree with the spiritual change God has already produced within.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:24**:

> *"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."*

The new creature has been created *"in righteousness and true holiness."* Therefore, the daily life of the disciple should increasingly agree with the spiritual life God has already given within.

The believer does not live in love, forgiveness, righteousness and holiness in order to become a new creature. We live this way because God has already made us new in Jesus Christ.

The new life within must now be seen without. The character and conduct of the disciple should increasingly reveal the spiritual life already received.

Christ within produces love and forgiveness, while His life within produces righteousness and holiness. This is the life of the new creature, and it flows from Jesus Christ dwelling within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should the new creature's choices show Christ's righteousness and holiness?

Personal Reflection

Where have you excused a choice you know conflicts with God's revealed will? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Identify a choice that conflicts with what you know is right. How will you turn from that choice and act according to the life and righteousness of Christ within you?

FROM NEW BIRTH TO DISCIPLESHIP

BACK TO CONTENTS

The new birth is the beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ. When a person is born again, that person becomes a new creature, receives the Spirit of Christ and becomes a child of God. However, the new birth is the beginning of discipleship, not the end of spiritual growth.

Just as a child is born with life and then grows towards maturity, the born-again believer must grow in understanding, faith, obedience and service. The life has already been received, but the disciple must learn how to walk according to that life.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:6-7**:

> *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."*

Notice the order because Paul first says that we have *"received Christ Jesus the Lord."* He then tells us to *"walk ye in him."*

This is the proper order of discipleship. We first receive Christ, and then we learn to walk in the life we have received.

Learning to Walk in Christ

A disciple is a learner and follower of Jesus Christ. The purpose of discipleship is not simply to gather information about Him, but to learn His Word, understand His ways and walk according to His life within us.

Jesus said in **John 8:31-32**:

> *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Jesus connected true discipleship with continuing in His Word. A disciple does not hear the truth once and then move on, but continues learning, receiving, obeying and living the Word of God.

This is why spiritual growth requires commitment. A newborn child must receive nourishment in order to grow, and in the same way a new believer needs the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, encouragement and opportunities to serve.

These things do not give spiritual life because that life has already been received through the new birth. They nourish the life that has already been received and help the disciple grow towards spiritual maturity.

Growing in Christ

God does not intend His children to remain spiritual babies. The born-again believer must continue growing in knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:18**:

> *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."*

Spiritual growth does not mean becoming less dependent upon Jesus Christ. The opposite is true because, as disciples mature, they understand more clearly that their strength, wisdom, righteousness and life are found in Him.

Growth therefore means becoming more established in Christ and learning to express His life more faithfully. The disciple grows in understanding while remaining completely dependent upon the life of Christ within.

Following Jesus Daily

Discipleship is not limited to study because it involves following Jesus in everyday life. What the disciple learns must become part of the way the disciple lives.

Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**:

> *"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."*

Notice the word *"daily."* Following Jesus is not something reserved for fellowship meetings or times of Bible study.

Discipleship reaches into our decisions, relationships, attitudes, speech, use of time, service and response to difficulties. The born-again believer now has a new centre for life.

Instead of living according to self, the disciple learns to submit every part of life to Jesus Christ. Following Him therefore becomes the continuing direction of the believer's life.

The Foundations of a Disciple's Life

As we continue through this module, we will examine several foundations that help the believer grow and remain strong in Christ. These foundations belong to the continuing life of someone who has already been born again:

- The Word of God and faith;
- Prayer, fasting and discernment;
- Service, stewardship and giving;
- Worship, fellowship and testimony;
- Following Christ and helping others follow Him;
- Growth, maturity and spiritual multiplication.

These are not separate religious activities added to salvation in order to make the believer complete. They are parts of a life that flows from Christ already dwelling within.

The disciple reads the Word because there is a desire to know Jesus Christ and His truth. The disciple prays because the new life brings fellowship with Him.

The disciple serves because the life of Christ is a life of love and service. The disciple helps others because the life received from Jesus Christ is intended to become fruitful.

We Receive Christ and Then Walk in Him

Discipleship therefore follows a clear order. First, we are born again, and then we learn to walk in the life we have received.

The new birth gives us spiritual life, while discipleship teaches us to grow, walk, serve and become fruitful in that life. Growth does not complete salvation because the born-again believer is already complete in Jesus Christ.

We receive Christ, and then we learn to walk in Him. Everything that follows in discipleship grows from the Jesus Christ who already dwells within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does receiving Christ come before learning to walk in Him?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes measure spiritual standing by religious activity? How does being complete in Christ change that way of thinking?

Action Step

Have you measured your standing with God by how regularly you pray, read or serve? How will you restore these practices to their right place as responses to salvation rather than ways to complete it?

CONCLUSION: CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now seen where discipleship begins. It does not begin with religious activity, outward practices or an attempt to improve ourselves. Discipleship begins when a person is born again and receives new life in Jesus Christ.

God first draws the sinner to Himself. Through His Word and Spirit, conviction comes, revealing sin and the need for salvation.

That conviction must lead to genuine repentance, confession and faith in Jesus Christ. God then performs the work that no person can perform for themselves: He gives spiritual life.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

The born-again believer is not simply forgiven and then left unchanged. God gives a new heart and a new spirit, and Jesus Christ comes to dwell within by His Spirit.

The believer becomes a child of God, a member of His household and part of the one body of Christ. This is the great New Covenant reality.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

Salvation is Christ in you, and the born-again believer now possesses the spiritual life found in Him. Jesus Christ dwells within by His Spirit and becomes the source of the disciple's life.

Because Jesus Christ lives within, the new creature begins to express His life. The love of God is seen in love towards others, while His forgiving nature produces a forgiving heart.

His righteousness and holiness become the way in which the believer desires to live. These qualities do not produce the new birth, but flow from the new life already received.

None of this means that the disciple has reached full spiritual maturity at the moment of the new birth. The new birth gives life, while discipleship is the continuing journey of learning to walk according to that life.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:6-7**:

> *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."*

Notice again the order. We first receive Christ Jesus the Lord, and then we are told to walk in Him.

This is where the remainder of the Foundations of Discipleship module will take us. We will consider how the born-again believer grows through the Word of God and faith, prayer, discernment, service, worship, fellowship, testimony and responsibility for others.

These things are important parts of discipleship, but we must never lose sight of the foundation. We do not practise these things in order to obtain life because Jesus Christ has already given us His life.

The life of the disciple begins in Jesus Christ and continues in Jesus Christ. Everything in true discipleship must remain centred in Him.

Christ is our life, and true discipleship is learning to walk in Him. The believer has received His life through the new birth and now learns to express that life faithfully each day.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ within remain the source of a disciple's daily life and growth?

Personal Reflection

Where have you returned to your own strength to produce what should flow from Him? What has this teaching changed in your understanding?

Action Step

Think of one decision you face this week. What would depending upon the indwelling Christ rather than your own strength change in your motives, your choice and your conduct?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why does New Life in Christ place the new birth before every practice of discipleship, and what does God give the believer at salvation?

2. Understanding

How do the Father's drawing, conviction through the Word and Spirit, repentance, confession, and faith in Jesus Christ relate to one another without making salvation a human achievement?

3. Personal Reflection

Which truth about the new birth, repentance, confession, or faith in Jesus Christ corrected something you previously believed about salvation? Explain what you now understand differently and why it matters.

4. Response to Truth

How should the claim that Jesus Christ, rather than an outward ceremony or human effort, gives new life change your response to God and to anyone who is seeking salvation?

5. Action Step

Identify a belief about salvation that this Study Guide has corrected, or an area of conduct where Christ's life within should be seen more clearly. What will you change, and when will you begin?

6. Early Response

Have you begun making the change identified in Question 5? If so, describe your first response and what it has taught you. If not, explain what has prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

What regular practice will help you grow as a disciple from the life already received in Christ while remembering that Bible reading, prayer, and service do not produce the new birth?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How are receiving the Spirit of Christ at the new birth, becoming a child of God, and belonging to one body connected? Why is a later experience not needed to complete salvation?

9. Living the Truth

Where do the new creature's love, forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness need to become more visible in your treatment of another person, and what will you do?

10. Final Response

After studying New Life in Christ, how would you explain the movement from God's drawing and the new birth to daily discipleship, and which part of that truth will you continue to live out?