

STUDY 9. The Christian

Four main points

1. The New Man
2. Communing with God
3. Witnessing to the World
4. Faith, Hope, Love

1. The New Man

Reading:

Eph. 2: 8, 9; Eph. 3: 14, 15; Eph. 4: 17 - 5: 2; 2 Cor. 5: 17
Luke 14: 26, 27; 1 Cor. 6: 19, 20; Heb. 11: 8 - 16, 13: 14
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2. Communing with God

Reading:

Matt. 4: 1 - 11; 2 Tim. 3: 14 - 16
Eph. 3: 14 - 19; Matt. 6: 9 - 13

3. Witnessing to the World

Reading:

Luke 24: 46 - 48; 1 Thess. 2: 7 - 13
Acts 8: 1 - 4; Acts 4: 18 - 20; Acts 2: 14, 42 - 47
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4. Faith, Hope, Love

Reading:

1 Peter 1: 3 - 9; Titus 2: 13; Rev. 22: 20
1 Cor. 13: 1 - 13; Col. 3: 12 – 17

1. The New Man

It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians - probably as a term of abuse. The idea of the new man (or as we might say these days – ‘the new person’) is an important theme particularly in the New Testament. This is related to the idea of the new birth or regeneration.

We start out in life in a state of unbelief and disobedience but by the grace of God, a free gift received by faith, we can know a new life in Christ. People who did not know God and did not belong to him are called, by his grace, to be sons of the living God. The new man is a member of God’s family by virtue of receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour. The New Testament includes ideas both of being born anew into the family of God and adopted into God’s family.

The Christian in the new life is also a disciple of Jesus Christ. Disciple could be translated ‘student’ but it is not only a matter of learning but responding to the call of Jesus by following him. The idea of journey is important throughout the Bible. Many of the important Old Testament figures had no permanent home of their own. Christians are therefore urged to concentrate on spiritual rather than earthly gain. Christians are pilgrims in an alien environment for the Christian’s citizenship is in heaven. The Christian looks forward to the eternal city of God in the future but continues as an ambassador for that city while here on earth.

In the Old Testament the temple was thought to be the place where God was especially present. In the New Testament Paul says that the individual bodies of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit. This means that our lives should be kept pure and holy as is fitting for the habitation of God, and that all our abilities and powers should be turned to the glory of God and the service of his kingdom.

2. Communing with God

Two important ways of communing with God are through Bible reading and prayer. It is a mistake to see these as one-way channels of communication whereby God speaks to us through the Bible and we speak to God through prayer. Clearly the whole thing is a good deal more complex than that.

There are many ways in which God speaks to us. He speaks through creation and through other Christians but supremely he has spoken to us in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, to whom the written Word of God, the Scriptures, bear witness. The Bible therefore is a very important way in which God makes himself known to us. The presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer confirm the witness of the Bible.

The Bible directs the Christian for life, corrects wrong ideas and guides the Christian in the path of obedience and service. The Bible is also a weapon of spiritual power demonstrated by the fact that Jesus himself used it to overcome temptation in the wilderness. Reading the Bible strengthens Christian knowledge and faith. A balanced faith is maintained by wide and careful study of the Scriptures. This equips the Christian both for faithful worship and service. The words of the Bible are useful to express our thoughts and praises to God.

Prayer is God's chosen way of fellowship with his people. It is not so much a technique, whereby God is manipulated to do our will, but a steady relationship through which the works and will of God become known. Prayer strengthens the inner resources of the Christian, and should be disciplined and regular.

The form of prayer (extempore or written) is of less importance than the state of heart of the person praying. Prayer sustains a living relationship with God and is not just vain words.

3. Witnessing to the World

It is primarily through Christian witness that God has chosen to continue the proclamation of his message to the world. In a sense witnessing ought to be a way of life for the Christian rather than something that happens on particular occasions.

To be a witness is different from being an advocate or an ambassador. The Christian faith needs advocates and ambassadors but a witness is called to speak his or her own personal testimony. This distinguishes witnessing from preaching and perhaps even from evangelising.

The Christian faith is not concerned with a series of rules and regulations. Christian living is not even a matter of agreeing to a certain number of propositions. Christianity is concerned with the person of Jesus, knowing him, loving him, obeying him and serving him.

From the New Testament it seems that the early Christians found little difficulty in witnessing for they had all experienced the transforming power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in their own lives. Every Christian is inevitably called to be a witness of the Saviour. The Christian will, as a natural part of testifying, want to explain the truth about Jesus and share the love of Jesus.

Jesus said that the mark of his disciples was to be the presence of love in their fellowship. Love is not something that can be worked up by trying hard - it is a gift from God. The whole essence of Christian witness therefore is to be a channel and an interpreter of the gifts that God gives to his people.

The apostles found it was impossible to keep silent about Christ. The closer we are to Christ the more we find that others come to see the impact of Christ on our lives.

4. Faith, Hope, Love

The Christian life is marked by all kinds of characteristics. Christians are people who are being saved and so salvation, peace with God, union with Christ and the journey to eternal life are all important. Paul singles out faith, hope and love as three abiding characteristics in the Christian's experience.

The most important thing about faith is not how much of it an individual has but who the object of the faith is. Faith is complete and unreserved trust in God as faithful to the promises contained in his Word and more particularly in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Faith has an emotive element but it has objective content. Christ, who died and rose again and is alive for evermore, is the one in whom the Christian has faith. He is the 'author and perfecter of our faith' (Heb. 12: 2) in whom and through whom the Christian knows redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The Apostles proclaimed this message and those who responded and confessed Jesus as risen Lord and Saviour came to be known as believers. Faith is sometimes helpfully rendered 'Forsaking all I trust Him'.

It is the historic nature of the Christian faith - culminating in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus - that gives the Christian an eager expectation of a final inheritance in glory. It is a hope that the past is forgiven, the present is covered and there is a future in Christ.

Love in its very highest sense is the very nature of God. The clearest expression of the love of God is in Christ's death on Calvary's cross. So as not to confuse divine and Christian love with family or sensual or erotic love the New Testament used a very unusual word in Greek 'agape' (AV 'Charity'). We must not confuse one kind of love for another. 'Agape' is unconditional, self-giving, costly, pure, forgiving and most of all it is eternal. In practice it means to love as Jesus loves.