

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

Study 1

DECISION

John 3: 1-21

For you to stand up and say, 'I am a Christian' may seem a comparatively easy thing to do. However it would without a doubt bring a variety of responses from your audience.

In our country today, the reaction could be anything from abuse, scepticism or indifference, to admiration or even applause. In other countries, it could mean hatred, imprisonment, exile or even death. These very different reactions make us realise that there is something vital and distinctive about being a true Christian - that is, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to study various aspects of the life of a Christian, for in these days it is necessary for us, not merely to say, 'I am a Christian,' but to have an intelligent grasp of what Christian living is all about.

If you read the history of the early Church in the Book of Acts, you will find that disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. (**Acts 11: 26**) This was quite a while after the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church began. Disciples were known then as 'believers', followers of 'The Way', and by other similar names. But here was the first occasion on which they were called Christians. Why was this? In all probability it was that men, in looking at these people, saw the marks of Christ's character and said, 'They are Christ's men.' Without doubt this is the best definition of a Christian - those who show by their lives that they belong to Christ! I wonder if people see this in you?

We are going to consider first how the Christian life begins, that is, the moment in time when one becomes a Christian. The Bible teaches that we become Christians by decision, we do not drift into Christianity. Look at **Romans 10: 9**. There, the clear facts of confession and believing in Christ as Lord, lead to the point of salvation. That is very clear. Has this ever been your experience?

Many people today think that because they are born in a country that is traditionally Christian, they are automatically Christians themselves. But nowhere in the Bible does it teach that one can become a Christian through natural birth. In fact the very opposite is true. The Bible clearly teaches is that by birth we are sinners. (See **Romans 5: 12** and **3: 23**) **John 1: 13** states very clearly that a man or woman is not a child of God, by natural generation or descent - "**not of blood**". Nor can he become a child of God through his own efforts - "**the will of the flesh**" however good he may be. Nor is it possible for any other human being, however high his ecclesiastical position to impart this to him - "**nor of the will of man, but of God.**" All the rites and ceremonies of any and every organised religion in the world can never make a person a child of God. He needs to be re-born by the Spirit of God. (**John 3: 8**)

In **John 3** you will have read the conversation on this very subject that Jesus had with Nicodemus, who, as a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, was one of the most upright, religious, sincere and moral men of his day. Yet to HIM Jesus said, "**YOU must be born again**". (**John 3: 3&7**) We can see then, that becoming a child of God is NOT an intellectual appreciation of what a Christian is. For a person can, like Nicodemus, be religiously educated, even ordained to the ministry without being a child of God, without being born from above.

We have already seen from **John 1**, three things that this spiritual rebirth is NOT, and from **John 3** we can also see that it is NOT reformation, self improvement or turning over a new leaf. Neither is it merely a religious belief. For it is possible to be sincere in one's religious convictions, to be baptised, confirmed, to join a church, take communion, teach a Sunday School class, or occupy some other church office, or even be a preacher, and still be without this new birth of which Jesus spoke.

How then can this new, spiritual birth be experienced? First, the entrance of God's Word brings light to man's mind, **Psalms 119: 130**. It corrects his wrong ideas about sin, himself and his need of a Saviour.

Then as the Word of God is read or heard, the Holy Spirit applies the truth in convicting force, showing the sinner his lost, guilty helpless **CONDITION**. He then reveals through the Word of God the way of salvation through faith in Christ and His finished work. (See **Hebrews 4: 12,13**)

So the decision to become a Christian must begin with **CONVICTION** of sin, and you will see from **John 16: 7,8**, that this is brought about through the operation of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. This leads to **CONFESSION**, or our 'owning up' to God that we are sinners, undeserving of His love, heading for a lost eternity, unable to do anything to save ourselves, and wholly cast upon His mercy.

CONVERSION is the word often used to describe the very act of becoming, a child of God. It is a wonderful word, and means 'change'. It involves the definite decision on the sinner's part to turn away from his old life and, realising he is a sinner and that Christ died for his sins, he accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour. At that point he receives spiritual or eternal life, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, becomes a partaker of a Divine nature, and is thus born from above - he becomes a 'new creature' - he is changed. This is the new birth, which Christ declared was absolutely essential to enter the Kingdom of God.

The moment the sinner trusts in Christ, the Holy Spirit seals him, by His indwelling presence, as Christ's purchased

possession. The convert has thus **COMMITTED** himself to living a new kind of life under the direction, control and ownership of the Lord Jesus Christ - he is one of Christ's men!

As we conclude this study think carefully what this means. For Paul it meant, **"For to me to live is Christ"**. (*Philippians 1: 21*) We cannot drift into the Kingdom of God, it needs a definite **DECISION** on our part to become followers of Christ. If you have studied this lesson, and realise that you have never made this decision, then why not make it now? Just where you are, and as you are, cease from your own efforts to save yourself. Trust in the Person of Christ and rest in His work of salvation. (See *2 Corinthians 6: 1&2* and *Hebrews 4: 7*)

Study 2

DELIVERANCE



Ephesians 2: 1-10;
Romans 6: 1-14.

You will have noticed from our last lesson that when a person becomes a child of God, much of that which happens to him, is not outwardly seen at once, because it is a spiritual and inward change that has taken place. The effects of this inward, spiritual change should however, soon begin to manifest themselves. We saw that at the point of the new birth, the believer in Christ was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and became a partaker of the new nature, and because of this the believer is now enabled to enjoy deliverance from the power of sin in his or her life. (*1 Corinthians 6: 19; 2 Peter 1: 3-4, Romans 6: 1-14*)

We can illustrate our study with an Old Testament story. Exodus records the beginning of the Nation of Israel, opening with a story of oppression. The Egyptians held the Israelites, God's chosen people, in terrible bondage. God never intended that the Israelites should be permanent slaves in Egypt, so He planned their deliverance through Moses. In *Exodus 12*, you can read the story of how God saved Israel from their enemies. It was, first of all, through sheltering beneath the blood of the Passover Lamb. Then as the people left Egypt following Moses, it was God's mighty power that brought them all through the Red Sea to final safety.

Before we became Christians we were very much like Israel in Egypt. Satan held us captives to sin. We were his slaves. Look at *John 8: 34-36*. We committed sin because we were enslaved by sin. So, to be a Christian means to be delivered from Satan and his power - to be free!

Here are three subjects of the Christian's deliverance.

1. The **MEANS** of Deliverance.
2. The **MEASURE** of Deliverance.
3. The **MEANING** of Deliverance.

1. First, think of the **MEANS** of our Deliverance.

For the Israelites, it was the blood of the lamb which had been slain. If the lamb had not been put to death, there would have been no blood to shelter and deliver them. The first-born in each family would have died. Similarly for us, the basis of our deliverance is the blood of the Lamb - the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. He suffered there the penalty for our sin. So great was His love, that He took our punishment, although He Himself was sinless. Because of this, He will set us free if we put our trust in Him. He can break the power of sin in our lives. Thus the only

means of deliverance is through faith in the death of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. Look at *Romans 5: 6-11*.

2. Think next of the **MEASURE** of this Deliverance.

It was on the following morning that the Israelites stood upon the other side of the Red Sea and sang for victory. This was no partial victory - it was complete! Also, the deliverance which Christ has achieved for the Christian is complete. It covers the past, the present and the future. We are delivered from the sins of the past and their penalty. Because Christ has endured the full penalty due to our sins, the believer is delivered from its dread consequences. See *John 5: 24; Romans 8: 1*. We have already seen from *Romans 6: 1-14* that we are delivered from sin's present power. Then at the future coming of Christ, when our physical bodies will be changed *1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18* we will be delivered from the very presence of sin. See also *Hebrews 9: 28*. Yes, His power is absolute.

In *Colossians 1: 13* we read that God has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness, which is Satan's. He has taken us right out of this altogether, and translated us, or transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the conqueror of Satan because He defeated him at Calvary. (*Hebrews 2: 14-15*)

3. Think now of the **MEANING** of this Deliverance.

What does it mean in practice to be free? It has been said that it is only those who have been slaves who can fully appreciate freedom. This is undoubtedly true. Those sinful habits which so easily bind us and spoil our lives can be broken by the power of Christ. We can live clean, pure, happy lives if we are willing to allow Christ to live through us by the power of His Spirit. This does not mean that the believer is incapable of sin; far from it, for he still possesses the old, evil nature called 'the flesh'. It does mean, however, that insofar as he avails himself of the means that God has provided, sin shall not be the **DOMINATING FACTOR** in his life. How then can we experience this deliverance in our present lives?

- (i) By the reading, study of, and obedience to the Word of God. (*2 Timothy 2: 15*)
- (ii) By keeping constantly in touch with God by prayer. (*Hebrews 4: 14-16*)
- (iii) By the yielding of our bodies to God for both a righteous and useful life. (*Romans 6: 13; 12: 1-2*)
- (iv) By the prompt confession to God and the forsaking of all known sin. (*1 John 1: 8-9; Titus 2: 11-15*)

The results of this great deliverance are multitudinous. Look at just a few now -

1. Peace with God. (*Romans 5: 1*)
2. Acceptance before God in Christ. (*Ephesians 1: 6*)
3. Joy in God as His children. (*Romans 5: 10-11; 8: 14-17*)
4. We can live for God. (*2 Corinthians 5: 14-15; Galatians 2: 20*)
5. We can serve God. (*Ephesians 2: 10, Matthew 5: 16*)
6. We can praise and worship God. (*John 4: 23-24; Hebrews 13: 15*)
7. We can pray to God. (*Hebrews 10: 19-22; John 15: 16*)
8. We have an eternal home in Heaven. (*John 14: 1-3; Revelation 22: 1-5*)

So you may know with certainty, based on the authority of God's Word, **"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love."** (*Colossians 1: 13*)

Study 3

DESIRE

Read

Philippians 3: 1-16

It can be well said about life that it is either marked by fulfilment or frustration. Possibly the reason for this is that we are creatures of desire. Within us there are longings to be, to do, or to have, which become the driving forces of our lives. We often use the expression, 'day dreams'. In many cases our day dreams are just silent expressions of our inner longings. According to the realisation or failure of these desires, life is for us either fulfilled or frustrated.

Because of the tremendous inner change that takes place when the Holy Spirit indwells a new believer, a whole new realm of desires comes into being. So the Christian's life is marked by new desires and new ambitions. But right at the outset let me say that this is not something artificial like a new religious inclination or something 'tacked on' to his life. Evidence that a person has new life can be seen in his new desires. We must be careful that we do not think Christianity is built upon the number of things we give up, just to show we are Christians. Not at all! It is because we desire, even long for the better things that Christ offers us that the old pleasures and ambitions no longer hold any attraction for us.

Paul gives us the reason for his change of desires in our reading today. In **Philippians 3: 7-8** he says, "**But what things WERE gain to me these I have counted loss for Christ... and I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.**" Past pleasures and worldly acclaim or ambition, paled into insignificance to the extent that they even became as refuse, when compared with Paul's new desire and longing - "**That I may know Him**", (**Philippians 3: 10**) - and his new ambition, "**I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**". (*verse 14*)

Indeed it would be very strange if the new believer did NOT have new desires, for he has been brought out of the slum of sin and made a child of God, (**John 1: 12**) So, let us look now at some of the desires which should characterise the Christian.

1. First there is the desire for FOOD.

The Christian life as every other life, needs suitable food to sustain it. Notice **1 Peter 2: 2**, "**As new born babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby.**" Possibly before we were saved, we saw no value in Bible study. Now it is the essential food for a Christian's healthy life. Just as it is important with the physical body to nourish it regularly with food, so the Christian will need to spend a certain portion of each day feeding upon the Scriptures as the bread of God. The period set apart for this purpose has become known as the daily quiet time, when the believer holds communion with God through His study. It is a time when the child of God seeks to be quiet before the Lord, so that He can speak to him through His Word.

In the rush of our present day life, it is not an easy discipline in the Christian life to set aside this daily time. The many duties of life press in upon us, or we wake up in the morning feeling dull and heavy. We pick up our Bibles to read and all sorts of thoughts go whirling through our minds.

Concentration seems impossible and we get nothing from the portion we read. But if you can, by the help of the Lord, triumph over these hindrances and spend a definite time, which is best for you, to feed on the Word of God each day, you will be a more useful for God, and a happier Christian in your own soul.

2. Then there is the desire for FELLOWSHIP.

I can remember that after becoming a Christian I began to see the difference between my own life as a Christian, and that of others who I counted my friends. I soon realised that there was no longer any real point of contact or common interest and eventually I lost the desire for their company. Instead, I enjoyed being with those who were Christians, who shared my view of life. If you read the book of the Acts you will find that the early Christians gathered with each other on many occasions for fellowship. Look, for example, at **Acts 4: 23**. There the Christians were able to meet after they had been persecuted. The rest of the chapter tells of the wonderful results. One great mark of a Christian is that the friendship and fellowship of other Christians is continually desired. See also **Acts 12: 5, 12-14**.

3. There is also in the Christian life the desire to FOLLOW after the right things.

The ambition of a Christian should be vastly different from those of a non-Christian. Remember how Paul's sense of values changed when he found Christ. Things that were gain to him, which had been the ambition of his life, suddenly lost their appeal. He wanted to follow Christ and Christ alone. Read **Philippians 3** again carefully. It seems to over-flow with the love Paul had for Christ. His desire was to win Christ, to make Him the centre, the goal of his life. Every true Christian's life should be centred in the desire to follow the Lord. (**1 Peter 2: 21; Philippians 3: 13-14**)

4. Desire in the Christian's experience CAN read true FULFILMENT.

In **Psalms 37: 4** David says, "**Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart.**" As you have studied this lesson, perhaps it has challenged you about the quality of your life. Make sure that you desire only those things which please the Lord, whom you serve and follow.

Study 4

DIRECTION

Read

Romans 8: 26-39; 12: 1-2.

We have already seen that becoming a Christian involves a complete change of heart and mind and way of living. This is true Repentance. We turn our backs on our old life and face towards God and Heaven. I always like to think of beginning the Christian life as a rising sun. There are all the possibilities of a brand new day. It is great to feel that God has so much to show us, give us, and lead us into on the pathway of living for Him.

Many feel that to trust our lives wholly to the Lord Jesus is like taking a leap into the dark. How can we be sure it works? How can we know the right way to go? No doubt all of us feel that if we are left to ourselves we shall go the wrong way and get lost. It is absolutely essential to realise that the Lord Jesus does not save us and then leave us to our own

devices. The Christian's life is not a self-planned existence with so much of it left to chance. **Romans 8: 28** tells us that, **"all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."** The Lord Jesus promised His disciples that when He went away the Holy Spirit would come to them. In **John 14: 16-17** the literal meaning of the word 'comforter' is 'one called alongside to help'. It is He that dwells within us, and in **John 16: 13**, Jesus said that He is the **"Spirit of truth"** and that **"He will guide you into all truth."** So you see we are not left to our own devices.

But while it is certainly true to say that the Christian can walk the pathway of life guided by the Lord, yet in the early stages of our Christian experience the question of guidance can present a great problem. There are times when a choice or decision is necessary. Our education, our career, our friends, our future partner in life. Can we know that we are making the right choice? Sad to say a wrong choice often leads to disaster.

Here are three 'signposts' that may help us in this matter of guidance.

1. A Christian must be willing to go GOD'S WAY.

This is the only direction that is safe for us to travel. Unless we are willing to go God's way, there is no point in asking for guidance. Using the illustration in **John 10: 1-5**, of the shepherd and his sheep, the Lord Jesus says that having put forth his sheep, the shepherd goes before them. They know His voice and He will lead them in the right paths. Are you willing to walk God's way in life? It is only sensible to trust our way to God, because He is the only One who knows what the future holds and He can guide us according to His foreknowledge. So often we want our own way yet we want God's blessing as well. **Proverbs 3: 6** says, **"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."**

2. God's way is governed by GOD'S WILL.

Do you talk about knowing and doing God's Will? We can say, without reservation that God's Will is always best for us. Yet, we are often proud and stubborn, and rebel against God. We know what He wants us to do yet we choose what we want - how foolish! The Lord Jesus is a tremendous example for us in this. As He walked His earthly road to the Cross - He was so humble in accepting God's Will. In **Matthew 26: 39**, He said concerning the coming sufferings of the Cross, **"If it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."** Many young Christians, and older ones too, have found that it has cost them much to do God's Will. Yet they have found their greater happiness in doing it. If you want your life to move in the right direction, then God's Will must govern it.

3. GOD'S WORD is the safest guide.

It is wonderful how, if we are willing to learn, God is willing to teach us His Way and His WILL through His WORD. This is why prayerful Bible reading and study is so vital to the well-being of Christian living. Neglect praying and reading your Bible and you will possibly miss God's way for your life. But let us also mention here, that it is no good asking God's guidance about something that is clearly contrary to His Word. One clear example of this is the question of choosing a life's partner, (husband or wife). If you are a Christian and the person of your choice is an unbeliever, then there is no point in even praying about the matter. For the Christian is explicitly forbidden from being **"unequally yoked together**

with unbelievers". (**2 Corinthians 6: 14**) So God is not going to give any other leading than that which is already in His Word. The only thing you CAN pray for that person, is for his/her salvation. David could say in **Psalms 119: 105**, **"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."** This is so very true when we consider the importance of a God-directed Christian pathway.

It is good to know that we are treading the right road as Christians. Be sure of this: God never makes a mistake! And if we surrender our lives to His care and control we shall never miss the way.

Questions

Study 1 DECISION

1. What is the origin of the term 'Christian'?
2. How do we know that a person CANNOT be a Christian by natural birth, NOR by any efforts of his own?
3. How can a person become a Christian?
4. What is meant by 'conviction of sin'?
5. What happens to a person at conversion?

Study 2 DELIVERANCE

1. Of what is **Exodus 12** an illustration for us?
2. Why can we say that the deliverance that Christ achieved for us is complete?
3. Does this deliverance mean that the Christian is incapable of sin?
4. How can we experience daily deliverance in our lives?
5. Give some (not more than 4) results of great deliverance in the Christian's life.

Study 3 DESIRE

1. Why is the Christian's life marked by new desires and ambitions?
2. What was the Apostle Paul's greatest desire and ambition?
3. Why is it so very important for the Christian to have a daily quiet time?
4. How can the Christian life be one of fulfilment?
5. What have you found most challenging to your own life in this set of lessons?

Study 4 DIRECTION

1. How do we know that once we are a Christian we are not then left to our own devices?
2. What is the first requirement of those who would seek for God's guidance?
3. Say, in your own words, what you understand **Romans 8: 28** to mean?
4. What are the two guides that God has given us?
5. When is there no point in asking for God's guidance in a matter?