

# TAKING CARE OF NEW DISCIPLES

John Hendee



Building your ministries plan for taking care of New Disciples

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I remember our raising our two daughters. It seems like so long ago but I can picture it all in my mind as if it were recent. As I reflect on it all I have so many good memories and I recall a few challenging times. I can see areas where I wish I had done some things differently or better, and if I had to do it over again, I would. But I don't get to do it over again. But the good relationships continue on yet today.

In my life as a Christian I recall so many people I've worked with in so many different places. It all started decades ago. As I reflect on having seen so many come to Jesus and start their new life in him, I also have many rich memories of working with them as well as remembering a lot of challenging moments with some. I have learned so much and there is more to learn. I can see how I could have done much better in many cases by having a general plan for all new Disciples.

The purpose of this book is to encourage one and all in the great opportunities that we have in caring for NEW Disciples, new followers of Jesus. We all have past experiences, some good and some not so good. But my hope is that by spending some time going through the examination and study in this book, we can all make great improvements in what we do with NEW Disciples in the future. I'm confident most all of us can do better.

So with the goal of improving our CARE for NEW Disciples we begin this study. I will be sharing some of my ideas but I'm not giving all the answers.

You love the Lord and are called according to his purposes or you wouldn't be reading this. So take the Scriptures, your own love, heart and mind, and start building a 'better plan' to guide you and others in your ministry in the future. Oh, and don't do this alone. Involve others who work with you in ministry. Make this a team or family project. You can't do this alone so don't plan it alone.

# TAKING CARE OF BABIES



Couples have many different reactions to the idea of having babies.

Some find out they aren't able to have babies. Some of them will choose to adopt.

Others don't want children for any number of reasons. I suppose a major one is that they realize having children will impose on their freedom and their life style.

Some realizing they are pregnant, prefer to end the pregnancy rather than give birth, or give the child up for adoption.

Most realize that to have any number of children will bring changes to their lives. There will be new challenges; health issues, expenses, time commitments, loss of many freedoms, sharing time and energy, possible discipline problems, and any number of potential crisis in the life of the children. With each additional child those things are multiplied. While there is the potential for great blessings there is also the risk of great problems.

But knowing all that, some still want one or two kids while other people want lots of kids. The potential blessings for many outweigh the potential problems.

Once a woman is aware she is pregnant there are many things to be done.

She needs a check up.

She needs to take special care of herself.

They need to start saving money, fix up the room or place the baby will sleep, start buying supplies, foods, clothes, etc. Sometimes there will be a 'baby shower' when family and friends can bring gifts to help the couple with their new baby to come.

There can be a lot of excitement and much stress involved in the whole process.

What does a new baby need?



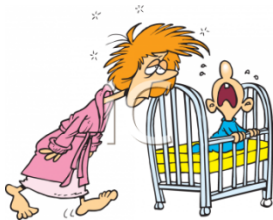
Food, water, milk, clothes, medical attention and LOTS of love, attention, cleaning, comfort and much more.

What happens when these things are denied?

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After the birth there are:

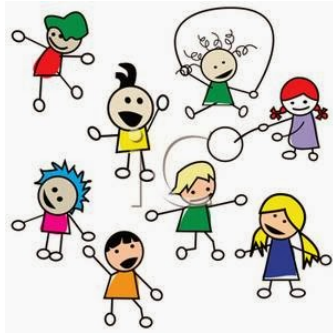
- Post natal check ups,
- Lost sleep



- New schedules,
- New expenses, etc.

-A NEW life together has begun.

What do parents desire for their newborn?



Make a list of some of those things:

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Did you think of any of these?

- That the child be born in good physical condition and health.
- That they be happy, loved and that they grow up into maturity.
- They will need to be taught how to feed themselves, how to walk and talk.
- They will need to be modeled good morals, and how to find the answers to all the 'whys' they will have in life.
- They will need to learn how to respect others, how to study in school, how to be a friend, how to be generous and so many other things.



We all know of cases where parents have failed. We know some kids are abandoned, neglected, persecuted, punished unreasonably and abused verbally, physically, sexually, emotionally and spiritually. It is sad to see any of those things happen. That certainly is not God's plan for babies and children.

Regardless, it is not easy to have and to raise children. It has its great rewards and it's great challenges and risks.

## **TAKING CARE OF NEW DISCIPLES**



Churches or we should say 'church leaders' have many different feelings or attitudes about actually 'making and receiving new disciples' into their ministry.

Some really don't want to see new disciples in their midst. Oh, seeing members kids accept Christ and be baptized is o.k., but in spite of what they may say or preach, they really don't want to see new 'outsiders' coming into their ranks.



New people run new risks. They can become problems in so many ways. It is safer and easier to keep the family small and controllable.

Others are more open to making new disciples and actually work in any number of ways to make new disciples. They welcome them into their midst. Some will see dozens become disciples of Jesus in a year and other ministries will see hundreds or maybe thousands.

We trust that you are one of those who want to see people won to Jesus and that you and your people will be welcoming them into the 'family'.

This study is to guide you through the process of building the best plan you can to be sure you are doing all you can to take care of New Disciples.

My guess is that none of us have done a perfect job in this area any more than any of us have been 'perfect parent's' with our own child or children if we have any.

But that doesn't mean we can't work harder to do a better job in the future with new Disciples who come into the family of God.

This is to be YOUR ministry plan. By that I mean you and the team you work with should build this plan. A number of people should be involved in building this plan.

I will suggest some things that could be done but I challenge you to take any of my ideas you like and add them to your ideas and build a plan for New Disciples. Of course we want to be sure what we are doing is carrying out God's desires for new disciples that we find the New Testament.

So let's get to it.

The purpose of the section below is to raise as many questions as possible to get us to think about what we could/should do for New Disciples. I suggest you sit down with other leaders in your ministry and work your way through this. Maybe do an initial pass through it and note any ideas. Then have everyone go home for

a week or so and keep praying, thinking and maybe researching more answers. Later come back together and start to build your plan.

## **AN EXAMINATION, RESEARCH AND QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BUILDING A PLAN FOR CARING FOR NEW DISCIPLES**

Once you have helped lead someone to becoming a Disciple of Jesus, we know from Matthew 28:18-20 that YOU are to baptize them. That is what it says.

Let's pick up from the time they have decided to become a Disciple and think about what we do to help them from that point on. As stated in Matthew 28, Jesus said that once we make a Disciple and baptize them we are to teach them (and this actually includes us) to obey all he has commanded. That is a life-long process, teaching his commands and obeying them.

But for the sake of this study/plan preparation let's focus on **the first year** of those who become New Disciples of Jesus and have been baptized.

In everything we consider and plan we want to be sure we don't start or carry on a man made tradition that becomes THE way something has to be done in order for a person to be 'accepted' by Jesus or the congregation. There are many traditions in some churches that are not based on anything in the New Testament. We don't want to make our ways, 'Biblical Laws' or precedents that 'have to done' our way, if Jesus or the Apostles taught something a certain way, then we do it that way, period. But there are many things that are left up to our prerogative. So let's start:

How do you currently prepare those who become Disciples of Jesus for their baptism?

Is there anything else you could do that would better prepare them for this?

How do you currently explain to them what it is all about, what it means, and how it is done?

Is there anything else you could do that would better explain it all?

Who baptizes them? Why? Is this a New Testament model?

When are they baptized? Why? Is this a New Testament model?

Where do you baptize people? Why? Is this a New Testament teaching?

How do you dress to do the baptism? Why? Is this a New Testament teaching?

How do they dress to be baptized? Why? Is this a New Testament teaching?

Do they invite others to their baptism? Family, friends, etc. How could that be tactfully done? How about having a simple snack time afterwards for the guests.

How about working with the new disciples to follow up on their guests and see if any of them would like to hear the IAAR lessons. They could get together with them and bring along their Ambassador to share the lessons. Who knows what could happen.

If that is done how is it done? How can that be effectively done?

While not a requirement in the N.T., what can be the benefits of doing so if time allows?

I saw a church that had those being baptized write out on a 3 x 5 card (to keep it succinct and to the point) what their being baptized meant to them. They went over it with them before hand to make sure they didn't say something weird. Then as they got into the water the person read what they wrote. It was pretty powerful and actually for many was the first time they testified of their faith.

What do you currently do with or for these New Disciples immediately after their baptism?

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#### WHY IS ALL THIS SO IMPORTANT?

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN RAISED IN THE CHURCH OFTEN DON'T ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON WHO HAS BECOME A DISCIPLE OF JESUS.

Think about this. The person has lived all of their life outside of Jesus but that has now changed.

Up until now they spent their whole life thinking about themselves and what they want in life. They have been living 'in darkness' as God describes it, a slave to Satan (whether they understood that or not). They may be coming out of a life full of greed, dishonesty, emptiness, lying, crime, unbiblical sexual activity, alcoholism, drug use, violence etc.

Now they have found Jesus and the Light and LIFE.

They are excited and overwhelmed with the love of God for them.

This is all new to them.

In many ways it is the total opposite of how they have lived their whole life.

They are now trying to figure out what they are supposed to do with this Faith in Jesus that they had rejected, maybe even scoffed at and belittled for years and years. Now they are embracing it.

Many things feel awkward to them.

They fear rejection by some in their family, circle of friends, with those at work or school, on their team or club.

They are introduced to a whole new group of people they used to avoid and maybe thought were a bit weird.

They are introduced to new groups, classes, events, programs, books, music, etc. and they can be a bit overwhelmed with services, Lord's supper, offerings, praying in public or a group, understanding the Bible, and maybe a number of things being done by the local church or denomination that might not even be Biblically based but they don't know that or know how to distinguish what is Biblical and what isn't yet.

They have entered a new culture, a faith culture that is foreign to them.

They fear making mistakes in how they should think or behave.

They have a new faith language to learn with new words they have not used in the past.

They aren't sure how they are supposed to dress, talk or act at different events.

And it goes on and on.

You must stop and think about this.

YOU or those in your ministry, and obviously GOD were involved in this person coming to Jesus. NOW HELP THEM. Don't abandon them, assume they understand everything, or are going to do everything right. STAND WITH THEM.

They have a NEW LIFE STYLE to learn.

Read how Paul describes his care for the new Disciples he worked with in Thessalonica.

I Thessalonians 2:7-11

How do we compare to that in our attention and care for new Disciples?

Is there anything else you could do to make this a better experience?

I'm amazed when I read where Jesus said that there is more rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents than over 99 who never left, or are in the fold.

How do you currently celebrate their baptism/new life with them?

Is there anything else you could do to make this a better experience?

What do you currently do with or for them in the few weeks after their baptism?

Is there anything else you could do to improve in this?

What do you currently do with or for them in the coming month?

Is there anything else you could do to improve in this?

I've seen that what we often do with new Disciples is welcome them into the family and then expect them to act, think and talk like 'grown adults' spiritually.



We don't do that with 'newborns'. We don't tell (as if that would do any good- they don't understand us) a newborn to come to the table to eat with us. We don't serve them beef and salad with vegetables; we don't try and carry on a conversation with them, asking them how their day has gone. We don't expect them to go to work or school in the morning, and bring some money home to help cover the costs of operating the home, etc.

Yet we will often do little with new Disciples that corresponds with their reality. We invite them to what we are all doing. Sit with us, listen with us or to us, understand everything, go to work (serve right away), participate in any conversations, find and read Bible verses in our group, pray out loud when we go around the circle, etc.

I worked with Gene Rogers a long time ago. He was my spiritual father. He preached in the same congregation in Los Angeles, CA for over 50 years. He influenced me in many positive ways. I remember a conversation with him way back then. Here is what he said: "John, what we do with new Christians is what they will spend the rest of their life doing. What happens in most places is they are told to 'Sit and listen to me preach. And Sit and listen to me teach. Sit and listen me at the retreat. Sit and read my book. Sit and watch me perform...and on it goes. So they learn pretty well. We train/teach them to sit and listen and we paralyze or handicap them for most of their Christian life. Then we spend the rest of our life trying to get them 'out of the pew' and doing something and it is very hard in most cases. We have taught them well and they learn it and are applying it." It is like we have set them in a 'spiritual high chair' and fed them week after week and they never get out of that chair. Later we are frustrated that we can't get them to do anything. Hummmm.

What do NEW Disciples in Jesus need? Make a list. Put some Scriptures from the New Testament with some of these too.

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Now that they have become a Disciple and been obedient in baptism what are God's goals for them? What Scripture do you base this on?

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Ephesians 4:13

Ephesians 4:15

Colossians 1:28

Romans 8:29

I John 5:4, 18

James 1:4

How do you currently share those goals with them?

How can you do a better job at this?

What do you currently do to help them achieve those goals?

How can you do a better job at this?

Who is assigned to each new Disciple to work with them to see that all this happens?

How can you improve on this?

I have a suggestion here. In my mind the best person to be assigned to follow up with a new Disciple is the Ambassador who led them to Jesus (Maybe by sharing the 4 'It's All About Relationship' lessons with them. This will put an extra demand on those people and is why you need A LOT of trained Ambassadors (those trained in how to use IAAR) and you need to free their week up from less important jobs in the local ministry to focus on evangelism and follow up.

Here is what I see happening in some places and the problem with it for new Disciples.

Here is an example: Joe and Sue become followers of Jesus. Let's say it happened in a scenario quite common today.

1. Friends invite them to church.
2. They go to church and hear the preacher preach and at some point they accept Jesus.
3. They go to their baptism and there are DIFFERENT people there to help them prepare for the baptism. It could be the preacher who baptizes them.
4. After the baptism they are invited to a Sunday afternoon class where there are DIFFERENT people who teach them about 'being a member' or something. Even if the preacher teaches this class it might be the last time they have much of any contact with him.
5. Then after that they are encouraged to join a home group; and if they actually go there are DIFFERENT people there leading the group.
6. Then someone (a DIFFERENT person or persons) approaches them to 'get involved in a ministry'. It might be to help in the nursery, hand out brochures, etc. (something simple for new people).

So here is the problem. This kind of thing can be a bit overwhelming for new Disciples who were NOT raised in the church culture. All this new stuff is a bit intimidating for many of them. They don't know any of these people. In the midst of all this they can get the feeling like many foster children get; NO ONE REALLY WANTS ME. I get passed on or passed off from one person to another.

My suggestion is this. The person who led the new Disciple to Jesus should stay at their side; working with them, introducing them, helping them get acquainted, oriented and educated.

DON'T PASS THEM OFF OR KEEP  
PASSING THEM ON TO NEW PEOPLE.

MANY WILL GET LOST IN THAT KIND OF SHUFFLE.  
If you helped in their 'new birth' then stick with them and help them in the new life style they have to learn.

One last thought. I highly recommend that men do this with men and women do this with other women. Couples could do it with couples too, but don't 'pass them off' and wash your hands of them.

So think of how you would actually carry this out. How can this be done?

Are new disciples currently assigned to someone to keep working with them?

How is that done?

What is the person to do with/for the new believer?

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How do you, or are you going to review or evaluate how support for new Disciples is working?

Are people sticking with those assigned to them? How is that checked up on to see that it is actually happening?

NOW, how are you going to prepare your people in how to care for new Disciples? They need training and preparation in that. What and how are you going to do that? Keep it simple.

What is provided to the new Christian to help them in their new life?

What about some of these ideas?

Who and when is someone going to visit them? How often?

What is the purpose of the visit/s?

What about a plan to start teaching them 'all that Jesus commanded?'

What about a weekly email of encouragement, etc.? Maybe one a week from a made up list for new Disciples.

Do you have any handouts, booklets or books for New Disciples?

What about invitations to meals at someone's home? Hospitality.

How about meeting with them to see how they are doing?

How about meeting with them to study the Word, or to pray with them?

How about helping them understand what is going on in the ministry?

How about offering them opportunities to be trained in personal evangelism?

How about 'scholarships' to church retreats or seminars that would be beneficial for them?

How about a retreat just for new disciples and their Ambassadors every six months?

How about a good CD of Christian music in a style they might like.

WHAT CAN YOU THINK OF THAT MIGHT BE IMPORTANT AND HELPFUL?

In addition to this are there some ways the church at large can show interest, support and concern for them?

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What is done to help them feel a part of their new family?

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What is done to help them grow in Jesus?



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What training is currently offered them?

What do you believe they need to be trained in?

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## Is there a plan to find out what they need?

I fear our tendency is to assume they understand most things (like we do) and now that they are 'in Jesus' all their past and current questions, doubts and life problems are taken care of. EEEERRRRR. Wrong. Does a new born baby know how to walk, talk, feed itself, go to the bathroom by itself, get to the doctor for checkups, etc? NO.

So how are you going to find out what each New Disciple needs? Everyone is somewhat different. We need to try and find out what we can to help each one without being rude, pushy and not respecting their privacy. We might have to spend a lot of time with some of them before they are going to trust us and open up with us about some of their personal problems. This calls for a lot of caution, patience and humility. We need to earn the right to be invited 'into their life'. We don't want to turn this into an inquisition trying to get them to confess something they aren't willing to at that point.

How do we find out what they know and what they need to learn about their life in Jesus? How do you find this out?

What fears they might be dealing with as a new disciple?

What questions or doubts they might have about their new faith, Bible, Jesus, Church, etc.

What struggles in life might they be dealing with?

What sins and sin problems they might be dealing with?

What Dragons from their past or present they might be dealing with?

See Hendee's book, 'A Dragon Slayers Life'. It is free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org) under 'free books'.

What their prayer needs may be?

What if any counsel they might need?

What if any relational problems are they dealing with? Marriage, parenting, etc.

What if any relational, work or school problems they might have as a result of accepting Jesus?

What if any health problems they are dealing with?

What if any financial crisis they might be living under?

What if any legal problems they might have?

Are they dealing with any alcohol, drug problems? Porno problems or other moral problems. Again, don't rush this and don't be stupid in this. Give the relationship time. Prove to them you care about them, no rush to judgment here.

What do you do in light of what you might learn?

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How can the church 'family' help them in dealing with these kinds of issues?

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I want to make a couple recommendations for new Disciples and those working with them.

1. Give them and maybe read and discuss with them:

It's ALL About Relationship, written by Jim Larsen and John Hendee

This book helps new Disciples get clear that their new life in Jesus is ALL about relationships, not religious activity. You could print off and give them a copy of it or give them the link. You could read it together with them as you meet with them, discussing points as you read through it week by week. It is free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org)

2. Discipling Christians; John Hendee and James Scott

This is a 6 months study especially for new Disciples. You can print the whole book off for free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org)

You are the leader but not the teacher. You will do the same exercises the other/s do. I would recommend you do this in groups of say 4 or 5. Men with men and women with women. You could meet once a week to do this. New people can join at any time; they don't have to wait till the end of the six months to join in. You can just keep this group going permanently as long as you have new Disciples. In this group they will learn how to find verses, how to make application of verses, the importance and

value in meeting with other believers and how to pray with others. Read the introduction to the book and you will see how it works.

#### RESOURCES TO HELP IN WORKING WITH NEW DISCIPLES.

Below is a 'life survival back pack' loaded with the things a person might need to survive out in the wilderness.



A new disciple has ventured out on a new life journey. They have entered a new land with a new culture, a new language, and they will need a lot of help and support as they learn how to live this new life. Sometimes those of us who have been in Christ for some time can take it for granted and greatly underestimate what it is like for a brand new person who has been living a life without thinking about Jesus.

So while we have been laying out a plan as to how we can best support them, maybe it would be a good idea to prepare them a 'New Life Survival Back Pack' filled with some things that would be helpful to them on the journey.

THIS IS NOT TO TAKE THE PLACE OF WHAT THEY NEED MOST, us! More than anything they need us and our personal support and attention.

But a New Life Survival Back Pack could be helpful. What would be in it?

The basics. Don't make it so heavy that they can't carry it, figuratively speaking.



They are a 'new babe in Christ.' Don't overload them.

So what might be most helpful to them to grow that could be put in the Pack?

They might not use it all at the very beginning but it will be good for them to have it on hand in the future.

A Bible if they don't have one.

A couple DVD's of good Christian music; or some links to download on their phone.

A copy of ***A Dragon Slayers Life*** by John Hendee. Free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org)

The link to Biblegateway.com; someone should show them how to use the concordance, etc. found there.

A copy of ***"It's ALL About Relationship"***. Larsen and Hendee

Link five books; Living in the Light as We Pass Through This Darkness. Free on website.

A copy of ***Adult Babies*** by John Hendee. Free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org)

A copy of ***Flies and Butterflies*** by John Hendee.

Free at [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org)

A page of links with videos found on YouTube by:

Francis Chan

Ravi Zachariah

Links on [www.itsallaboutrelationship.org](http://www.itsallaboutrelationship.org); books and papers.

A copy of “My Heart, Christ’s Home.” You can order that on Amazon Books. Get a bunch of them to have on hand to put in the packs.

Following are some papers written by Gene Rogers and me, John Hendee that can be of help to new Disciples. You could print these off and put in the ‘back pack’ or give to them when you meet with them along the way. Maybe read one at a time with them and discuss it.

What else might be helpful to them?

# O.K.

You have started your plan.

Keep building it.

Keep improving it.

And START DOING IT.



# On to Maturity

By Gene Rogers

Once you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and have become a partaker of the life of God, your next concern should be to see that new life develops within you so that you can begin to be conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus.

Your new birth has brought you a new nature and with it all the potential of a blessed new life in Christ. But birth alone does not insure sustained life nor will it bring one into fullness of life in either the spiritual or physical realm. The fact that a baby is introduced to life in this world does not insure that it will live to experience adulthood. There are certain conditions that must be met to develop the life begun in it. If those conditions are met, the newborn will most naturally grow. But if they are not met, life will be extinguished almost as quickly as it began. If the basic necessities for the sustaining and developing of spiritual life are met, the new inward life begun can do nothing but grow. But if they are not met, spiritual life can be extinguished almost as quickly as it began.

## BORN FOR MATURITY

Birth is a start in life not the goal. The new birth is a start in the spiritual life; it is not the goal. When a baby is born it is not born to remain a baby during all its earthly life. The goal set before it at birth is adulthood and maturity. All of the nurture and care and discipline that the home gives, added to that which the school, public or private, has to contribute, plus all the experience that life itself offers, combine to bring the baby through the various growth stages to physical, mental, and emotional maturity. **Maturity is the goal.** God does not lead us through the experience of the new birth and place his life within us for us to remain a spiritual baby. The new birth is only the beginning. God's will for each of us is that we grow to spiritual maturity. This is the goal that he has set for each one of us. All spiritual nurturing, every spiritual experience, every bit of spiritual discipline, and all Christian education combine to work for realizing that goal within us. God's desire is that every newborn babe be brought to maturity in Christ; he repeatedly says so in his Word. Consider some major passages in which his will is revealed on this matter. "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15, RSV, emphasis added). "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28, RSV, emphasis added).

"As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6, 7, RSV, emphasis added). "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity" (Heb. 6:1, RSV, emphasis added). "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18, RSV, emphasis added). It is equally true in both the physical and spiritual realms that everything and everyone must either continually grow or die.

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF MATURITY

A newborn baby in the home certainly has some capacity for experiencing satisfaction in being alive. It experiences satisfaction in nursing, in being held and cuddled, and in being talked to and made over by its parents and older members of the family. In a sense, we could say that these experiences are representative of the joy a baby is capable of knowing in its new found life, limited though these may be.

Contrast the baby's limited ability to experience joy in life with that of an adult. Contrast the baby's limited experience of nursing and being cuddled with the wide variety of experiences that adults are capable of entering into. Consider, for example, your own ability as an adult, to experience a wonderful evening dining at your favorite restaurant; consider the experience of spending an evening listening to your favorite orchestra; think of being able to experience the many joys of domestic relationships; or consider the excitement you could have while participating in your favorite sport. As you can see, the ability to receive of the blessings of this life is directly proportionate to the degree of your maturity. The greater our maturity the greater our capacity to receive and experience increasingly more of all that life has to offer in this world. An adult's capacity for experiencing life is hardly to be compared with that of a baby. Similarly, there is certainly joy to be experienced by a newborn babe in Christ. To begin with, there is the joy resulting from being set free from the plaguing guilt of sin. There is joy in knowing that we have come into right relationship with God. There is joy in knowing that we have been freed from the fear of death, judgment and condemnation. But these blessings which come to us as newborn babes in Christ are not to be compared with those that can be ours as mature, adult believers in Christ. For though to be in Christ even as a babe certainly is a blessing in itself, it definitely has its limitations. The babe in Christ by the very fact of infancy is limited in ability to receive yet greater blessings that come with maturity in Christ. While yet a babe he must partake of the "pure spiritual milk" of the Word before he is able to partake of the "meat." (See 1 Peter 2:2, Heb. 5:12-14.) As a babe he is limited in his ability to experience many of the joys that are to be had in serving, because as a new convert he is not yet able to assume positions of responsibility and leadership out of which come many of the greater blessings of the Christian life (1 Tim. 3:6). The blessings that God is able to pour into our lives are directly proportionate to our degree of maturity and our ability to receive. With growth in Christ comes a greater ability to receive and experience increasingly more of God and the life that he has imparted to us. Maturity

### **Maturity in Christ should immediately become the desired goal of everyone born into the family of God.**

The new Christian should certainly be thrilled in being born into the family of God, but should immediately begin to earnestly long to quickly grow out of infancy where life is filled with unresolved questions and problems, where we are inexperienced in so many ways, and where we are lacking in mature knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Increased happiness awaits us as we begin to move toward maturity in Christ, and fullness of life shall be ours when we finally arrive. **FOUR ESSENTIALS TO GROWTH** The basic necessities required to sustain the life of a baby seem to be four in number:

nourishment, nurture, breathing, and exercise. Withdraw any one of these and a baby will not only fail to grow; it will die. These same basic necessities must be met in the spiritual life if it is to be sustained and developed. The newborn babe in Christ must be nourished and nurtured and must breathe and exercise if the spiritual life begun within it is not to be extinguished. Let us devote some time to a consideration of these four basic essentials

#### THE NEED FOR NOURISHMENT

It is quite obvious that the first basic need of a baby is food. If a baby is to grow to adulthood it certainly must be nourished. If all food were withdrawn from a baby it would be but a matter of time until it starved. The newborn babe in Christ must be nourished or it will die. Spiritual birth must be followed by a systematic and regular feeding upon Christ (John 6:52-63). We may feed upon Christ by taking him into our lives through the Word of God. The Word of God reveals to us all that we may know of Christ and the life that He would develop within us. The Word of God is that spiritual food which must be consumed if we are to be nourished and have a developed life. Jesus said that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

If an infant is ever to grow to adulthood, and in so doing enjoy good health along the way, it must partake of nourishment daily. To fail to do so would result in weakness, sickness, and eventual death. Likewise, the new babe in Christ must partake of the Word of God by disciplined daily reading and study or he will become spiritually weak and sick and end up dying spiritually. As a baby is fed and begins to grow, the need for nourishment in other areas begins to arise. We begin to give attention to fulfilling not only the physical but the mental and emotional needs that the child has. These needs may be met by the home until they are of high school or college age, or help may be sought from others in either private or public school. Whatever the case, there comes a time when the help of teaching specialists will be needed to further accelerate the growth of our children. They are going to need outside help when it comes time for them to enter into higher education. The new Christian not only has a need for regular daily nourishment from a home study of the Word of God, but he also needs to be regularly confronted by specialists in the Word who will be able to aid him in reaching maturity much more quickly. There is not only the need for studying the Word of God daily personally, but there is also the need for assembling with the church where those who have been blessed with the gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10-16) can serve to accelerate growth by giving insight into the depth of the meaning of God's Word. While daily home study is mandatory for spiritual growth, it is of equal importance that we assemble with other Christians where the Word of God is expounded by more mature believers who serve as teaching specialists.

#### THE NEED FOR NURTURING

A second basic need of a baby is that of nurturing. A baby must be looked after, cared for, loved and handled if it is to reach adulthood. Research has proven that a baby left entirely to itself, though well fed, will nevertheless die. It must have contact with other human beings if life is to be sustained and developed within it.

If the spiritual babe is to grow to maturity in Christ it too must have nurture and care. It must be in constant contact with the older members of the family of God who have been commissioned by the Lord to look after the lambs. The new Christian cannot fend for himself anymore than a baby can take care of itself. He must have the encouragement and fellowship of the family of God. To fail to be actively associated with the family of God is to court spiritual disaster. The new Christian needs to immediately assume his position as part of the church. He needs to regularly assemble with God's family for worship and study. He needs to take advantage of every opportunity for fellowship and seek the association of older believers who will be able to contribute to his spiritual growth. Surely, if the fellowship of the church was not vital to the Christians' growth and maturity, the Lord would never have instituted such a fellowship in the first place

#### THE NEED FOR BREATHING

If a baby is to live to become an adult, the first breath taken at birth must be followed by a life of breathing. Breathing is vital to the sustaining of life. One must take into his body those elements of the atmosphere which are necessary to sustain life. If the newborn babe in Christ is to stay alive spiritually and grow to maturity he must immediately begin, and maintain, a life of prayer. Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is through prayer that we are able to open our lives to more of God. Prayer is a means of vital contact with God. It is a way of fellowshiping with him and of discerning his will for our lives. It is a means of direct and immediate communication with our Father. The new convert needs to develop and maintain a life of prayer even as a baby needs to take that first breath and continue breathing. Jesus' example teaches us to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35). Jesus told us to pray (Luke 18:1). The results of prayer demand that we pray (Matt. 7:7, 8; Phil. 4:5-7). To maintain or restore lost fellowship with the Father necessitates our praying (Matt. 6:6; 1 John 1:9; 2 Chron. 7:14). As new Christians our first request of the Lord should be "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

#### THE NEED FOR EXERCISE

If a baby is ever to grow to adulthood it is essential that it exercise. It must exercise its mind and its limbs. To fail to do so is to run the risk of losing their use. For example, if one failed to use his right arm, he would lose the use of it. Exercise is a vital factor in growing from infancy to adulthood. Those who become Christians must exercise their faith by serving God if they are to grow and reach maturity in Christ. The Christian life is characterized as a life of service.

In 2 Corinthians 5:15 we are told that to be a Christian is to live for Christ: "And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (emphasis added). In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 the Thessalonians were told that their conversion was one that had turned them "to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (emphasis added). Jesus said that proof of our discipleship would be a fruit-bearing life: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8, emphasis added). God has given each of us talent, ability, and gifts of his grace to be employed in his service. It is his intention that we use them. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them; if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts in his exhortation; he who

contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:6-8). It is as we use these talents in Christian service that growth takes place, to say nothing of the fact that the work of the Lord is done through the service we render. If we do not exercise our faith in service it is quite easy to see that our growth will be seriously limited. We will probably never grow much beyond spiritual babyhood. It is essential to our growth, then, that we get vitally involved in Christian service.

#### INTERRELATIONSHIP OF NEEDS

Experience is going to teach you that these four basic growth needs are intricately interrelated. Their fulfillment does not take place as isolated experiences. Having one need met will naturally lead to the fulfilling of others. For example, to read and study God’s Word and learn of the greater blessings He has in store for you as a believer will move you to lift up prayers of praise and thanksgiving. As you begin to search his Word you will be challenged and directed to Christian activity, and will become involved in Christian service before you hardly know it. As you read and study the Word, begin a life of prayer and start to serve, you will experience that you will not only want to do these things alone, but also along with other believers. You will come to see that studying the Word and praying with other believers will bring added spiritual blessings to your life. You will learn that the most effective way in which service can be rendered is in cooperation with fellow believers. Therefore, of necessity, you will find yourself sharing much of life with them in study, prayer, worship, and service. In running a parallel between physical and spiritual growth, as we have been doing in this study, there is a great difference to be noted between the lengths of time required by each to reach maturity. Physical maturity is a lengthy process. One does not expect a baby to arrive at adulthood in less than 18 or 20 years, or even longer. Spiritual maturity may not require as much time. Spiritual maturity can be reached in a relatively short period of time if vigorously pursued. How quickly it is reached will depend upon how earnestly one yearns for it. How fast can you grow? That depends entirely upon you. God grant that the desire of your heart will be to “grow daily in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” and “to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ,” that you may be “mature in Christ.”

Then, that we get vitally involved in Christian service.

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# NEW CHOICES, STRESS AND CONFLICTS RESULTING FROM RESTORING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

By

John Hendee

Choosing Christ and being in Christ creates a new internal conflict or tension in our life. Don't be surprised or frightened by it. It is normal. Becoming conscious of the tension reminds us that we have free will and will spend the rest of our life exercising it every day. While it is a challenge, it is a good thing.

You can use this conflict to deepen your love for Jesus and strengthening your walk with Him. Jesus promised us he will be with us in this 'spiritual war' for our soul. We are not alone.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus does not remove us from temptations. Temptations will not only continue, but in one sense they will become stronger than in the past. Before Christ we pretty much did what we wanted. Now that we are living for Christ, the old ways are in opposition to the new ways of Christ. The inner Old Man will call out to us to return to him and his familiar and often pleasure-able ways (which often created conflicts, suffering and damage). The Old Man doesn't give up easily. He has been rejected. He won't go down without a fight.

This new conflict is a result of our choosing to follow Christ and His way of life rather than continue in the destructive ways of the Old Man (or "flesh" as the New Testament calls it).

Remember that every temptation, every conflict and every tug and pull toward the old way is an opportunity to show your love and trust in Jesus, our Savior.

Paul talks about this tension, conflict and war in **Galatians 5:16-25** <sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the **flesh** desires what is contrary to the **Spirit**, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. **They are in conflict with each other**, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Let's take a look at this passage.

First Paul says, *“<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.<sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.”*

He calls us to WALK BY THE SPIRIT. That means to trust and obey the Spirit of God as he leads us through the Word of the New Covenant writings and his inner promptings which will always be in line with the Word. The Spirit will never lead or call us to do anything sinful. Paul is calling us to live our life conscious of the ONE we have invited into our life. We should live to please him, love him and make him comfortable as an invited guest in our life.

He points out that we will have to continually choose to do what the Spirit of Christ calls us to do rather than succumb to the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh don't die out when we become a Christian. What the flesh of Old Man wants is contrary to what God wants. It always has been and it always will be. The Old Man is selfish, self centered and immature. Following him will result in pain and suffering at some point. The writer of Proverbs says *“There is a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is death.”* That WAY is the way of the Old Man. It seems right. It is what we “want”. But God, His Word and very often our conscience will tell us that way is wrong, damaging, and destructive. If we believe the Old Man and follow him we will suffer and lose. If we understand that God is trying to save us from that damaging and destructive life style then we will trust Him.

The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and vice versa. THEY ARE IN CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER. Our choosing to follow Christ puts us in the middle of that conflict.

We are not alone there. We have God, His Word, His Spirit, His family and our conscience to guide us into the truth so we can choose the right way. But in the end, we are the ones who have to choose. We make the final choice. Be careful.

We **have** to choose. Our choices are what prove we have free will. It proves that God hasn't made us like robots with no choices in life. It also proves how much God loves us in that He works by persuasion in our life - not force. He seeks to teach us, call us, lead us and even prays for us through his Holy Spirit to choose the right path and make the right decisions.

It is similar to getting married. Before marriage you have the choice to date and pursue whomever you want. You are single. You haven't made a choice and a commitment to one person. Most 'play the field' for a while. BUT once you feel you have found 'the one', you propose or accept a proposal and you marry. Then everything changes and you understand that you have made a decision and a commitment to live being faithful to ONE person. That means we will STOP 'playing the field'. The search is OVER. You have entered an exclusive, committed relationship.

Now, does your attraction to others cease? Most will find in time that it does not. You will still find others attractive, interesting and desire-able. For most newly married that doesn't even seem like a possibility. “What do I need another for? I'm happy with what I have.”

But many people will find that in time the Old Life of being single and playing the field is still in their mind and still inviting. Many will find it tempting to look or dream, and maybe even flirt and

pursue NEW opportunities. While that might be stimulating at the time of doing it, only damage and danger await that person down the road. Many others will also be affected by their 'unfaithfulness' and 'flirting'. It is amazing how one can justify their 'new' pursuits.

There is a conflict for this person. They know deep down they shouldn't be doing what they are doing.

But the temptation is strong.

Only the strong, those of character and maturity, those whose word is true and those whose heart is faithful and committed to keeping their word and the promise of fidelity they made will resist the temptations to follow those illicit opportunities will survive. The other attractions are illicit because you promised your love to another. That doesn't leave room for roaming around looking, flirting with and playing with others.

Only those who are wise enough to consider and value the importance of their word and their commitment they made to their mate will stand strong. Only those who consider the damage that will be done by their illicit pursuits will know how to say NO and Stop those perilous ventures.

Only those who ignore all that will follow the temptations that are out there.

The CONFLICT is a result of making the commitment in the first place. If you don't make the commitment you are 'free to play the field'. But you have chosen the relationship and made the commitment FOR ALL THE WONDERFUL BENEFITS THAT WILL COME FROM THE MARRIAGE.

There will be the discovery at some point that the person you 'chose' isn't perfect and has a number of defects. Those moments can make one more vulnerable to new pursuits that are blind to the faults of the new person. So in self pity one can justify going after another or others.

With that comes the CONFLICT, the call to return to the 'good old days of playing the field, having a number of options.'

Now you have a field of ONE. Your mate. And the potential and joys that can come from that will only be known by those who remain loving, giving, romantic and faithful to their special one.

IT IS THE SAME WITH CHRIST. He will be faithful. We don't ever have to doubt that. The question now becomes "What about us?" Will we be faithful to Him?

In marriage one may have to renew their commitment every day as one goes 'online' and sees all the opportunities to 'be unfaithful' there on pornography sites. Then there are the 'attractions' and opportunities to flirt at work, at church, in the neighborhood, club, team, etc. There are others who will flirt with you and will be willing to walk down with you or lead you down the road of unfaithfulness.

There are thousands of opportunities which will create CONFLICT. Do I say NO, first to myself and then to the opportunity? Do I turn and shut it out, shun it, reject it, turn, and walk or run away, or do I tempt myself, play with it and tease myself with it?

Rejecting it, and running from it would be for the best interest of our marriage.

God is also hoping that when faced with the calls of the Old Man, the Flesh, that we will say NO, reject the offer, turn and walk or run away rather than tease ourselves with it, which will often lead to our being weakened and in the end damaged as we give in to it.

It is a war. Satan and the Old Man want their way and our allegiance to them. God is calling us to trust Him and be faithful to the relationship we have with him. One can't love or serve TWO Masters or Lovers. We can't live to please the Old Man and God. We can try and walk with one foot on each side of the line but it won't last. One or the other will eventually win out. God is trusting that we will honor our commitment with him and keep both feet on His side choosing to stay away, far away from the line.

Paul goes on to say that we shouldn't and we don't have to gratify the longings or desire for the Old Life. The results of that life style are disastrous. He lists them in Galatians 5:19-21

Sexual immorality

Idolatry (making other people or things a god in my life; giving my loyalty and allegiance to it)

Hatred (that is arrogance out of control, bitterness and self righteousness)

Discord (conflicts, arguing, fighting, being nasty)

Jealousy (being selfish, not trusting others, running others down, maybe wanting what they have)

Fits of rage (that is an adult throwing a baby kind of tantrum; oh so common but so selfish and immature)

Selfish ambition (that is living like a baby). I want what I want now and if I don't get it, watch out)

Dissensions (that is fighting, arguing, disagreeing, putting down, degrading, etc.)

Factions (taking sides, not understanding, being intolerant and dividing up, taking sides)

Envy (that is just another form of selfishness; I deserve more or better and I'd better get it or else)

Drunkenness (drinking, drugs, over eating, over indulging in any number of things, are self punishment and a way to punish others or try to numb pain in my life. I only end up causing more pain to myself and others.

Orgies (Really, like more and more unfaithful sex is going to make life better. Eeeerrrrr. They only make one a slave and unable to ever be able to live faithfully and be content with the 'best' life offers.

THEN PAUL SAYS: *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Well, that is rather obvious. How foolish do we think God is, to die for us to prove how much he loves us and then let us live as total rebels? How can we think that we are still going to get life from him?

It doesn't work that way. Granted we will never be perfect in all our ways BUT flagrant rebellion and rejection of God and his ways is OUR saying God really means nothing to us. We will continue to live how we want, in spite of the relationship we have with God. And God says, "Well, that is your choice."

Paul goes on to say that *"those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*

We chose Jesus. We rejected Satan and the Old Man or sinful nature (flesh). It was a choice. Now our responsibility is to faithfully live the rest of our life in loyalty to our word and our relationship with God.

To us "THE SINGLE LIFE" is dead. It is over. It has ended. WE must not, we will not go back to its ways. We have no need to dwell on the 'single life', to revisit it or entertain returning to it. We will not foolishly entertain the thought that we will stay in our marriage and secretly pursue others at the same time. THAT DOESN'T WORK.

We have committed ourselves to our new LOVE.

Choosing the way of the Spirit means trusting and obeying God. It means putting our relationship with Him before all else in life. He becomes the guiding and controlling factor in our life. We submit all to Him and his ways knowing and believing that is for our best interest. It is the only way we can show God we truly and genuinely love him and appreciate what he has done for us.

That life will be characterized by and controlled by: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul makes the obvious statement following giving that list when he says, *"Against such things there is not law."* We aren't going to be arrested and sent to jail for being loving, joyful, patient, kind, good, etc. WE won't be responsible or guilty of breaking a relationship by living in these ways.

Being or doing the opposite can and will break relationships.

It is our choice.

Paul is saying "YOU have made your choice. Now be faithful to it." Don't be fooled into returning to the control of the "Old Man". It ends in death. Following Jesus and His Spirit ends in Life.

**Romans 8:6LB** *Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace, but following after the old nature leads to death.*

We will be tempted till death to do things the 'old way' or the way of 'the flesh'. The fact that the choice will be there every hour of every day creates a HEALTHY TENSION. We can chose to honor our commitment, vows, promises and be faithful. This makes our love and relationship even stronger.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:19** Paul says *"Do not quench the Spirit."*

How do we quench the Spirit? Quench means to throw water on something. You quench your thirst with water. You quench the fire with buckets of water. You quench the Spirit when the Spirit prompts you to do what is right or good but you reject it and "throw water on it". The Spirit can prompt us to do what is good and right through the Word, through someone else's encouragement or even through an inner prompting. It can be the smallest of things or huge things. God is always motivating us to do the good, the right and the best.

Sadly we often "throw water on it".

Nah, I don't want to.

I don't feel like it.

They don't deserve it.

I'm too busy.

I'm tired.

Later.

Someone else can do it.

We are putting out the Spirit's fire in us or the spark to create a fire of good passion and ministry for God.

Quenching the Holy Spirit is like a child rejecting the good word of encouragement of their parents, teachers, coaches or friends to do what is right, beneficial and good for them.

In **Ephesians 4:30** Paul calls us to *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

We **QUENCH** the Holy Spirit when we reject a prompting of the Spirit to do something good or positive.

We **GRIEVE** the Holy Spirit of God when we CHOSE to think, live and act in WAYS THAT ARE CONTRAY TO GOD'S WAYS. We already know much or most of what God really desires from us. When we act rebelliously and do things "OUR WAY" with no consideration as to how it is

going to affect our relationship with God, He grieves. Why? Because he loves us and sees our actions as a lack of love and trust on our part.

**In quenching we chose to not do something good.**

**In grieving we chose to do something wrong or bad.**

I suppose that most all of the time when we sin, when we choose and act in ways that will damage our relationship with God, we do so KNOWING it is not God's will but we do it anyway. Now that has to hurt God! Paul even says that it grieves God.

Have you ever 'grieved' over someone rejecting your love for them? It hurts to the bone. We don't know how we can go on having been rejected.

God feels grief too.

Thus Paul calls us to "live in the Spirit" and "Walk in the Spirit". That is part of our commitment and our chosen way.

Let's not be foolish. Are we going to trust Satan and go back to the old ways that caused us suffering and pain?

Oh yes, maybe we can remember the 'pleasures and adventures' of the old ways and forget or overlook the emptiness and pain of that life. That is how Eve was fooled by Satan. He lied to her. He promised her things she would not get and he could not deliver.

**What are we to do when we do believe the promises and calling of the old man and we fall in sin?**

God has a safety net.

John tells us we need to go before God and confess our sins.

1 John 1:9 *<sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

[Hebrews 4:16](#)*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with **confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

God is good. He is good with us. He wants the best for us. He also understands we are not perfect in all we do. With confession he provides us with a 'safety net' for when we fall. We obviously don't want to take advantage of that and abuse it as if to say, "Ahhh, I know my mate will forgive me so I'll go and commit adultery again. What the heck."

But when we do fall, God has a plan as to how to deal with it and keep the relationship strong and healthy.

[If we don't confess or acknowledge our sins but we continue pursuing our sin, God will discipline us. He loves us.](#)

[Hebrews 12:10](#) *They disciplined **us** for a little while as they thought best; but God **disciplines us** for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.*

Most often that means he will let us go our chosen way and suffer the natural consequences.

Natural consequences are a great teacher.

Do you remember Esau? You can read his story in Genesis 25. He sold his birthright (which represented all his privileges, benefits and promises for the future), he traded all the potential for many good things in life for something that he felt he had to have in the moment. And he lost.

Moses is a great model for us in choosing the right path and rejecting the damaging route.

Hebrews 11:24-26.

*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.<sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.<sup>26</sup> He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.<sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*

Let's live in the wisdom of God, not the foolishness of Satan and his ways.

Remember, "IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP." If we have THE relationship we have it all.

Philippians 3:<sup>7</sup> *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.<sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that **I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him**, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in [\[a\]](#) Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.<sup>10</sup> **I want to know Christ**—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, **becoming like him** in his death,<sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

<sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but **I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*



# CELEBRATING IN THE LIGHT VS. SUFFERING IN THE DARKNESS

John Hendee

We are talking about either living in Light or Darkness. We aren't talking shades of gray here.

It is one extreme or the other. Which it is for each person will depend on the choice each makes.

It is our call, our decision and our choice.

The world is described as the 'dominion of darkness' in the Bible.

This dark world has its' god's.

2 Corinthians 4:4NIV

***<sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***

This 'blinding of the minds' results in spiritual blindness and darkness. That leads to turning off our brain to the truth. We become hardened, closed and cold to God. We cut off the messages coming from God.

Our receptors only respond to promptings and messages from the 'god of this world'. We become his slaves, living (and dying) to carry out his will. The 'god of this age' doesn't want to lose anyone he is holding captive. He will fight to keep you. He doesn't want to go down alone!!! And he will lie, cheat, deceive and harm people in order to get them to follow him.

Light or darkness? It is our choice.

What draws us to the darkness to start with? It is pretty simple.

***For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.***[1 John 2:16](#)

It is our love for or lust for what is attractive pleasurable and desirable but at the same time destructive. While we lust for these illicit, damaging things, they lead us down the path into darkness.

Esau had this problem. Genesis 25:29-34 He had to have something. He couldn't wait. He wanted it and he wanted it 'now'. And he sold his birthright to get it. You could say he sold his soul for something he 'had to have' that satisfied his short term wishes but that would destroy him in the long run. He couldn't wait. "Hey, it's just a bowl of soup." But it was a 'bowl' with deep implications, with a deep and dark bottom. It was 'dark soup'. "Just once" I'm sure he thought. "What can it hurt?" But he crossed a line in his head and heart that changed everything for his future. **He had to have it.** He couldn't live without it. It would be more accurate to say he did didn't want to live without it. It says he despised his 'birthright'. He took what he had been promised as the oldest son for granted. He didn't appreciate or value it and what it meant. He valued something in the moment and was willing to trade what he was promised for the long haul in order to have something NOW. His choice took him into the realm of darkness where there was weeping, pleading and gnashing of teeth afterwards. It seemed so innocent, so unimportant at the time. How wrong he was.

Isaiah gives an interesting description of those living in darkness.

***Isaiah 5:20***

***Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter.***

We too can cross into the realm of darkness when we try and take what is bad, damaging, destructive, evil and bitter and say it is good, sweet, right and o.k.

***But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:23***

What Jesus is saying here is that if we live trying to justify what is really evil then we have passed into darkness, the zone where it is REALLY DARK. We are in the deepest of pits.

**To live in darkness or light  
is a personal, individual choice  
that every living person must make every day of their life.**

Most think they can venture into the darkness, frolic in its' delights and get out of there without being hurt. It is sort of like "What you do in Vegas stays in Vegas." The problem with that saying is that it is a lie. Proverbs speaks of that. There is a way that seems right to man, but ends in darkness and death. Sorry, but you take it home with you.

Now the interesting truth is that **we all start in the darkness**. We are all in the same boat and its name "Darkness" is engraved on a plaque on the front of the boat's main cabin.

More than a 'boat' it is a death cruise. It is a cursed ship. We are doomed if we stay on board.

But help has come. A rescuer has come. There is a 'life boat'.

The LIGHT has come.

***the people living in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned."* Matthew 4:16**

***For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6***

God has a plan as to how to help free us and rescue all of us who are slaves and prisoners in the darkness. He sent LIGHT to shine in our hearts. That LIGHT is the only thing that can guide us or lead us out of the darkness. It can save us and change our hard heart. When we see Jesus and what he has done to rescue us, how great his love is, what a huge price He had to pay to free us so our hearts will soften and we can be released from the darkness and enjoy living in the true light.

We can get off this condemned, cursed ship. It is our choice. Some prefer staying on the death cruise. What a terrible choice. It might look like it right now, but it IS NOT a party cruise. Its end will be more horrible than that of the famous Titanic.

The light came, the life boat came, but people loved the boat named 'darkness'.

***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. John 3:19***

***When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12***

All have a decision to make. Do we want to live in the Light or the Darkness?

In making that decision we need to know that the **darkness IS passing**.

***Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. 1 John 2:8***

Being surrounded by darkness is temporary for those who choose the Light. It is permanent for those who chose the Darkness, as in never ending.

Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30 describes the destiny of those who choose the darkness in this life. Eternity, or hell will be an extension of what they choose in this life; darkness. It says they will be in OUTER darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, as they realize what a bad choice they made. Do you know what it feels like to know 'you blew it', you missed it, and you passed up the best for a poor choice? This is that feeling on steroids. This is serious stuff.

Paul says we Christians were once darkness.

***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Ephesians 5:8***

Jesus came ***to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*** Acts 26:18

***Jesus came <sup>79</sup>to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*** Luke 1:79

The Light is shining so those living in darkness can escape.

He will guide us out of the realm of darkness into a new life for eternity.

***<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going.<sup>36</sup> Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."*** John 12:35,36

***<sup>46</sup> I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. John 12:46***

It is our choice to be children of Light or children of Darkness. We don't have to stay in the darkness.

When we choose the Light, we are forgiven, justified, exonerated, freed, cleansed, filled and liberated. We are made right with God. It is a free gift with free passage out of darkness into the Light.

Living in the Light is so incredibly rewarding, fulfilling and enriching. It is what we were created for. We were created to live IN RELATIONSHIP with our heavenly Father, in the Light. We weren't created to live in darkness.

It's our choice. But it is a choice with consequences.

Now even though the 'darkness is passing', those of us who have chosen to live in the LIGHT have to spend our years of life here on earth "surrounded by darkness" and those choosing to live in it. And it is not an easy journey.

It wasn't for Jesus. It won't be for us. Once we choose the LIGHT we will still face challenges in life and very likely will experience sufferings, persecutions, unexplainable situations and events. We will suffer losses, hurts, etc. But be strong. We aren't alone. The darkness is passing. It will end.

**We have been called from the darkness.**

***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.1 Peter 2:9***

We heard the CALL, and bailed out of or off of the ship of death. We are in Jesus.

We need to understand that we will live with a new TENSION the rest of our life here on earth. Don't be confused by that. It is normal. It is a result of the choice we made and will need to continue making or renewing every day.

***So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, Galatians 5:16,17***

It is the tension caused by HAVING TO CHOOSE between living in light or darkness every hour of every day for the rest of our life. While we changed ships, we will need to continue to decide and choose to be faithful to Jesus every day. The Darkness (the dark side) will still be calling us to return. Satan wants us back. He will pull out the big guns. He is ticked off with our decision. He will work to win us back till our dying day.

We have to continue to choose between Jesus and the light, or the way of darkness or Satan. The god of this world is prowling around, seeking for someone to deceive. The new tension is not a bad thing. It can strengthen us and build us up.

I ran across the picture below some years ago. I don't know where it came from.

Jesus and Satan are arm wrestling.

What do you think they are arm wrestling over?

For me, as I interpret it, they are wrestling over you, over me.

We know Jesus will win in the end of time and Satan will be defeated. Satan can't and won't win.

But who will win in our life now? What determines who will win, who will be the more powerful of the two in our life?

It is the one we choose to believe and surrender to.

We give the power in and over our life to the one we choose to obey and trust.

Choose to live in darkness and Satan wins; you lose.

Choose to live in the Light and Jesus wins; you win.

It is up to us.



And Satan doesn't give up easy. And certainly Jesus doesn't. They both want us with them for eternity. Satan doesn't want to suffer alone. Jesus doesn't want to celebrate alone.

The daily choice we have to make is between believing in the false promises Satan offers us or the WAY Jesus offers. This choice puts us in a battle. Both Satan and Jesus are persuasive. But all of Satan's promises are poison filled candies. They end in death.

Jesus' promises give life.

In the New Testament this conflict is described as being between the Old man and the New man; the flesh and the spirit; the light and darkness. Take your pick. It is the same thing.

We need to stay in the light, close to Jesus. What draws us to and keeps us in Jesus? His love. *We love because He loved us first. 1 John 4:19*

And He proved His love for us. John 3:16

Yet we are vulnerable. Just as married people are vulnerable to infidelity, so are we with our relationship with Jesus. Paul warns us to be alert; to be sincere and pure in our allegiance to Jesus.

***But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. [2 Corinthians 11:3](#)***

It is a war.

***Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11***

We are told to arm ourselves.

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.<sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.<sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.<sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:10-16***

But in this battle we can be victorious in Jesus.

***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [Romans 8:37](#)***

I remember the great basketball coach Mike Schechevsky saying of basketball, “This is a mind game.” The same is to be said of living in the world, choosing between darkness and Light. It is a mind game; better referred to as a war.

*Above all else, **guard your heart**, for everything you do flows from it. [Proverbs 4:23](#) What we give our heart to is what will control us and our thinking and decisions.*

***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***  
**Romans 12:1,2**

We need to think differently. We need to see things from God’s perspectives and truth, not Satan’s.

**We were darkness but now are light in the Lord.**

***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.***  
**Ephesians 5:8**

We are to shine in a wayward and crooked generation.

***so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. Philippians 2:15***

We are to help those still trapped in the darkness just as someone helped us. We are to try and rescue those trapped in the villages of deceit. We are to risk ourselves, to go and ‘pillage’ those villages of the captives living there.

***Rescue those being led away to death;  
hold back those staggering toward slaughter.  
<sup>12</sup> If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,”  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?***

**Proverbs 24:11,12**

We are light; let our light shine.

***“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14***



***The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Romans 13:12***

***Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.***

*1 Peter 2:10-12*

Have nothing to do with deeds of darkness.

Live to Honor and please Jesus.

Venture out to rescue those in the darkness.

Be faithful till death.

# CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

By Gene Rogers

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I did my internship in college with Gene Rogers. He had a huge impact on my life. The following is an article that he wrote. He hit it on the head, he nailed it. He went to be with the Lord years ago, but his widow, Alice gave me permission to include this writing.

**Christianity centers in a Person!** A living person whom the grave could not hold and who at this moment is very much alive and waiting to meet men in a personal encounter. The Christian faith does not center in an idea, or a system, an event, a building, a geographical Mecca, a preacher, not a catechism or a book—not even the Bible—but in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. This cannot be said of any of the present day world religions or philosophies. The great world religions of our day derive from real historical human founders, but they do not center in their founders. Their founders are no longer personally necessary to the religious systems. They have gone on apart from them. They are like a spider and her web. The web will remain after the spider is long gone. Confucianism does not center in Confucius but in his set of moral maxims. Buddhism in reality does not center in Buddha but in a complex set of philosophical concepts. Hinduism centers in myth and mysticism, while Mohammedanism centers in the Koran.

But with Christianity there is a striking difference. Christianity centers in Jesus. Christianity centers in the person of its founder and cannot possibly exist apart from Him. The focus of the Christian faith is not on what Jesus taught, not what Jesus did, although His teaching, life and sacrifice are central—the vital center is Jesus Christ himself. That virgin born, God man, sinless example, some day returning royal bridegroom of the church; Jesus Christ is the center and essence of Christianity. Jesus is the sum and substance, the very life of Christianity. Take Him away and you destroy it. The Testimony of the New Testament Scripture in John 1:11, 12 we read, **“He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”** This passage plainly states that one is born of God when he receives Christ, a person and not some doctrine or philosophy.

In I Corinthians 2:2, the Apostle Paul seems to set forth a conclusion concerning his ministry as he says, **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”** The person of Jesus Christ was the sum and substance of Paul’s message. The second time he wrote to Corinth he reiterated this when he said, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” II Corinthians 4:5 In what well may have been Paul’s final word of personal testimony, he said in II Timothy 1:12, “I know whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.” Note the personal pronouns in this testimony. Paul does not say I know ‘what’ I have believed, but I know ‘whom’ I have believed. His faith was in the living Son of God. In I John 5:11,12 we read from John, “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life.” John’s testimony was that eternal life is a person and that person is Jesus the Son of God. He does not say that he who has the right doctrine or the right affiliation or the right information has life, but ‘he who has the Son has life.’ The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ himself was, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” Truth and life and the right way are not to be found in abstract philosophical concepts but in the person of the living Son of God. When Philip met up with the Ethiopian Eunuch and proceeded from Isaiah 53 to give him the message of life, the scripture says in Acts chapter 8, verse 35, and “He told him the good news of Jesus.” Good news centers in a person and that person is Jesus the Son of God.

#### Substitutions for Jesus

The reason Christianity is dead in so many places today is because there is no Jesus in it. Substitutions have been made for Him. And as they have, lifeless religion has resulted. Christianity without Jesus at the center suffers the loss of power and vitality and is doomed to becoming as dead as a body from which the spirit has departed. If spiritual life and power are lacking in the life of any individual or congregation of individuals professing Christianity, chances are it is due to the absence of Jesus and the substitution of something or someone in his place. On the things people have embraced instead of a living Savior. Some have ‘joined the church’ in much the same way that one would a fraternal lodge or service club and think of church membership as belonging to a moral, service organization rather than union with a living organism. Some have acquired for themselves a new moral religion centering in a combination of the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus as another Moses. Some have subscribed to a plan of recreating first century Christianity.

Some have adopted man made creeds written and oral. Some have learned a catechism. Some have become defenders of orthodoxy. Some have embraced all or part of the New Testament scripture and have codified it into a moral, ethical religion. So may have believed in something or done something in lieu of receiving Jesus as the Way. Jesus is the Way. Christianity is Christ! Jesus is the Way, the unqualified Way. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the A and the Z of the Christian faith. He is the beginning and the end of all there is in between. He is ‘our wisdom, our righteousness, and consecration and redemption. ( I Corinthians 1:30). He is our peace, our cleaning, our healing, our power, our joy, our love our life, our everything! He is the one who puts reality and contentment in our life. It is He who becomes the key unlocking the meaning of life. It is He who brings dynamic, thrill, excitement, and adventure into life. It is only as you have received Him as the Way that worship becomes the song of the

soul, the Bible becomes the unveiled word of Life and prayer becomes the communion of kindred spirits.

It is only as you have received Him as the Way that worship becomes the song of the soul, the Bible becomes the unveiled word of Life and prayer becomes the communion of kindred spirits. It is only as you have received Him as the Way that you are going anywhere for without Him you are going nowhere. In reality, if you don't have Jesus you don't have much of anything. But if you have Him, all things are yours. If you have Him you have all there is of God, "For in Him dwells the whole fullness of deity" (Colossians 2:9) If you have him every spiritual blessing is yours, for God has 'blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3. If you have Him you have fullness of life, for "you have come to fullness of life in Him" Colossians 2:10.

If you have Him you have one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3) If you have Him you have exchanged shadow for the real thing. (Colossians 2:17) How amazingly simple the Christian life becomes when related to the personal living Christ! It is not a matter of how well one knows a doctrine or how well one has been taught but it is a matter of one's relationship to Jesus. Are you hot toward Him or are you cold? Are you living in close fellowship with Him or is your heart far from Him? Do you see how the whole matter of being a disciple of Jesus is simply a matter of one's relationship with Jesus? All aspects of the Christian life point to Jesus and have value only in their relationship to Him. The only value of faith is that it leads us to Him. The only value of repentance is that it calls us to turn around and face Him again. The only value of humility is that it brings us down low enough to fellowship with Jesus. The only value of confessing our sin is that it clears the conscience of the clouds that have separated us from the Son of righteousness.

The purpose of the spirit filled life is to make the presence of Christ real to us. The whole purpose of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus to be the way in human hearts and to glorify him. Jesus summed up the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 16:14 when He said, "He shall glorify me." The purpose of the whole of Scripture is to bear witness to Jesus as can easily be seen in a statement from His own lips when He says, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." John 5:39 Jesus is the way in our homes. There is great value in family devotions and discipline based upon Christian precepts as a means of directing our children to Jesus, but if young people are ever going to really see Jesus it will be when they witness His living in the lives of their parents and radiating out from them so as to capture their faith and loyalty. Jesus is the way in our church life. The whole purpose of our assembling as Christians is to reaffirm our loyalty to Him and to praise and honor and glorify His Name. The Lord's Supper is meant to focus our attention upon Him, upon what He did for us at the cross and upon His coming again. In a word, our assembling as Christians is for the purpose of feeding upon Him who is the Living Bread.

Jesus is the way in all our service. Fruit is not to be born in our Christian life by the energy of sheer will power and determination, but by the energizing power of the indwelling Jesus. He has ordained that we bring forth much fruit and that it remain, but he adds that 'apart from me you can do nothing.' John 15:4 Witnessing, missionary work, giving, teaching and all other spiritual activities and works which grow naturally out of the energy of the indwelling Jesus will abide forever but are meaningless without him.

Salvation and Life in Christ.

Both salvation and life are in Jesus. “And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who doesn’t have the Son of God doesn’t have life.” Christ in you is the hope of glory.’ Col 1:27. It is all about Jesus. Is your life centering in the person of Jesus? Is your faith in a church or in Him Who is the Head of the church? Are you following a philosophy of life or Him Who is Life? Are you focusing your life and attention upon Biblical teaching or upon Him Who is the Subject of the Bible? Are you more focused on a preacher, priest or some other man or woman leader, rather than on He who is our King, leader, Savior and Pastor?

Remember, “to all who received Him, who believed in His name, God gave the authority, power, privilege, right to become the children of God.”