

“ADVICE I WOULD GIVE A NEW CHRISTIAN”

● *By James E. Gibbons*

SOMETIME ago this writer was involved in an informal series of group discussions on “advice I would give a new Christian.” He led the discussions and received the feedback from the others, which proved very interesting and helpful. We would like to share some of the thoughts we gathered and gleaned from these discussions. It is our conviction that many new Christians fail to get off to a good start in their new life and consequently are stunted and dwarfed in their development. They never realize their potential and don’t become the people that Christ intended for them to be, although they wear his name.

What is a Christian?

Before we get into the advice proper, perhaps it would be good to ask, “What is a Christian?” To simply put it in a “nutshell,” a Christian is one who believes Christ was God incarnate and has unconditionally surrendered himself to His will. Galatians 3:27 tells us exactly when we can be identified as a Christian through faith, “For as many of you as have been baptized [immersed] into Christ have put on Christ.” We therewith know forgiveness (Acts 2:38), have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ and now can be called a Christian. With Paul we should be able to say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

And the word “Christian” means Christlike. With the “imputed” righteousness of Christ we have been forgiven (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Now this righteousness, or Christlikeness, is to be lived out in our lives as we

become and are like him. We are Christlike when we are like Christ.

But what was Christ like? What is involved here? Perhaps the following Scriptures will be helpful in understanding this.

- *Walk as he walked:* “He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).
- *Follow his steps:* “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again...” (1 Peter 2:21-23).
- *Walk in love:* “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us...” (Ephesians 5:2).
- *Purifying oneself as he is pure:* “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure...And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin” (1 John 3:3,5).
- *Meek and lowly, gentle:* “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart...” (Matthew 11:29; Read 2 Corinthians 10:1 also).
- *Having the mind of Christ; humility, being a servant:* “Look not every man on his own things [selfish interests], but every man also on the things of others [concern for others]. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...But [he] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in the fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:4-8). “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Also read John 13:1-17.

- *He went about doing good:* “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and with power: who went about doing good...” (Acts 10:38).
- *Love others as Christ has loved us:* “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

Have a Quiet Time

First, we highly recommend that the new Christian, and every Christian, have a “quiet time” to be alone with the Lord every day. Psalms 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God...” The Lord Jesus Christ saw the need and desirableness of this. Repeatedly we read of him withdrawing from others to be by himself alone with the Heavenly Father. Mark 1:35 reads, “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” Another verse says, “And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone” (Matthew 14:23). Other verses could be sited. Jesus taught, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet...” (a closed place, away from the crowd), Matthew 6:6.

During this quiet time, read the Bible, meditate and pray. In reading the Bible, God speaks to us. In praying, we talk to God. This quiet time will be an anchor for your soul every day that you live to help you be focused, steadfast and faithful to the Lord. You will derive spiritual strength that otherwise you would not have.

The Public Assembly and Worship

Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Faithfulness in attending the public assembly of the church and really worshipping is not optional in being a Christian. It is a “must” for the able-bodied, as

well as being a very special privilege. Here we have fellowship with those of like precious faith while engaged in worship and learning more from God's Word. It is encouraging to know that we are not alone and that there are others who are really striving to do what is right and please the Lord.

And in this assembly each Lord's day we partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32). This really should be an unparalleled experience, and should be entered into as such with the utmost respect and discernment. It is a time of the most serious contemplation, self-examination and resolve. It is a communion. We draw near to the "old rugged cross." Our minds are focused upon the one upon the cross, as we discern his body and his blood. It is a very sobering experience, and consequently we go forth renewed in spirit to serve Him. It is a memorial, and more than a memorial, as we are made to never forget the price paid for our salvation. Therefore, let us never forsake the Lord's Table. In doing so, we will never forsake the Lord.

Attitude toward the World

The apostle John wrote, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). He also wrote earlier in this same epistle, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). In the same vein of thought, the apostle Paul admonished, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). Further implementing this thought, the writer James questions his readers with the prodding words, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Let us never forget the truths taught in these verses of Scripture. If we do, we are in trouble. The people of the world march to a different drum beat than that of Christians. For the most part, they do not think and act the way we do. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are mirrored in their “value” system. They are children of this world, largely living for the flesh and just for today. A person’s goal in life, his aspirations, his entertainment, his music, or even the way he (or she) dresses are all indicative of where he (or she) is “coming from.” And we should always be aware that even community standards are not necessarily the standards of Christ. Don’t be afraid to stand on your own two feet. Be an independent thinker. Remember. God has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

Giving and Alms Deeds

Dear fellow-Christian, from the very beginning in your Christian walk you should practice liberality in giving, and consciously and continually be on the alert for opportunities for good works. You are the object of God’s grace. You have freely received and you should freely give. The early church laid aside on the first day of the week as God had prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2). The Jews under the law gave a tenth, but Christianity is more wondrous and glorious. We look to the cross for our motivation in giving, and that goes beyond the basement level of a tithe. Regardless, God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). There is nothing stingy about Christianity and we shouldn’t be stingy. Jesus in a beatitude, surprisingly not recorded in the gospels, said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). This vividly characterized his life while here, and it is understood that this will be our driving motivation in life, too. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord repeatedly spoke about “when thou doest thine alms” (Matthew 6:1-4), not “if” you do them, but “when” you do them. Paul exhorted the Galatian Christians, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all

men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Matthew 25:31-46, with the Great Day of Judgment in view, graphically illustrates that this is a very important part of a Christian’s life. Yes, to be a Christian, we must be Christlike. Therefore, let us always consciously be on the lookout for opportunities to do “good.”

Your Friends and Associates

In “advice I would give a new Christian” the matter of friends and associates was brought up as something that should be considered. This is very important. It is made emphatic in the words highlighted by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Be not deceived: evil communications [companionships] corrupt good manners [morals].” In the verse right before this one, he spoke of the “let us eat and drink” and be merry philosophy of life. To be close associates of people whose “value” system (or lack of one) is like this, is to have their views rub off on us. It has been said that water seeks its own level and that birds of a feather flock together. So choose your friends and associates wisely. May they be the kind who will build you up and not tear you down, or be a stumbling block in any way.

Psalms 1:1-3 reads, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful [the wayward impact and downward spiral experienced in associating with such people]; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

Yes, we should always have a pleasant and cordial disposition toward all people, but our primary friendships should be with those of like precious faith (moral and decent people). We can avoid pitfalls and help one another on the way to heaven.

Don’t Ever Give Up

All parents have gone through similar experiences with their children. As babies and toddlers making their first ef-

forts at learning to walk, they unceremoniously fall on their faces. But do they despair, and just lie there, thinking they will never learn how to walk? It never enters their minds. They are up and “at it” again. Likewise, as a new Christian you will have similar experiences spiritually.

The devil will trip you and you will mess up, even fall. But just don’t lie there. Don’t give up, thinking you will never make a go of it in being a Christian. Get up. The Lord will be there. He will give you a hand and walk with you as you learn how to walk. You can make a “go” of it and be a real Christian. If we don’t “give up,” the Lord will never “give up” on us.

Remember that John said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8, 9). Remember these reassuring words found in Hebrews 4:14-16 and press on: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Then Hebrews 7:25 reads, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Closing Comments

These are just some of the several things that entered into our discussion on “advice I would give to a new Christian.” As a new Christian you have entered into the greatest and most wonderful life that can be lived, “having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). Yes, Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and that we “might have life” and that we “might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Con-

sequently “all the promises in him [in Christ] are yea, and in him Amen...” (2 Corinthians 1:20). And with the blessed assurance of Acts 2:38 having been made our very own, we know that our past sins have been forgiven and that with the gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, we are on our way to heaven (Ephesians 3:15-21). Therefore, let us faithfully press onward and upward. We trust this “advice” we have given has been helpful. We look forward to seeing you in heaven someday. □



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