

Freedom in Christ

TRAITS OF THOSE WHO DECIDED FOR CHRIST

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I. Introduction

In the first two lessons of this unit we have studied the decision making process and learned that we are free to make our own decisions. In fact, we are not just free to make our own decisions; there is no way to *avoid* making them. Even when we refuse to make a decision, we have made one! Too often when we refuse to make a decision, we are usually making a *bad* one.

Also, we are responsible for our decisions. Whether the decision is good or bad, it is our decision. As much as we might try to shift the blame to someone else, it is impossible. We decide. We are responsible. There is no way around it.

The most important decision that we will make is whether or not to follow Jesus. The type of life we live and our eternal destiny are determined by this decision.

II. Five Traits of Those Who Decide for Christ

A. They have transformed their minds into the mind of Christ.

Paul tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

When we decide to follow and obey Christ, we become new creatures (Second Corinthians 5:17). God makes us new beings, who have been washed in the blood of Christ and cleansed of sin (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:16). We have entered into a new relationship with God. Once we were God’s enemies. Now, we are part of His family – His kingdom. We have left the kingdom of Satan and have been freed from slavery to the flesh.

Being new creatures in Christ does not mean that we have new physical bodies or that all our physical ailments will disappear. It means that our *inner* man – our souls – have become new. It means that now we are motivated by God’s love instead of by our own lusts.

It does not mean that we still do not live in a world dominated by sin. It does not mean that we are not faced with temptations daily. We still are.

The difference is that now . . . *we have a reason for living*. Now, we have a reason for resisting temptation.

In Romans 12:2, the word that is translated “transformed” is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. It is the idea of making a fundamental change in a person’s very nature. It is the same word that we use to describe the change (metamorphosis) that a caterpillar undergoes when it changes into a butterfly.

The caterpillar is an ugly, almost repulsive, creature. But, it has the potential to become a beautiful butterfly. The butterfly undergoes such a fundamental change that it bears no relationship in appearance or function to the caterpillar that it had once been.

It is the same with us. All men have the potential to make such a fundamental change from the mind of sin and self, to the mind of Christ. But for us to obtain the mind of Christ in our lives, we must undergo a metamorphosis. The caterpillar spins a cocoon and eventually emerges as a totally new and different creature – the butterfly. So, we also, when we come into contact with Christ’s blood, emerge as a totally new and different creature – a Christian.

B. They have been baptized into Christ.

Paul, in Romans 6:3-7, explains the meaning of Christian baptism. Baptism was a common religious rite in the ancient world. Most religions – pagan and Jewish – practiced it to some degree. They viewed it with different meanings. Some saw it as a way to obtain ritual purity. Others saw it as an initiation rite into their religion.

Our modern word “baptism” is from the Greek word – *baptizo*. It is not a translation but a transliteration. That is, instead of giving the meaning of the word, the translators only translated the Greek letters into English letters. The meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* is “to immerse, to dip, to plunge, or submerge.” Therefore, the physical act of Christian baptism is to *immerse* a person in water. But, what does baptism mean? Paul tells us that it is an imitation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Baptism is our attempt to show Jesus that we will follow in His footsteps. As He physically died, was buried, and was resurrected . . . we die to our old selves of sin. We bury ourselves and we are raised up as new creatures in Christ. In baptism, we put to death the “old man of sin”. We are changed (metamorphosed) into people who have the mind of Christ. Baptism is more than a physical act. It is also a *spiritual* one. In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul says that Christians are “sons of God” through faith in Christ Jesus. How do we become *sons of God*? When we are baptized, we dress ourselves with Christ. That is, we become one with Christ. We belong to Him.

Part of the *spiritual* effect of baptism is that God washes away our sins and sends His Holy Spirit to live within us (Acts 2:38-41). Baptism is the means by which we

enter a new relationship with Christ – reconciling us to God. While we were once God’s enemies, now we are His children and part of His kingdom.

Matthew records that just before Jesus ascended, He ordered the Apostles to “make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The idea of being a disciple is that being a learner – a pupil. It is more than an academic or intellectual process of learning about Jesus. It carries the idea of accepting Jesus . . . a rejection of the old life of sin and self. It is the beginning of a new life in Christ.

C. They have been added to the church.

In a world of numerous “churches” and cults that claim to be *Christian*, a popular slogan is: “Attend the church of your choice.” How does this fit into God’s view of the church? When Jesus established His church, there was only one. It was His. Those in it had accepted Him and were baptized. They did not “join” the church. They were “added” to the church by God (Acts 2:47). As we read the New Testament, we see the unity of the church. There are numerous references to difference of opinions, but there is never a hint that the church is divided or that we have a choice to make as to which church to join. Paul’s great unity passage in Ephesians 4:4-6 shows us the oneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Along with the unity of God, Paul also states the unity of the church. To Paul, there is “one body,” “one hope,” “one faith,” and “one baptism.”

Since the church is one in body, hope, faith, and baptism, where do we find the modern idea of different churches, different faiths, and different baptisms? *We do not!* It is the work of evil men, posing as angels of light (Second Corinthians 11:13-15). They are as Paul says, “false apostles, deceitful workers”. Because a person claims to be a servant of God does not mean that he is. In Matthew 7:21-27, Jesus talks about these types of people. They call Him, “Lord, Lord” and claimed to prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles in His name. Jesus tells them: “I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”

What did these people do that caused Jesus to reject them? They thought that they were doing God’s will but they were not. Their sin was that, although they had heard Jesus’ words, they did not act upon them. They thought they knew better than Jesus. They heard Him but went ahead and ignored Him. They did what they wanted to do and then had the nerve to call it “Jesus’ will.” The church can’t be separated from Christ. In Colossians 1:18, Paul calls Jesus the “head of the body, the church.” This description shows the importance of the church to Jesus. As the body cannot exist if its head is removed, neither can the church exist if it is not attached to Christ. Without Christ, there is no church. In Ephesians 5:22-32, Paul expands this concept of Christ being the head of the church – His body. He compares the husband/wife relationship with that of Christ and the church. A husband is to love his wife as strongly and totally as Christ loved the church. Christ’s love was so great that He died for the church.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that a person can be a Christian without being in the church. The New Testament characterizes the Christian as part of the church and the church is made up of Christians. They go together. As the words of an old song go: “You can’t have one without the other.” We don’t join our family. We are added to it by birth. It’s the same with the church. As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3 – “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

D. They Are in a Saved Condition.

Another trait of people who have decided to accept Christ is that they are saved from their sins. After Saul of Tarsus had his vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and blinded, he went on into the city and prayed and fasted. Several days later God sent Ananias (a Christian prophet) to Saul. Ananias commanded Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins.

There are several truths we can learn from this account. One is that though Saul saw the risen Christ, he remained a sinner. Also, we learn that works of merit – prayer and fasting – cannot save us. Third, we learn that we accept Jesus when we are baptized. And, fourth, we learn we become free of past sins at baptism. Paul writes to the Romans (Romans 5:8-11) about God’s love. He reminds them that before they accepted Christ, they were *enemies* of God. Usually, humans don’t love enemies but God is different. God so loved His human enemies that He sent His Son – Jesus – to die for us. Jesus’ death restored us to a position of friendship and sonship with God (thereby saving us from God’s wrath). Jesus died that we might have life.

This concept is hard for us to understand. When we try to understand it from pure human logic, it makes no sense. From God’s logic, it was the only way to save us. Peter warns that although we might have accepted God’s salvation, we can still return to a lifestyle of sin. He describes salvation as “escaping the defilements of the world” (Second Peter 2:20-22). He also says that one who walks out on God has no hope of salvation. He is worse than if he had never accepted Christ in the first place.

Peter is not talking about a person who sins because of weakness of the flesh but a person who rises up in rebellion against God. This is what the ancient Jews called the “sin of the high hand” when a person would shake his fist toward heaven and say: “God, I don’t care what You want. I will do what I want to do.” This doesn’t mean that God cannot save such a rebel. It means that the rebel does not want to be saved. Once he was an enemy of God because of ignorance. Now he is an enemy because of hate.

As long as we live, we will commit sin. Such sin is due to our human weakness, not intentional rebellion against God. As long as we are trying to do God’s will, He will continue to wipe away our sin (Romans 6:1-12 and First John 1:7-2:2). The saved condition is one of hope for the future. We know as long as we live in harmony with God’s will, we will be saved (Matthew 24:13; Galatians 6:9; Revelation 2:10).

E. They Are Unique People.

The idea of being unique is one of being “special”. Those who have decided to follow

Christ are special. Although ALL mankind is called to follow Jesus, only a few decide to accept His call. As we look at these unique people, we see several characteristics. One is that they are zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). James tells us the Christian does good works because that is how he demonstrates his faith. Good works are not done to merit salvation but to show gratitude for it. To James, “good works” include *controlling our speech, helping the poor, widowed and orphaned plus, keeping ourselves pure from the contamination of sin* (James 1:26-27 and James 2:14-26).

Another characteristic of these unique people in Christ is that they do what is right. They have rejected a lifestyle of sin and in its place, they have accepted a lifestyle of righteousness – *doing what God considers right* (Romans 6:12-13). When we do what is right because we have decided to follow Christ, God blesses what we do (James 1:23-27). This doesn’t mean the Christian life will be one of comfort or free from pain. It will not. We’re still human and live in a fallen world. We are still subject to the pain and sorrow all men and women have to face. It means that when we do God’s will (even if causing pain and suffering), God strengthens us with endurance. God will declare that we are blessed because we have decided to follow Him.

The Christian knows that he is pleasing to God. Therefore, the Christian is confident in his relationship with God. Because of this confidence, he is not ashamed to be called a child of God. He knows that God is powerful enough to save him from all temptations he may face (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:6; Second Peter 1:1-3). Finally, the Christian has abundant life. God didn’t create man just to survive on earth. He meant for man to enjoy a full and happy life – a life centered around God – a life that includes all the good things God gives (Matthew 12:33-35; Luke 6:45; John 10:10; Philippians 4:13). When we accept Christ, He reaches down into His treasure house of blessings and gives them to us.

III. Those Who Have Decided to Follow Christ Will Be Rewarded

One of the greatest motivations is the promise of a reward whether it is a material reward we receive for doing our jobs well for monetary pay or . . . God’s promise of eternal reward for following Him faithfully. The Bible uses several terms to describe eternal life. In John 14:1-4, Jesus describes it as a royal palace with more than enough room for all those who will follow Him – not a low budget motel room but the Presidential Suite! Another term for our reward is “everlasting life” (Romans 6:22-23). It is a life that will never end, a life in which we will always be *in our prime* – a life in which there is no sickness or death. A third term to describe the reward God gives us is that of being “joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). God will treat us with the same love and consideration that He has demonstrated for His Son, Jesus Christ. We are no longer orphans in service to Satan. God our Father has formally adopted us.

IV. Conclusion

You are free to choose your destiny. You can either live with God in eternal joy or suffer and die with Satan in eternal punishment. It is your decision. No one else can make the decision for you. What will you choose? Will it be freedom with Christ or slavery to sin under Satan (John 8:32 and Romans 1:16)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

1. Following Jesus means that our minds are
 - (a) transformed
 - (b) lost
 - (c) retarded
 - (d) all of these
2. When we follow Jesus, we become new
 - (a) robots
 - (b) creatures
 - (c) angelic beings
 - (d) none of these
3. Another trait of those following Jesus is that they
 - (a) are baptized into Christ
 - (b) give a lot of money to the church
 - (c) sing without ceasing
 - (d) hum a lot
4. The means through which we enter into a new relationship with Christ is
 - (a) a gray door
 - (b) repeating the Lord's prayer
 - (c) communion
 - (d) baptism
5. When a person becomes "one" with Christ, that person
 - (a) looks different
 - (b) smells different
 - (c) is added to the church
 - (d) none of these
6. Christ died for
 - (a) only Hebrews
 - (b) the church
 - (c) only Gentiles
 - (d) non-Jews
7. A fourth trait of those who follow Jesus is that they are in a "saved"
 - (a) condition (spiritually)
 - (b) state (as opposed to "lost")
 - (c) relationship with God
 - (d) all of these
8. As long as we are alive, we will
 - (a) sin
 - (b) not sin
 - (c) die
 - (d) none of these
9. The idea of being unique is one of being
 - (a) common
 - (b) similar
 - (c) special
 - (d) alike
10. One of the greatest motivations is the promise of
 - (a) parents
 - (b) rewards
 - (c) children
 - (d) none of these