

Becoming
like
CHRIST



**THE SECRET OF SPIRITUAL
MATURITY AND CHARISMATA**

ABIA FRIDAY ABIA

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ISBN: 978-051-720-0

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Printed by
ENNE PRINTING PRESS
42 Target Road, Calabar
Cross River State
Nigeria.

Dedication

To all men and women young and old
for whom the Lord Jesus Christ is the
only Messiah and model for living.

Preface

Becoming like Christ is the most important and the most rewarding duty of the Christian life.

It is the goal of Christian consecration or sanctification. One who is not like Christ is not yet truly consecrated or sanctified. He who is not wholly like Christ has not yet attained full consecration or sanctification.

Becoming like Christ is also the most satisfying state of the Christian life. Anyone who is not truly like Christ cannot attain spiritual tranquility and bliss that only the state of Christ-likeness provides. An unChrist-like life is not a satisfying or tranquil or blissful one. A life that is not completely like that of Christ is a miserable one.

Becoming like Christ is the basis for spiritual maturity, anointing, and power. Anybody who is not fully like Christ is an infant spiritually, severely deficient in charismata, and totally impotent with regard to spiritual warfare. Spiritual maturity, diverse anointing, and power thrive only in a Christ-like life.

This publication is written to enable us to attain these objectives. Here I have sought to draw attention to areas of the Christian life in which we need to become like Christ. I have also tried to make some suggestions that can help us in this task. The suggestions are wholly based on the Scripture, as is characteristic of my writings.

It is not enough to learn the principles of becoming like Christ. Christ-likeness and its attendant benefits will never be attained if these principles are not put into practice in our daily lives as a matter of duty and priority.

I can assure readers that Christ-likeness and the benefits accompanying it await everyone who is ready to put into practice the principles taught in this little book.

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BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN OBEDIENCE

Jesus is the most obedient person we have ever known. His obedience is total, complete, and full. He is even obedient to His earthly parents (Lk. 2:51). His obedience to God the Father is well known. He is completely obedient to Him. There is no moment when or matter in which He is not obedient to Him. His obedience is so complete that He obeyed even unto death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). His obedience is so full that not even death on the cross could cause Him not to be obedient (cf. Phil. 2:8). His life is a life of obedience from the beginning to the end. For Him, obedience is not a partial but total act. It is His habit and way of life. It is His nature to be obedient.

When those of us who confess and profess His name and claim to belong to Him compare ourselves with Him in respect of obedience, we readily discover that we are world apart from Him. The early disciples were not like us. They were noted for their obedience (Acts 5:29). The history of the Church is full of credible accounts of believers who obeyed the Lord at the cost of their lives (see Acts 7:1-8:1; cf. Dan. 3:1-30; Dan. 6:1-28). But in spite of these cases, the Church today is not being driven by the kind of obedience for which Jesus is well known. What is quite common in today's Church is either outright disobedience or partial, divided, or selective obedience. Full obedience is quite rare among believers today. What we call obedience today in comparison with obedience as lived and taught by Jesus is no obedience at all. The Holy Spirit is witness that many of us who claim to belong to Jesus today are not obeying Him fully and absolutely as He did and taught. We are not obeying Him as He deserves. This kind of obedience cannot make us like Him.

Anybody who desires to be like Christ must obey God in everything as He did. There must be nothing whatever in which he is not in total obedience to God. Anyone who seeks to be like Christ must commit his entire life to obey Him. If anybody is not obedient to Christ in all areas of his life, he cannot be like Christ.

Obedience that will make one like Christ is total, full, complete and absolute obedience. This is the kind of obedience that is taught and urged upon all true believers by the Scripture (see Deut. 28:1-2; cf. Lk. 11:28). Any one who is not prepared to obey Jesus in this manner is not ready to be like Him.

In seeking to be like Jesus, only full obedience is acceptable. Partial, divided or selective obedience is worthless when it comes to being like Christ. This point is made clearly in the Scripture (Jam.2:10). If one obeys the Lord in some matters and disobeys Him in others, such obedience is unacceptable (cf. Jam. 2:10). If one obeys the Lord in nine of the Ten Commandments, and disobeys Him in one, his act of obedience is not acceptable (cf. Jam. 2:10). There

is nothing like partial, divided or selective obedience as far as being like Jesus is concerned. The obedience required to become like Jesus must be total and full. There must be no area or aspect of the believer's life where there is no complete obedience to Jesus. Full or absolute obedience is the kind of obedience that Jesus had and taught. This is the only kind of obedience that will make one like Him. One act or area of disobedience is enough to deprive one of becoming like Christ (cf. Jam. 2:10)

It is like what happens in athletics. The athlete who wins the race is not the one who obeys some and not all of the rules, but the one who obeys all of the rules. This is what happens in the matter of becoming like Christ. Full obedience, however rare and difficult, is what is required to be like Christ. Partial, divided or selective obedience does not serve any purpose in the business of becoming like Christ. If anybody really wants to become like Jesus then he must commit himself to obey Him fully, absolutely. He must obey Him totally in all areas or aspects of his life. There must be no aspect or area of his life in which he is not completely obedient to Him.

Partial or divided or selective obedience is the kind of obedience that is common among professing Christians today. We stress that this kind of obedience is no obedience at all and is of no effect or purpose whatsoever in the business of becoming like Christ. Anybody who obeys God partially or selectively is considered a hypocrite (see Matt. 23.1ff.). Such obedience can never make one to become like Christ.

God abhors partial, divided or selective obedience and condemns and rejects it vehemently (Is. 29:13). Partial, divided or selective obedience was the main problem of Old Testament believers and the principal reason for their subsequent rejection and exile by God. Therefore, this kind of obedience is not only unacceptable to God, it can never make any one to become like Christ. The obedience that is acceptable to God and can make one to become like Christ is full, total, complete and absolute. Anything short of this is not only unacceptable to God, it is of no use whatever in the task of becoming like Christ.

Besides, obedience is like a one-way road. One can only obey or not obey. No one can obey and not obey at the same time (see Lk. 16:13). One can either obey or not obey.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN HUMILITY

Jesus is the most humble person we have ever known. His humility begins at birth (Lk. 2:6-7). He lived a life of humility throughout His short sojourn on earth. The Scripture extols His humility (Phil. 2:6-8). He is indeed unequalled in humility (cf. Phil. 2:6-8). He was humble in everything and before all men.

Today humility is not common among us who claim to belong to Jesus. In fact, we professing believers today are better known for our pride and arrogance than for humility. Humility is so scarce among us that it may even be extremely difficult to find one truly humble individual among one hundred professing believers. On the contrary, it is easier to find one hundred proud and arrogant individuals among one hundred professing believers. It is really an undisputed fact that humility is truly scarce among us professing believers today. Ours is not the age of humility. Pride appears to have replaced humility among us professing Christians today. Pride is so common that it appears to be the norm for believers.

Any true believer who sincerely desires to be like Christ must be humble like Him (see Phil. 2:5-11). Pride can never make one to become like Christ. In fact, pride and becoming like Christ are incompatible. It is only true humility that will make one to be like Christ. False humility will not serve the purpose. Anybody who honestly seeks to be like Christ must deliberately humble himself. Nothing short of true humility can make one to become like Christ. The Scripture extols and recommends humility (Prov. 11:2; Prov. 15:33; Prov. 18:12; Matt. 18:4; Lk. 14:11; Lk. 18:14). Believers are urged to be humble (Phil. 2:5-11; Tit. 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

In order to be truly humble like Christ, one must consider whatever or whoever he is as nothing for His sake (Phil. 3:7). This is what Jesus did. This is what Paul did (Phil. 3:7). This is what we need to do to become as humble like Jesus. Whoever insists on what and who he is does so at the expense of Jesus and can never become like Him. Only he who is ready to empty himself of himself is ready to become not only humble but like Him in humility.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN PRAYER

Jesus was a man of prayer. He prayed often (Lk. 5:16). He prayed alone and in solitude (Lk. 5:16; Lk. 6:12; Lk. 9:18). He spent the night praying (Lk. 6:12). He prayed prior to His passion (Lk. 22:39-46). He lived a life of prayer (Lk. 5:16; Lk. 9:26-36; Lk. 11:1). Jesus has no rival when it comes to prayer. Prayer was an important aspect of His life. He even drove away people who abused the place of prayer (Lk. 19:45-46). Prayer was His habit and way of life (cf. Lk. 5:16; Lk. 6:12; Lk. 11:1).

Prayer is another area in which those of us who claim to belong to Jesus differ considerably from Him. Prayer is not our habit and way of life as was the case for Jesus. We do not have His kind of zeal and passion for prayer. We do not depend on prayer as He did. Prayer is not as important to us as it was for Him.

We cannot become like Jesus unless we become like Him in prayer. No one can become like Jesus unless he first becomes like Him in prayer. Therefore, any body who really desires to be like Jesus must become a man of prayer like Jesus. He must have a life of prayer like Jesus. He must make prayer his priority and way of life as Jesus did. He must have a passion and zeal for prayer like Jesus. He must follow Jesus not only with regard to how to pray but also concerning what to pray. Jesus must be his model in everything concerning prayer. Any one who is not able to pray like Jesus can not become like Him. To become like Him one must learn to pray like Him.

The Scripture even enjoins believers not only to pray but to do so continually (1 Thess. 5:17; cf. Lk. 18:1-8). The apostles and early disciples made prayer their priority (Acts 2:42; Acts 6:3-4). They did everything through prayer (Acts 4:24-31; Acts 2:23-26; Acts 6:6).

Prayer in the business of becoming like Christ is like oxygen to the body. As the body cannot survive without oxygen, so no one can become like Christ without prayer.

The fact that Jesus lived a life of prayer underscores its indispensability in the work of becoming like Him. If Jesus, being God, lived a life of prayer, then those of us who desire to become like Him who are mere men ought to do likewise. If Jesus prayed as He did although He is God, then those of us who seek to become like Him must pray even more.

Prayer and becoming like Christ are inseparable. But the kind of prayer that will serve the purpose is not occasional, intermittent prayer, but a personal life or habit of prayer. It is this kind of prayer that will certainly make one to become like Christ.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN LOVE

Jesus is love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:16). Everything about Him is love. He is unequalled in His love for humanity. He gave up His own life for the world because of love (cf. Gal. 2:20). Because of love He gave up His life as a ransom for sin (Gal. 2:20). He held back nothing, not even His own life, because of love (cf. Gal. 2:20). He is the greatest as far as love is concerned (Jn. 15:13). His love is universal (Jn. 3:16). His love knows no barrier of geography, race, language, or culture (cf. Rom. 10:11-13). His love is unconditional (Eph. 2:8-9). He always ever loves. He never fails to love. He loves with all His heart.

This is another area in which we who claim to belong to Jesus differ from Him noticeably. We love conditionally, if we love at all. When we claim to love, there is always a reason or explanation for it. Unlike Jesus, we love others because we bear the same colour of the skin like them or come from the same place or speak the same language. We love others because they belong to the same denomination or congregation with us. We love someone because he has been kind to us or because we expect something from him. We love others because we share the same profession or employment with them. Thus, we know nothing of the unconditional, universal and sacrificial love of Christ. The love that we know is one that is based on one human factor or the other. We do not love at all when the human factors are not present. This is not how Jesus loves. We are quite unlike Him when it comes to love. We hate while Jesus loves. In fact, it is for man to hate while Jesus loves.

Any one who desires to be like Jesus must not only love but love as Jesus did (Jn. 15:12; Eph. 5:25). This means we must love totally, even if it means doing so at great cost to us. It means we must hold back nothing, including our lives, for love's sake. To love as Jesus did means we must love unconditionally, without regard to any human factor or consideration. It also means we must love every one, including our enemies (Lk. 6:27-36). No one can become like Jesus unless he loves as Jesus did. Nothing makes us like Jesus more than when we love as He did. And nothing makes us more unlike Jesus than when we fail to love as He did.

The importance of love in relation to becoming like Christ cannot be over emphasized. Love is the greatest and most supreme virtue (1 Cor. 13:13). One who loves fulfils the entire law (1 Cor. 13:10). It is the proof of genuine faith and new birth (1 Jn. 3:14). It is the evidence of knowing God (1 Jn. 4:8).

Jesus commands His followers to love as He did (Jn. 15:12, 17; 2 Jn. 6). Any body whose goal is to be like Him must heed His command whole-heartedly. Any one who is not ready to love as Jesus did is not ready to become like Him. To love like Him is not optional in the business of becoming like Him.

But love is better demonstrated, seen and shown than talked about and heard. To love as Jesus did is a matter of action not of words. It is love that is demonstrated that will make one like Jesus (cf. Rom. 5:8). To love by word of mouth only cannot make one to become like Jesus. Love not seen in deeds is utterly useless and inapplicable in the business of becoming like Christ (cf. Jam. 2:26).

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN PURITY

Jesus is best known for His purity. According to the Scripture, He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:22; cf. Is. 53:9). In Him is no impurity of any kind (1 Jn. 3:5). When He died on the cross he died for the impurity of others, not for any impurity of His own (Is. 53:4-5). He is indeed pure. He faced the longest and toughest temptation ever and yet did not sin (Lk. 4:1-12).

This is yet another area in which we who claim to belong to Jesus differ considerably from Him. Purity is quite rare among us professing Christians today. We speak about it but know nothing of it. It is impurity, not purity, that seems to reign in the Church today. There is no difference in conduct between believers and unbelievers today. Impurity has taken over both the world and the Church. Inward purity is not presently known to be the way of life of many professing Christians. And this situation is universal.

A life of impurity cannot make any one to become like Christ. On the contrary, only a life of purity suffices in the business of becoming like Christ. Without purity, no one can become like Christ (cf. Heb. 12:14). To become like Christ one must first become pure. A life of impurity is incompatible with becoming like Christ (1 Jn. 3:6, 9).

A life of purity is not optional for true believers. God specifically commands it (1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). It is God's will for His children to be pure (1 Thess. 4:3-5). Life in Christ demands it (Tit. 2:11-14). Besides, purity is of the essence of God (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Thus, true believers are called to a life of purity, not of impurity (1 Thess. 4:7; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). In addition, a life of purity is an evidence of new birth, while a life of impurity is an evidence of the old life (see 1 Jn. 3:7-10).

Therefore purity is of utmost importance in becoming like Christ. But the purity that will serve the purpose must be internal, from within, from the heart, and not external, from outside, from the mouth. In becoming like Christ, only internal purity is acceptable. External purity without its internal counterpart is valueless in the business of becoming like Christ.

The purity that will make one like Christ must also be a continuous, unceasing one. The believer who wants to become like Christ must keep on being pure. This purity must remain a daily, moment by moment walk. To become like Christ, there must be no time when the believer is not living a life of purity (1 Jn. 3:6). A break in the life of purity is a break in the business of becoming like Christ.

What purity is in the work of becoming like Christ is like what blood is to the body. Just as no one can live without the blood, so no one can become like Christ who does not have personal, inward purity. Only a life of purity can make one to become like Christ. There can be no Christ likeness without purity. Both go together and are really inseparable. Therefore, whoever wants to become like Christ must first and foremost purify himself as He did (1 Jn. 3:3).

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN SUFFERING

Jesus is also best known for His suffering. He was born to suffer (Lk. 9:22; Lk.18:31-34; Lk.22:37). Suffering was part and parcel of His destiny (Lk. 17:25). He suffered in various forms. He was mocked, beaten, and insulted (Lk. 22:62-65). He was stripped of His clothing (Matt. 27:28), spat on and struck on the head repeatedly (Matt. 27:30). He was unjustly crucified (Lk. 23:33). Thus, He suffered to the point of paying the highest and most supreme price for it (Lk. 23:33). The Scripture calls Him a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering (Is. 53:3). He is the only suffering Saviour the world has ever known (see 1 Cor. 1:22-24).

But Jesus did not suffer for Himself. Neither did He suffer for His offences. He was innocent in His suffering (Lk. 23:4, 13-16, 22). Pilate, the Roman Governor who tried Him, testified to His innocence (Lk. 23:4, 13-16,22), as did one of the criminals crucified with Him(Lk. 23:41). A criminal ought to have known his counterpart. Jesus suffered for others, the innocent for the guilty, the righteous for the unrighteous (see 1 Pet. 3:18). And He endured it all (see Heb. 12:2).

Suffering is another matter in which we who profess the name of Jesus today differ sharply with Him. Contemporary Christianity is the exact opposite of the one Jesus founded when it comes to suffering. It is considered all over Christendom today that suffering is evil and is of the devil. It is even widely taught and believed today that suffering is a mark of sin and guilt. For some, suffering is incompatible with faith in Christ. There are many today who are believers because it is well with them materially. There are also many who would readily renounce Christ if for any reason their material comfort is taken away. There are many who follow Christ today because their mouth is full of bread (Jn. 6:26). Should the bread be taken away, their profession of Christ is gone.

But no one can become like Christ who is not ready to suffer not only for Him but with Him (Lk. 14:27). In fact, to suffer for or with Jesus, is the mark of a true disciple (see Lk. 14:27; Phil. 3:10). Therefore, the best way to become like Christ is to suffer for and with Him. Suffering for and with Jesus and becoming like Him are like Siamese twins. One is inseparable from the other. When one is not ready to suffer for and with Jesus, he is not ready to become like Him. To be ready to suffer for and with Him is to be ready to become like Him. One without the other is unthinkable and impossible. There is no way any one can become like Christ without suffering for and with Him.

The teaching of the Bible in respect of Christian suffering is quite clear. First, suffering is natural to the gospel (Lk. 21:12, 16, 17; Jn. 15:20-25; Jn.16:1-4; Acts 14:22; Acts 20:23-24; 1 Thess. 3:2-4; 2 Tim. 3:12). The gospel gives rise to suffering as believers stand up for it while unbelievers oppose it. If there were no gospel, there would be no suffering on its account.

Second, Christian suffering is a blessing (Lk. 6:22; 1 Pet. 4:14). It is not a curse

as many professing believers teach and hold. A true believer is always under the blessing and not outside of it, regardless of his physical circumstances (Rom. 11:29).

Third, Christian suffering may be an act of God's discipline (Heb. 12:4-12). This kind of suffering is intended to bring the one who suffers back to God. It is for his own good.

Fourth, Christian suffering is a mark of true son ship, not a mark of God's rejection (Heb. 12:4-12).

From the above summary of the position of the Scripture, it is unscriptural to teach or believe that suffering is unbecoming of true believers. We cannot become like Christ without suffering for and with Him.

It seems that the problem with Christian suffering is not its cause or source but how we professing Christians handle it. The Scripture indicates how we who claim to belong to Jesus ought to handle suffering.

First, we are called upon to rejoice in suffering for and with Jesus (Lk. 6:23; 1 Pet. 4:13, 16). Joy in Christ must take the place of gloom, sorrow and despair when we suffer for or with Him. We know that this is easier said than done. But Paul and Barnabas did it when they suffered for the gospel (Acts 13:50-52). It is one of the greatest antidotes against suffering.

Second, believers are called upon to be patient in suffering (Jam. 5:7-10). Patience is one of the most powerful and potent weapons against suffering. Those who are known to have overcome suffering have done so on account of their patience.

Third, believers are also called upon to endure suffering (2 Tim. 2:3; Heb. 12:7-13). Again, this is easier said than done. But God's grace is sufficient for this purpose (see 2Cor. 12:7-10)

Fourth, believers are called upon to persevere in suffering (1 Thess. 1:4; Jam. 5:11). Jesus persevered in all the sufferings He encountered. The early disciples persevered in spite of all that they suffered for the gospel (Acts 14:4-7). Any body who gives up his faith on account of suffering cannot become like Christ. He is like a soldier who runs away from his post because of the fierceness of the battle. As that soldier is not entitled to any medal, in the same way, anybody who claims to belong to Jesus but gives up on account of suffering cannot become like Christ. It is only those who persevere who become like Christ (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17).

Fifth, believers are called upon to remain faithful even in suffering (1 Pet. 4:19). Renouncing Jesus on account of suffering will not take away the suffering but remaining faithful to Him in spite of one's suffering can bring His salvation (see Exod. 3:7-9). Any body who sincerely desires to become like Jesus must be willing and ready to suffer for and with Him. No one can become like Jesus who is not ready and willing to suffer for and with Him.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN COURAGE

Jesus is most outstanding in courage. It is quite correct to say that He is the most courageous person who ever lived. He knew before hand all the sufferings He was to undergo but never ran away or gave up His mission (Lk. 18:31-31). He faced the fiercest opposition and persecution than anyone ever faced but never gave up His mission (Lk. 11:53-54). He went through the cruelest, most painful, and most degrading suffering any one has ever experienced but He never abdicated on or abandoned His mission (Matt. 27:27-44). Those who were against Him far exceeded those who were for Him but He did not give up (see Mk. 15:6-14. During His passion everyone deserted Him, including His disciples but He did not give up (see Lk. 22:54-60). All this is indicative of His unequalled courage.

Jesus' kind of courage is quite rare among those of us who profess to follow Him today. People readily stand up for their country or anything else but not for Jesus. To stand up for Jesus is not only rare but unpopular today. Courage has never been rare in the history of Christianity as in the modern and post modern period. Personal safety and material well-being have replaced courage among professing believers today. If we used courage as a criterion for determining true believers we would be shocked by the scant number. While many profess to belong to Jesus today, only a few can courageously stand up for Him. Courage is indeed not characteristic of Christian profession and confession today.

But we can not become like Jesus if we lack the courage to stand up for Him. To become like Jesus, one must have the courage to stand up for Him, in spite of the cost (Mk. 8:34-38). To be courageous is to stand up for Jesus in everything at all times regardless of the cost. Courage is one of the greatest requirements for becoming like Jesus (Heb. 3:6). Any body who does not possess it cannot become like Jesus. In fact, one of the greatest obstacles to becoming like Christ is lack of courage. Courage cannot be excluded in the path of becoming like Christ. It is as essential in the journey to becoming like Jesus as the taking of food is to the survival of the human body.

Believers are urged to be courageous (1 Cor. 16:13). The opposite of courage is fear. Believers have an overwhelming reason to be courageous (Lk. 12:4-7). Believers have no reason whatever to be afraid (Lk. 12:4-7). The lives of all true believers are in God's own hands, not in the hands of any one else (see Lk. 12:6-7). Fear is entirely unnecessary for true believers.

The place of courage in the work of becoming like Christ can be seen in the example of a boxing race. It is not the boxer who gives up half way into the fight who wins the prize but the one who fights to the end in spite of his difficulties.

Those who give up Jesus due to lack of courage forfeit the right to become like Him (cf. Jn. 1:12). Those who stand up for Him become like Him. The right to become like Jesus belongs solely to those who are courageous like Him. The right to become like Him has never and can never be given to those who lack His kind of courage.

Courage is easier to speak of than to attain. In fact, it is easier to be afraid than to be courageous. But there is no alternative for anyone who desires to be like Christ than to be as courageous as He was.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN SERVICE

Jesus is also unequalled when it comes to service. He stated that service is His hallmark (Lk. 22:27). According to Him, He came to serve and not to be served (Matt. 20:28). Throughout His life, He was always serving others. He lived all of his life serving others. If it is correct to describe Him as a man of sorrows as we have done elsewhere, it is also correct to describe Him as a man of service. Whereas it is the nature of man to be served, it is the nature of Christ to serve others. He did not only teach that a life of service is the right kind of life for His followers (see Matt. 20:26-27), He personally demonstrated it (Jn. 13:1-17). Just as we cannot speak of Jesus without thinking of His life of love and compassion, we cannot also speak of Him without underscoring His life of service.

But many of us who profess to follow Jesus today disdain service. We seem to know little or nothing about serving others. We prefer to be served than to serve. A life of service is quite rare among us professing Christians today. By a life of service I do not mean doing our duty but going beyond what is our duty. I do not mean serving others when it is convenient for us to do so but serving them even when it is not convenient for us to do so. I do not also mean serving people whom we know but serving those whom we do not even know. I do not also mean serving others occasionally but being devoted to a life of serving others. To serve as Jesus did, always, without preconditions or qualifications, is quite rare indeed today among us who claim to belong to Him. While service is natural to Jesus, it is foreign to us who profess His name today.

If any body desires to be like Christ, He must become like Him in service. He must live a life of service as Jesus did. He must live to serve others. Anyone who seeks to become like Christ must live to serve instead of being served (Lk. 22:24-26). Like Christ, he must be known for serving others than for being served by them. This is how to become like Jesus.

The Scripture extols or commends a life of service (Lk. 22:24-26). Believers are specifically called to live a life of service (Jn. 13:12-17; Gal. 5:13). For true believers, it is service, not greatness, that is their distinguishing mark. In fact, true greatness lies in service, not in being served (Matt. 20:26-27).

To serve as Jesus did, we must actually serve others, not ourselves or interests. To serve others is to serve God. Our service to others is proof of our service to God (see Matt. 25:34-40).

Furthermore, to serve as Jesus did we must serve without preconditions and ulterior motives. Service based on preconditions and ulterior motives is like no service at all. Such service is not noticed by God and cannot be credited to the one performing it (cf. Matt. 6:1-4). It stands rejected before it is even rendered.

In addition, to serve like Jesus, we must serve God alone (Matt. 4:10; Matt. 6:24). Our service must not be shared or divided between God and any other being. Our service must be unto God alone to be acceptable.

Besides, to serve like Jesus, one must serve from the heart (Jos. 22:5; 1 Sam. 12:20, 24; Eph. 6:7). Any act of service that does not come from the heart is unacceptable before God. To serve as Jesus did is to become like Him indeed.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN INTERNAL, INWARD LIFE

Jesus is well known for His emphasis on internal, inward life as against external, outward one. His internal, inward life is in agreement with His external, outward life. One does not contradict the other. Jesus condemns external, outward life that does not come from the heart and is not a true reflection of it (Matt. 23:1ff.). For Jesus, the state of the external man may not reflect his true, actual state. To Him, it is the internal, inward state of the individual that measures his life, and not the external, outward circumstances (cf. Matt. 5:28; Jam. 1:13-15). A man may be right externally, outwardly, but never so internally, inwardly (see Matt. 23:1ff).

The problem of the conflict between external, outward life and internal, inward life has been as old as the Old Testament (see Is. 29:13). It is even most notorious today. There are many today who are children of God externally, outwardly but internally, inwardly they are children of the devil. There is more emphasis today on external, outward life than on internal, inward life. We are living in an age in which everybody is a believer outwardly but not inwardly. Christianity is presently more or less an external, outward confession than an inward, internal life. The world is Christian externally, outwardly but not internally, inwardly. Christianity is now a matter of the mouth than of the heart. This kind of Christianity cannot make us to become like Jesus.

Any body who desires to become like Jesus must become like Him in his internal, inward life. He must turn over his entire heart to Jesus and bring it into total submission to Him. It is not enough to confess with the mouth. One must bring the heart into full subjection to Jesus (see Rom. 10:9-10). A man who does not yield his entire inner being to Jesus cannot become like Him. A man who belongs to Jesus externally, outwardly and not internally, inwardly, cannot not become like Jesus. In order to become like Jesus, one must yield his entire heart to Him without holding back any portion of it.

The internal, inward life is of utmost importance as far as becoming like Christ is concerned. It is the internal, inward life, not the external, outward life that the Scripture urges upon believers (Deut. 6:5; Deut. 10:12; Joel 2:13). The external, outward life is of no value before God (see 1 Sam. 16:17). God does not measure a man on the basis of his external, outward life but on the basis of his internal, inward life (1 Sam. 16:17). A man's internal, inward life gives the true picture of the state of the man's faith (see Matt. 6:21; Prov. 4:23).

No amount of external, outward life can count in the business of becoming like Christ. External, outward life is of no benefit as far as becoming like Christ is concerned. External, outward life can be quite deceptive (1 Sam. 16:6-10). It does not always give a true picture of the true state of one's faith. One

may be externally, outwardly right but not so internally, inwardly. The external, outward life may suffice before man but not before God (1 Sam. 16:7). It is of no relevance whatever in the work of becoming like Christ. It is completely useless like a bad tooth. What counts is the internal, inward life.

There is no alternative to an internal, inward life for those who really seek to become like Christ. No pretensions are workable. No one who is not living the internal, inward life can pretend before God to be doing so. He may succeed in deceiving fellow human beings but not God who is all-knowing (Ps. 139). Therefore, we either live the external, outward life and fail to become like Him or we live the internal, inward life which brings one to become like Christ. The external, outward life takes one away from becoming like Him. It is the internal, inward life that makes one to become like Him.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN GIVING

Jesus is most outstanding when it comes to giving. His personal example is the best as far as giving is concerned. He gives all that He has without sparing or withholding (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32). He gives voluntarily (Jn. 10:18). He gives even to the unworthy and undeserving (Rom. 5:6-8). When it comes to giving, His gift is the greatest and He remains the greatest giver.

Giving is one area of life in which we who claim to belong to Jesus differ from Him. We are no longer giving today as the early disciples did (see Acts 4:32-37). And whenever and wherever we give, we do not do so as Jesus did and taught. The way the Church goes about giving today cannot be defended on the basis of the Scripture. For example, today we teach all over the world that unless some one gives to our Church or Ministry the promises of God cannot come to pass in his or her life. In this way we have made giving to become God. The Church has never had it worse in giving as it does today, especially with regard to attitude and available teaching. What we teach about giving today and the way we give cannot make us like Christ. Desperation with regard to the Church's finances has led to the invention of unscriptural theories and methods of giving. But any body whose goal is to become like Christ must learn to give as He did and taught. It is by following His personal example and teaching in respect of giving that we can become like Him. We cannot become like Him by throwing away His example and teaching concerning giving. The strongest evidence of true discipleship is to hold on to the example and teaching of Jesus in all things (Jn. 8:31).

Before we suggest how one can give as Jesus did and taught it is important to state that giving is indeed rewarding (Prov. 28:27; Matt. 10:42; Lk. 6:38; Acts 20:35). It is indeed true that when we give we are blessed. There is no need for someone to exploit or deceive or even compel us before we give. It is quite true that God rewards giving (see Prov. 28:27; Matt. 10:42; Lk. 6:38; Acts 20:35).

How can one then give in order to give as Jesus did and taught?

First, one must first give himself totally to God (2 Cor. 8:5). This is exactly what Jesus did. One's act of giving may not be acceptable unless he first offers himself to God (see Matt. 5:23-24). It is through offering himself to God that one's gift can become acceptable on his behalf.

Second, to give as Jesus did and taught one must give voluntarily (2 Cor. 9:7). The gift is acceptable when it is willingly given and rejected when it is given grudgingly. There must be no compulsion of any kind as is often the case today.

Third, in order to give as Jesus did and taught, the giver must give generously (Matt. 12:41-44; Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:6). God loves a generous offering (cf. Lev. 22:17-33; Acts 4:32-5:11).

Fourth, the giver must give cheerfully if he intends to give as Jesus did and taught (2 Cor. 9:7). As the Scripture says, God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

Fifth, in order to give as Jesus did and taught one must give secretly (Matt. 6:3-4). Jesus taught that hypocrites publicize their acts of giving (Matt. 6:2) and that giving so publicized forfeits the reward due to it (Matt. 6:1,2).

Sixth, in order to give as Jesus did and taught we must be willing to give to all, whether they deserve our giving or not (Prov. 25:21; Matt. 6:27-37). People do not need to be deserving or worthy of our giving before we give to them.

Lastly, if we desire to give as Jesus did and taught we must give God the very best (see Lev.22:17-33). God gave us His very best (Jn. 3:16). To give as Jesus did and taught is to give our very best. God deserves the best of our giving. We will not become like Jesus if we insist on following our own ideas in giving. Our own ideas as presently taught are not compatible with His own. If we desire to be like Him in giving, we must be willing to follow His example and teaching concerning giving. There is no other way to become like Him in giving than this.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN ACCESSIBILITY

Jesus is well known for His life of unlimited and unrestricted accessibility (Lk. 5:29-32; Lk. 15:1-2). Everyone had unqualified and unrestricted access to Him—the poor, the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the leper, the demon-possessed, children, etc. No one was denied access to Him. Anyone had a ready and welcome access to Him without qualifications or preconditions (Jn. 6:37). Even sinners had unconditional access to Him (Lk. 5:29-32; Lk. 19:1-10). Some people even questioned His integrity and credibility because of the unlimited and unrestricted access to Himself that He offered people (Lk. 15:1-2).

Jesus openly stated that He is readily accessible to everyone (Jn. 6:37). His life is one that is meant to be freely accessible (Jn. 6:37). He even became indignant with His disciples for trying to deny children access to Himself (Mk. 10:13-16).

This is not the kind of life that those of us who claim to belong to Him are living today. Whereas Jesus is known for His life of unconditional accessibility, we are better known today for living an inaccessible life. Today people have access to us on conditions and qualifications prescribed by us and acceptable to us. For many of us professing Christians, we choose whom to give access to ourselves. We can welcome our staff, relations, friends, the rich, the educated but not so the poor, the needy, the sick, the uneducated, and the ordinary members of the society. Our accessibility is severely limited, restricted, and conditional. Some professing Christians are more guilty than others. This is how we differ from Jesus. Jesus never despised or rejected anyone (Jn. 6:37). On the contrary, He readily granted access to whoever came to Him (Jn. 6:37).

Therefore, if any one seeks to become like Jesus he must become like Him in accessibility. He must become as accessible as Jesus Himself is. An inaccessible life cannot make one like Christ.

But what does one need to do in order to become as accessible as Jesus?

The first thing to do is to make it one's policy to be accessible to everyone. Let it be known by everyone that we are readily accessible. Our lives are created to be accessible to others (cf. Mk. 12:28-31). We forfeit the very purpose of our lives when we refuse to live a life of accessibility to others. Or what is the value of life if it is not accessible to others? In fact, an inaccessible life is not worth living. Like an unproductive life it is dead (cf. Jam. 2:26). An inaccessible life is neither scriptural nor Christian. We must make it our policy to be accessible to everyone who needs us.

Second, to be like Jesus in accessibility we must deliberately make time

for people who have need to see us. When we welcome people into our lives, especially the needy, we welcome Christ Himself (Matt. 18:5). An accessible life not only makes us like Christ it draws Him nearer to us (Matt. 18:5)

Third, in order to be as accessible as Jesus we must make people feel welcome when they gain access to us (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). A hostile access is no access at all. Our guests must feel welcome in our company.

Fourth, in order to be accessible like Jesus, we must be willing to give everyone equal access to ourselves. We must attach no qualifications or preconditions to people seeking access to us. There must be no such qualifications or preconditions in the first place. To be accessed on the basis of set qualifications and preconditions is to become unlike Christ.

Fifth, to be accessible like Jesus we must deliberately put away the factors that cause people not to have access to us. Such factors could be anything, but whatever it is we must be willing to do away with it in order to give people access to ourselves.

In the sixth place, if we desire to be like Jesus in accessibility we must stop people from denying others access to ourselves. This is precisely what Jesus did when His disciples tried to stop children from gaining access to Him (Mk. 10:13-16). He made it quite clear that their behaviour or action was unacceptable to Him. Such a behavior is incompatible with His life of accessibility.

Lastly, in order to be as accessible like Jesus we must be ready to do away with all available excuses. Such excuses exist and abound. Like in the story of the good Samaritan such excuses may appear reasonable in human eyes but are wholly unacceptable and untenable before God (Lk. 10:30-37). According to the story, the Priest and the Levite have reasons for passing by on the other side (Lk. 10:31-37). But such reasons do not excuse them before God. In seeking to become like Jesus in accessibility we must be careful not to offer excuses that may not really excuse us before God. Our most common excuse has to do with questions about our security and safety. But God has addressed this concern (Deut. 28:7; Jos. 1:5; 2 Kgs. 6:16; Ps. 33:16-19; Ps. 125:2; Matt. 28:20; Lk. 21:18). God has taken complete charge of the very matter of which we worry most. Thus, we have no valid excuse for not living a life of accessibility like Jesus. Remember that it is not our caution that secures us but God (Matt. 6:27; Ps. 127:1-2)

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN POVERTY

Jesus is also well known for His material poverty while on earth. He was notably poor by every human measurement. He was born of poor parents (Matt. 13:55). He had no home (Matt. 8:20). He had no property of His own. He depended on others to take care of His needs (Matt. 15:41). When He died, He did so in poverty. He was quite contented with His poor family background. For Him, His poverty was not a hindrance to His mission. His poverty was even deliberate and for a purpose (2 Cor. 8:9).

This is another area of life in which we differ from Jesus considerably and markedly. We differ sharply from Him in our attitude to poverty and in our understanding of it. To many of us who claim to belong to Jesus today the word poverty is anathema. We regard poverty as a curse. For us wealth is the only legitimate destiny. We consider any body who is poor as cursed. We measure success in life by the measure of wealth people acquire. We judge that the poor is unsuccessful in life because he is poor. We treat the poor as statistics, not persons. We have preference not for the poor but for the rich in every matter under the sun. We even measure faith by wealth. To us, the rich man is the believer. The poor man is the unbeliever. When we compare our attitude to poverty and our understanding of it to that of Jesus, we can see that we are world apart from Him. We cannot become like Him if we differ from Him in respect of this matter.

To become like Jesus we must have the same attitude and understanding He had concerning poverty. We must bring our attitude and understanding in respect of poverty to be like His own.

The following suggestions will make us to become like Jesus in our attitude and understanding concerning poverty.

First, we must not despise the poor. God created the poor and the rich (Prov. 22:2). Both are loved by God in Christ (Jn. 3:16). Jesus never despised the poor. On the contrary, He welcomed them.

Second, we must not allow poverty to keep us from Christ. Neither wealth nor poverty is advantageous before God (cf. Lk. 12:15). One may be poor in this life but rich before God (Lk. 16:25). On the other hand, one may be rich in this life but poor before God (Lk. 16:25). It is even better to be a poor believer than a rich unbeliever (cf. Prov. 19:22).

Third, it is important to have the right understanding of poverty. Neither wealth nor poverty is an evil or a curse. There is no support in the Scripture for the view that wealth or poverty is an evil or a curse. The Scripture is so clear in this regard that to teach or hold otherwise is nothing but outright rebellion against its authority.

Fourth, we must not put our hope in wealth but in God (1 Tim. 6:17). Wealth is uncertain and perishable (1 Tim. 6:17; Jam. 5:1-3. We cannot serve God and wealth (Lk. 16:13). As believers, we must use our riches responsibly, if not we will become unlike Jesus.

Fifth, we must labour to be rich before God, whether or not we are rich before men (Lk. 16:9; Lk. 18:22; 1 Tim. 6:18). Every body can do this, whether rich or poor. This is how to be truly wealthy (1 Tim. 6:19). Any one who is not rich before God is poor, no matter how rich he may be in this life (Lk. 12:16-21).

Sixth, we must be most careful with our wealth. Wealth can be a hindrance to the Kingdom (Lk. 18:18-25). Wealth is like the ocean wave. It comes with its own dirt. We make it into an idol when we worship it. Our present attitude and understanding concerning poverty, no matter how popular, cannot make us like Christ. To become like Him we must make His attitude and understanding in respect of this matter our own. This is how to become like Him in this matter.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

IN FAITH

Jesus was unequalled in faith. He had an unbroken and unending faith in the Father. Throughout His life and career, He never for one moment disbelieved the Father. In every situation and at every time, He always believed in the Father.

Jesus' faith can be likened to eternity. Like eternity His faith in the Father never ceased. Even during His suffering and crucifixion He did not waiver in His faith in the Father. Like day and night, His faith in the Father never failed. We find no break or interruption of any kind in His faith in the Father. His faith in the Father always remained. He never for any moment or reason stopped believing or trusting in the Father.

Faith is another area in which we who claim to belong to Christ today differ from Him. Unlike Him, our faith often fails. We know nothing of uninterrupted, unbroken, unending, unfailing faith. Our faith is more intermittent and sporadic than permanent and persistent. It is like the wave of the sea tossed back and forth (cf. Jam. 1:6-8). It is quite correct to say of us professing Christians today that we disbelieve more than we believe. It is also correct to assert that many of us professing Christians today are no different from unbelievers in unbelief.

To become like Christ we must discard unbelief and believe like Him. Unbelief is a great stumbling block in the path of becoming like Christ (see Matt. 13:58). No one can ever succeed to become like Christ by remaining or persisting in unbelief. We can only become like Him by believing as He does. Any body who desires to become like Him must always believe, circumstances notwithstanding. There must be nothing that makes us not to believe. There must be no moment when we do not believe. To become like Christ, our faith must be unfailing, unending, and uninterrupted like His own. Unless we believe like Him, we cannot become like Him.

The importance of faith to believers is well documented in Scripture. First, as human beings rely on oxygen to live the physical life, believers rely on faith to live the Christian life. Therefore, faith is the life breath of believers (Heb. 11:6). Believers live when they are exercising faith and die the moment they stop believing (cf. Heb. 11:6).

Second, faith is also the means of obtaining favour from God (Matt. 9:2,22,29; Matt. 21:21-22; Mk. 5:34; Mk. 10:52; Acts 3:16; Gal. 3:9; Jam. 5:15). Without faith no one can receive any favour from Him (Jam. 1:6-8).

Third, faith is the one thing we find Jesus commending and appreciating (Matt. 15:28; Lk. 7:9). Jesus noted and commended it where He found it (see Matt. 15:28; Lk. 7:9).

Fourth, the importance of faith can be seen in the fact that nothing is impossible to faith (Matt. 21:22; Matt. 9:23). With faith all things are indeed possible (Matt. 21:22; Matt. 9:23).

Fifth, faith is important because it is the only means to salvation (Rom. 1:17; Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9). There is no other means to salvation than through faith (see Rom. 1:17; Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9).

Therefore, faith is indispensable as far as becoming like Christ is concerned (see Heb. 11:6). Unbelief is of the devil. Unbelief can never make one like Christ. We become more like Satan than Christ by remaining in unbelief. We must believe like Christ if we are to become like Him. But what do we need to do in order to believe like Jesus? A number of practical measures is readily available.

First, pray for faith (Lk. 17:5-6; cf. Lk. 22:31-32). Through prayer we obtain what we need from God (see Jam. 5:15). Jesus promised to give us whatever we ask of Him (Jn. 14:13-14). If we ask Him for faith, He will surely give it to us as He promised. He does not promise and fail to keep His promise (see Jos. 23:14).

Second, set your faith in Christ alone (Heb. 12:2; Acts 4:12; Acts 20:21). To set one's faith on someone else is to misplace it. Faith that is not set on Christ is neither true nor effective. There is no genuine faith outside of Christ.

Third, stand firm in the faith regardless of the circumstances (1 Cor. 16:13; Heb. 4:14). Faith is faith. The moment one stops believing for whatever reason, even if it is for a short time, he is out of faith (cf. Is. 7:9). We must remain in faith always to become like Christ. Genuine faith is a permanent phenomenon. Once faith ceases to exist, there is no faith left in its place but unbelief. Always believe. Never disbelieve.

Fourth, live by faith and not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20). Faith is the power that propels believers (see Heb. 11:1). Anyone who lives by sight and not by faith cannot live a happy and successful life. He cannot become like Christ at all.

Fifth, let your faith be a living faith and not a dead one (Jam. 2:26). A dead faith is of no use whatever in the business of becoming like Christ, just as a dead person is of no use to his relations. An unexercised faith is dead.

Sixth, resist unbelief. Unbelief can be of no value in becoming like Christ (Matt. 13:58; Matt. 17:19-21). Faith and unbelief are like oil and water. They never mix. They are mutually exclusive. To become like Christ, it is faith, not unbelief that one needs. No one can become like Christ by living in unbelief. Unbelief and becoming like Christ are not related. We can become like Christ only by believing as He did.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN PEACE

Jesus was as well unequalled when it comes to peace. Throughout His life, He did not engage in any violent or rebellious act. He went about His mission peacefully. He abhorred violence (Lk. 22:52-53). Even when He was fiercely opposed and attacked, He responded peacefully. He was never violent. He rejected the use of violence as a method for resolving issues (Lk. 22:49-51). Thus, violence was neither His method nor way of life. On the contrary, His method was peace. When His disciples sought to change this method, He refused to endorse their action (cf. Lk. 22:49-51). He never used the same violent means as His opponents (Lk. 22:52-53). The Scripture calls Him the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). He was indeed a man of peace.

Again, we who claim to belong to Jesus today differ from Him when it comes to peace. We do not even believe in peace as a way of life. Jesus did. We may use the word peace in our speeches but do not believe in the state or reality of it. We also differ from Jesus in respect of peace because we do not seek or work for peace. Peace is not our own chosen or preferred method. Many of us professing Christians prefer violence to peace. Some of us like violence better than peace. Unlike Jesus, peace is not our preferred choice or method or way of life. We cannot become like Jesus unless we are willing and ready to become like Him in His attitude to peace and preference for it.

Peace is not something that a true believer who sincerely desires to become like Jesus can do without. It is even indispensable as far as becoming like Christ is concerned. Peace is God's will for His children (Lk. 2:14). It is God's will that His children not only possess peace but live in it. Any believer who desires and seeks peace is desiring and seeking God's very will.

In addition, peace is the best state of life for believers. There is no better state of life than it.

Furthermore, peace promotes and safeguards the health of believers (Prov. 14:30). Any one who is not living in peace is sick, and most terribly so (Prov. 14:30).

Moreover, God requires peace of His children (Ps. 24:14; Mk. 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 2 Tim. 2:24; Heb. 12:14). It is a virtue that God expects His children to cultivate.

Besides, peace is Jesus' parting gift to His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 14:27). This peace is most abiding and all sufficient (cf. Lk. 24:36).

But what do we need to do in order to attain this peace and become like Jesus?

The first thing to do in order to attain this peace and become like Jesus is to become a child of God through Him (Jn. 1:12-13). Jesus is our peace (Mic. 5:5; Jn. 16:33; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14). Without Jesus and outside of Him there is no peace (Acts 4:12).

Second, to attain peace and become like Jesus we must be willing to take peace as our preferred method for resolving conflicts. We must be ready to support, choose, and even use peace as a mean for resolving conflicts as against every other means.

The third thing to do in order to attain peace and become like Christ is to seek and work for it always. By seeking and working for peace we are seeking and working for God's will. When we refuse to seek and work for peace we are refusing to follow God's will and cannot become like Christ.

Fourth, in order to attain peace and become like Christ we must be willing to renounce violence. Violence may bring immediate and temporary results but not lasting and permanent ones. Only peace can bring lasting and permanent results.

Anyone who rejects peace as a way of life cannot become like Christ. Apart from forfeiting the privilege of becoming like Christ, any one who rejects peace forfeits his own peace. The absence of peace is conflict, turmoil, war and even hell on earth. Unfortunately, this is the state of everyone who refuses to seek and choose peace as Jesus did. Regardless of his pretentions, there is indeed no peace for any one who rejects peace (see Is. 48:22).

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN FORGIVENESS

Jesus was equally without an equal when it comes to showing forgiveness. He lived a forgiving life. He forgave everybody, including those who opposed, persecuted and rejected Him (Lk. 23:34). He forgave, even on the Cross (Lk. 23:34). He forgave all things, including the greatest injury and act of injustice done to Him (cf. Lk. 23:34). It is His nature and way of life to forgive (cf. Matt. 9:6). He is forgiving in His being and Mission (Col. 1:14).

This is another aspect of life in which those of us who claim to belong to Jesus differ essentially from Him. Who among us can claim to be as forgiving as Jesus was? When we compare ourselves with Jesus in respect of forgiveness, do we not readily see the huge difference between Him and us?

First, we are not living a life of forgiveness as He did. Forgiveness is not a way of life for us. It is not part and parcel of our living. We consider it an acceptable way of life today to keep count and record of wrongs people do against us than forgive them. It even delights many of us to keep count and record of people's offences against us than forgive them for those offences.

Second, we differ from Jesus when it comes to forgiveness because we do not actually forgive. We never really forgive. Our forgiving is usually in our lips, and not from our hearts. Great malice remains even after we claim to have forgiven the offender.

Third, we differ from Jesus today in respect of forgiveness because we prefer revenge to forgiveness. It is very popular today to pray for the destruction of those who offend us than for their forgiveness. We rather have them destroyed than forgiven. We take great pleasure in the demise of those who offend us than in their forgiveness.

We cannot become like Jesus unless we become like Him in respect of forgiveness. We must be willing to discard our own erroneous views and attitude concerning forgiveness. Forgiveness is so important to the true believer. We cannot afford to treat it with levity. It is important because Jesus requires it of His followers (Lk. 17:3-4; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; cf. 1 Thess. 5:15). Forgiveness is also important because it is the basis for our own forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15; Mk. 11:25; Lk. 6:37; Lk. 11:4). We forfeit and forgo our own forgiveness when we fail to forgive others (Matt. 6:14-15; Matt. 18:35; Mk.11:25). Furthermore, forgiveness is important because God forgives those we forgive (Jn. 20:23; cf. 2 Cor. 2:10). The

importance of forgiveness can also be seen in the fact that answers to our prayers depend on our willingness to forgive those who offend or wrong us (cf. Matt. 5:23-34).

Therefore, any one who desires to be like Jesus must take forgiveness seriously as He did. He must seek to become like Jesus in the understanding and practice of forgiveness.

What does one need to do in order to become like Jesus in respect of forgiveness?

First, to become like Jesus concerning forgiveness we must resolve never to harbour any malice against anyone, whether they offend us or not (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). Malice and forgiveness are opposed to each other. They cannot function together for the same purpose. The former must be discarded for the latter to thrive. No one can retain malice and attain forgiveness at the same time. Any body who truly desires to be like Christ in respect of forgiveness must keep malice out of his heart.

Second, if we desire to become like Christ in respect of forgiveness, we must never return wrong for wrong or evil for evil (1 Thess. 5:15). To avenge is God's sole duty, not our own (Deut. 32:35). Our duty is to forgive, not to avenge (Lk. 17:3-4; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:15). Whereas believers are called upon to forgive (Lk. 17:3-4; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:15), they are strongly forbidden from taking revenge (Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:17-19). To forgive is of Christ. To avenge is of the devil. In fact, the most appropriate Christian or biblical response to any offence is not revenge but forgiveness (cf. Rom. 12:20-21). Many believers hold the view that the highest form of justice is to avenge. This is entirely wrong and unbiblical (Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:17-19). The saying is quite true that the highest form of justice is forgiveness, not revenge (cf. Rom. 12:20-21). It is equally true that it is more blessed to forgive than to revenge.

Third, to become like Christ in forgiveness we must forgive from the heart. Unless we forgive from the heart our act of forgiveness is not acceptable (cf. Matt. 18:35). An act of forgiveness that does not come from the heart is no forgiveness at all. It is not worth the name.

Fourth, in order to become like Christ in respect of forgiveness we must leave nothing unforgiven (cf. Matt. 11:25). We must forgive as God forgave us (Col. 3:13). When God forgave us in Christ, He left nothing that was not forgiven (cf. Eph. 4:32). We must leave nothing unforgiven as we forgive those who offend us. Like Christ, we must forgive everything.

Fifth, any one who seeks to become like Christ in forgiveness must be ready and willing to forgive always (cf. Matt. 18:21-22). God's forgiveness is never exhausted or unavailable. It is always available. In the

same way, our forgiveness of those who offend us must be inexhaustible and always available. Like Christ, we must never stop forgiving.

An unforgiving man can never become like Christ. Instead, he is like someone carrying a heavy load on his head. The man who carries a heavy load on his head cannot be relieved unless the load is put away. So it is with an unforgiving man. His load remains. It is only after he has forgiven the one who offended him that it is taken away.

An unforgiving person is not acceptable before God (Matt. 5:23-24). Neither he nor his offering nor his worship is acceptable unto God (see Matt. 5:23-24).

Unforgiveness serves the purpose of Satan, not of Christ. Any one who persists in unforgiveness is carrying out the will of Satan, not that of Christ.

One can only become like Christ in respect of forgiveness by forgiving as He did and being as forgiving as He was. We must be willing to abandon our own understanding and attitude concerning forgiveness for that of Christ. There is no other way to become like Christ in forgiveness than this.

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN TRUTH

Jesus was well known for speaking the truth, and living truthfully. He never ever lied, in word or in action. It is quite true of Him that no deceit of any kind was found in Him (Is. 53:9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). He Himself is the truth (Jn. 14:6; cf. Is. 45:19). He is full of truth (Jn. 1:14). He is even the source of truth (Jn. 1:17). Throughout His life, He spoke and lived truthfully.

Truth is one other area in which we who profess the name of Jesus today are quite unlike Him. The difference between us and Jesus in respect of truth appears to be as wide as the distance between East and West. Those of us who follow Jesus today are better known for our lies and falsehood and deception than for truth. In fact, lying, falsehood and deception have become so much part of us today that we have taken them as the norm. We lie in everything, small or great. We lie as it suits us. We are indeed unlike Jesus when it comes to truth. It is true of us professing Christians today as was true of Old Testament believers that truth is nowhere to be found (see Is. 59:14-15; Jer. 5:1; Jer. 7:28; Jer. 9:5-6). Truth is despised today as was the case in the Old Testament (see Amos 5:10). Many professing Christians even hold and teach the view that truth is relative and no longer absolute today. Our attitude to truth today is so unlike that of Christ in every way. Yet truth is so important to the Christian. It is important in so many ways.

First, God requires truth from His children (Ps. 51:6; Jer. 5:3; Zech. 8:14-17). He expects all His children to speak and live truthfully. Second, truth is the basis of acceptance before God (see Ps. 15:1-5; Ps. 145:18). Anyone who comes to God in deceit and falsehood cannot be accepted before Him. Third, truth is important because it is the characteristic of true believers (see Jn. 4:23-24; Jn. 18:37). True believers are known by their truthfulness. Fourth, truth is Jesus' wish for His followers (Jn. 17:17). Anybody who is not truthful is not fulfilling Jesus' desire for his life. It is by living truthfully that we attain Jesus' desire for our lives.

Thus, anybody who desires to be like Jesus must become like Him in respect of truth. But what does one need to do in order to become like Jesus in truthfulness?

First, anyone who seeks to become like Jesus in truthfulness must speak the truth all the time. There must be no time when he is not speaking the truth. Whether in public or private, he must speak the truth at all times.

Second, to be like Jesus in truthfulness one must speak the truth in everything. Whatever it is, he must speak the truth. There must be no aspect or matter of life of which he does not speak the truth. Whatever is his profession, he must speak the truth. There are no areas where the need to speak the truth does not apply. There are no human professions reserved for lies, falsehood and deception.

Third, anyone who desires to become like Jesus in respect of truth must live and act truthfully in all things at all times. Anything short of this is deception and of the devil (Matt. 5:37; Jam. 5:12). Truth must become the habit and way of life of someone who truly seeks to become like Jesus in truthfulness. Without consistent, uninterrupted truthful speaking and living, one cannot become like Jesus in truthfulness.

Anyone who is not living and acting truthfully in all things at all times cannot become like Christ. Such a person is living and acting in lies, falsehood and deception, which belong to Satan (Jn. 8:44). Lies, falsehood, and deception are the distinguishing marks, not of true believers but of unbelievers and false believers (cf. Jn. 8:44). Anyone who professes the Name of Jesus but is not living and acting truthfully is living and acting like the devil, not like Christ (cf. Jn. 8:44). To truly become like Jesus one must live and act truthfully in all things at all times. Anything short of this is of the devil and cannot make one like Christ pertaining to truth (see Matt. 5:37; Jam. 5:12).

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN HIS ATTITUDE TO PUBLICITY

It is important to define what we mean by publicity. By publicity we refer to seeking attention or glory for oneself and doing something only for men to see (Matt. 23:5-7). We are not referring to seeking God's glory and giving genuine testimony to His gracious acts (see Mk. 5:19-20). This is not what Jesus is up against (Mk. 5:19-20).

Jesus was well known for His attitude to publicity. He had reasons to look for it, but He never did. In fact, He deliberately avoided it throughout His life and career (Matt. 8:4; Matt. 9:30; Mk. 1:35; Mk. 5:43). He did nothing for the sake of publicity.

This is another area in which we who claim to belong to Jesus today differ from Him. Unlike Jesus, we love, desire and seek publicity. We even create it and become angry when people do not give it to us. We deliberately court it. There are many of us today who would make no substantial donations in Church unless our donations are publicised.

Publicity is not commended by the Scripture. On the contrary, the Scripture condemns it in entirety (Matt. 6:1). It regards it as an act of hypocrisy before God (cf. Matt. 6:2). As far as the Scripture is concerned, the motivation for it is usually wrong before God (cf. Matt. 6:2). The Scripture indicates that publicity in itself is a useless act before God (see Matt. 6:1). We receive no reward from God for our good deeds when we are doing them in order to gain publicity (Matt. 6:1).

Any one who truly desires to become like Jesus in all aspects of his life must become like Him in his attitude to publicity. But what does one need to do in order to become like Jesus in respect of publicity?

First, we must never seek our own attention or glory in all our actions. We must renounce it, avoid it, and refuse it when people offer it to us. Jesus never sought His own glory (Jn. 8:50). All glory belong to God alone. We steal God's right when we seek glory for ourselves instead of seeking it for Him.

Second, we must deliberately seek God's own glory in all our actions. Again, all glory belongs to Him alone. When our actions do not bring Him the glory due to Him, they are unacceptable.

Third, we must have the right motive in our hearts for all our actions. When our motive is wrong, our action is wrong, no matter our pretense (cf. Matt. 5:28). When our motive is right before God, our action will also be right before Him. Wrong motive will never produce right action.

Anybody who indulges in seeking publicity can never become like Christ. Whoever truly desires to be like Christ must renounce publicity as He did.

CONCLUSION

It is God's will that His children become like Christ. But nobody can become like Christ by his own ability. Like our salvation, becoming like Christ is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is most willing and ready to make anyone like Christ who desires to be so. We must ask Him to make us like Christ. We must surrender our lives to Him to lead and guide and mould until He makes us like Christ. We must give Him full control over all our lives and affairs. There must be no aspect of our lives in which He is not in full control, if we really desire to be like Christ. Our primary duty is to yield ourselves completely to His working and be totally subject to His authority. By so doing He will bring us to become like Christ. Nobody can become like Christ who is not willing and ready to yield his entire life to be led and shaped by the Holy Spirit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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