

Beginning Right

by
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There is nothing more important in the Christian life than beginning right. If we begin right, we can go on right. If we begin wrong, the whole life that follows is likely to be wrong. If anyone who reads these pages has begun wrong, it is a very simple matter to begin over again and begin right. What the right beginning in the Christian life is we are told in John 1:12, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." The right way to begin the Christian life is by receiving Jesus Christ. To anyone who receives Him, He at once gives power to become a child of God. If the reader of this book should be the wickedest man on earth and should at this moment receive Jesus Christ, that very instant he would become a child of God. God says so in the most unqualified way in the verse quoted above. No one can become a child of God in any other way. No man, no matter how carefully he has been reared, no matter how well he has been sheltered from the vices and evils of this world, is a child of God until he receives Jesus Christ. We are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26), and in no other way.

What does it mean to receive Jesus Christ? It means to take Christ to be to yourself all that God offers Him to be to everybody. Jesus Christ is God's gift. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Some accept this wondrous gift of God. Everyone who does accept this gift becomes a child of God. Many others refuse this wondrous gift of God, and everyone who refuses this gift of God perishes. He is condemned already. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

What does God offer His Son to be to us?

1. First of all, God offers Jesus to us to be our sin-bearer. We have all sinned. There is not a man or woman or a boy or a girl who has not sinned (Romans 3:22, 23). "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8, 10). Now, we must each of us bear our own sin or some one else must bear it in our place. If we were to bear our own sins, it would mean we must be banished forever from the presence of God, for God is holy. "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). But God Himself has provided another to bear our sins in our place, so that we should not need to bear them ourselves. This sin-bearer is God's own Son, Jesus Christ: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus Christ died on the cross of Calvary He redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse in our stead (Galatians 3:13). To receive Christ, then, is to believe this testimony of God about His Son, to believe that Jesus Christ did bear our sins in His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24), and to trust God to forgive all our sins because Jesus Christ has borne them in our place. "We all,

like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Our own good works, past, present, or future, have nothing to do with the forgiveness of our sins. Our sins are forgiven, not because of any good works that we do; they are forgiven because of the atoning work of Christ on the cross of Calvary in our place. If we rest in this atoning work we shall do good works, but our good works will be the outcome of our being saved and the outcome of our believing on Christ as our sin-bearer. Our good works will not be the ground of our salvation, but the result of our salvation, and the proof of it. We must be very careful not to mix in our good works at all as the ground of salvation. We are forgiven, not because of Christ's death and our good works, but solely and entirely because of Christ's death. To see this clearly is the right beginning of the true Christian life.

2. God offers Jesus to us as our deliverer from the power of sin. Jesus not only died, He rose again. Today He is a living Savior. He has all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He has power to keep the weakest sinner from falling (Jude 24). He is able to save not only completely, but "completely," all that come to the Father through Him ("Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." -Hebrews 7:25) "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). To receive Jesus is to believe this that God tells us in His Word about Him, to believe that He did rise from the dead, to believe that He does now live, to believe that He has power to keep us from falling, to believe that He has power to keep us from the power of sin day by day, and just trust Him to do it.

This is the secret of daily victory over sin. If we try to fight sin in our own strength, we are bound to fail. If we just look up to the risen Christ to keep us every day and every hour, He will keep us. Through the crucified Christ we get deliverance from the guilt of sin, our sins are all blotted out, we are free from all condemnation; but it is through the risen Christ that we get daily victory over the power of sin. Some receive Christ as a sin-bearer and thus find pardon, but do not get beyond that, and so their life is one of daily failure. Others receive Him as their risen Savior also, and thus enter into an experience of victory over sin. To begin right we must take Him not only as our sin-bearer, and thus find pardon; but we must also take Him as our risen Savior, our Deliverer from the power of sin, our Keeper, and thus find daily victory over sin.

3. But God offers Jesus to us, not only as our sin-bearer and our Deliverer from the power of sin, but also as our Lord and King. We read in Acts 2:36, "Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Lord means Divine Master, and Christ means anointed King. To receive Jesus is to take Him as our Divine Master, as the One to whom we yield the absolute confidence of our intellects, the One whose word we believe absolutely, the One whom we will believe, though many of the wisest of men may question or deny the truth of His teachings; and as our King to whom we gladly yield the absolute control of our lives, so that the question from this time on is never going to be, What would I like to do or what do others tell me to do, or what do others do? but "What would my King Jesus have me do?" A right beginning involves an unconditional surrender to the Lordship and Kingship of Jesus.

The failure to realize that Jesus is Lord and King, as well as Savior, has led to many a false start in the Christian life. We begin with Him as our Savior, as our sin-bearer and our Deliverer from the power of sin, but we must not end with Him merely as Savior; we must know Him as Lord and King. There is nothing more important in a right beginning of the Christian life than an unconditional surrender, both of the thoughts and the conduct, to Jesus. Say from your heart and say it again and again, "All for Jesus." Many fail because they shrink back from this entire

surrender. They wish to serve Jesus with half their heart, and part of themselves, and part of their possessions. To hold back anything from Jesus means a wretched life of stumbling and failure.

The life of entire surrender is a joyous life all along the way. If you have never done it before, go alone with God today; get down on your knees, and say, "All for Jesus," and mean it. Say it very earnestly; say it from the bottom of your heart. Stay on your knees until you realize what it means and what you are doing. It is a wondrous step forward when one really takes it. If you have taken it already, take it again, take it often. It always has fresh meaning and brings fresh blessedness. In this absolute surrender is found the key to the truth. Doubts rapidly disappear for one who surrenders all (John 7:17). In this absolute surrender is found the secret of power in prayer (1 John 3:22). In this absolute surrender is found the supreme condition of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).

Taking Christ as your Lord and King involves obedience to His will, so far as you know it, in each smallest detail of life. There are those who tell us that they have taken Christ as their Lord and King who at the same time are disobeying Him daily in business, in domestic life, in social life, and in personal conduct. Such persons are deceiving themselves. You have not taken Jesus as your Lord and King if you are not striving to obey Him in everything each day. He Himself says, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

To sum it all up, the right way to begin the Christian life is to accept Jesus Christ as your sinner and to trust God to forgive your sins because Jesus Christ died in your place; to accept Him as your risen Savior who ever lives to make intercession for you, and who has all power to keep you, and to trust Him to keep you from day to day; and to accept Him as your Lord and King to whom you surrender the absolute control of your thoughts and of your life. This is the right beginning, the only right beginning of the Christian life. If you have made this beginning, all that follows will be comparatively easy. If you have not made this beginning, make it now.

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