

# Becoming Like Christ

Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 10:24-33; Philippians 3:7-16



We often confuse Bible study and discipleship with memorizing a host of answers. Data is good and forms a basis of content for our lives. Discipleship, however, is so much more than data, doctrine, answers, and things that can be memorized. Being a disciple includes learning, but its focus is on living like the master. What does it mean to become like Christ?

Jesus said it is enough for the servant to be like the Master. That sounds good to me, until I stop and think about it. The words are comforting and soothing only as I continue to miss the point. What would it mean for my life if I were to become like Christ? What about my dreams of home ownership, great vacations, new cars, and all those things that make life easier? What about all the material things I want for my family? What about all the things I want to do with my time, talents, and energy? Would He deem them worthwhile or spurious?

Let's not think about that. We'll just settle for Paul. After all, Paul was fully and simply human, he had no divine nature. His attitudes should be more acceptable. I can't be God, so why bother trying to be like Jesus? Paul just doesn't make it much easier on me, though. He says I have to lay aside all of those things I would otherwise count as important. He considers them garbage—just smelly, icky, foul stuff that has got to go out before it kills us.

But then, Paul was talking about all the bad stuff. He referred to sinful things that got in the way of serving Christ. Wait a minute, did I read that right? He said that all those things like zeal, righteous actions, family standing, and anything else that gave him confidence before others was trash. This is garbage? Is this not our standard means of measuring people, ourselves included? How else do we measure ourselves and find anything worthwhile?

In the public eye, being a Christian is being on a crusade against the great sins of society—public prayer, abortion, unrestrained sexuality, halting displays of religious imagery, and other issues from which we like to find ourselves exempt. Paul compares measures of righteousness from such bases to all he had left behind to follow Christ. Paul had led in the religious culture war. He had led in the advance of doctrinal purity. He had led in proving his righteousness before the world. He declares it reeked like garbage. It was not enough. It took him away from the true measure of righteous faith.

Paul needed an objective that surpassed all that garbage he had pursued. Having people agree with him, holding his lifestyle up as the emblem of righteousness, and demonstrating his zealous determination to achieve his goals was a bunch of bunk. It was all empty and worthless. He cast it aside for something of much greater value. He recognized his true need—to become like Christ Jesus.

His objective was not doctrine. His objective was not promoting the sanctity of life. His objective was not fighting the ills of alcohol and rampant sexual deviance. His objective was not to conform society to act and think and talk and live as he did. His objective was to become like Christ, even to the point of becoming like Christ Jesus in suffering and death. He desired to gain the goal of fellowship with God for which reason Christ had died. To know Christ and live like Christ was so much more important than anything else.

You remember the story of how the term Christian was a pejorative designation? It meant “a little Christ.” Those who want to be like Christ Jesus. There was ridicule associated with the term, for folks knew that this “Christ”, this King, had been killed by the Romans. The “little Christs” wanted to be just like their dead king! What was ridicule for some was ardent desire for Paul. Paul wanted even that: “to fellowship in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

This was not morbid thinking. For Paul it was release from living to gratify empty fleshy desires. It was a release from such a living death—a pointless existence centered on what is not eternal. Jim Elliott’s most famous quote is “He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”<sup>1</sup> Like Paul, Jim Elliott recognized Jesus’ words to be true and worthy as a basis for his own living. If the things of this world are not eternal, they are unworthy of my affections.

Jim Elliott and Nate Saint gave their lives to minister God’s love to the Waodoni in the Equadorian jungles. They knew that they might be killed by the tribe, but along with three others, they risked death to share God’s love anyway. Foolish? They didn’t think so. They thought serving God was more important than protecting their own lives. Five men died that day in 1956. Because of their efforts and commitment, others took up the call and an entire tribe came to faith in Christ Jesus.

Jim Elliott had plenty of facts down, but facts are not the same as discipleship. Information can be written on paper and burned with the trash. The concern of discipleship is not data. Discipleship is about living. It is what we do with the data we have. More importantly, what will we do with the call of Christ Jesus?

Jesus called disciples to learn from him. The call, however, was not to learn facts about God. The call was, “Follow Me.” The whole point of being a disciple was to live as Jesus did. It was to learn surrender to God. It is a call to become a “little Christ,” displaying Christ Jesus before the world around us. We become redemptive, for Christ Jesus was redemptive. We are forgiving, for Christ Jesus was forgiving. We are loving, for Christ was loving. The disciple walks like Jesus, talks like Jesus, loves like Jesus, forgives like Jesus, lives like Jesus, and dies like Jesus.

This is enough: that I may know Him and share in His kind of living. It is enough to become like the master. Oh, it may cost me a few things. I may lose control over my life. I may make people uncomfortable enough they want to kill me. I may lose the things of this world along the path of the disciple. They are really not worth that much, anyway. I cannot keep them forever. Why not let go of them now?

Perhaps Paul, Jim Elliott, and Nate Saint are the ones who really did have control over their lives. They willingly let go of earthly things to gain the eternal. Most let go of the eternal to grasp what death will rip away by force. These men decided to allow discipleship to take hold of their lives completely. They lay aside all those other good things that paled in the presence of Christ Jesus. They decided to live to become like Christ. This is enough for the disciple. It is the only thing that is enough. All the rest is just garbage I’ve not had the courage to haul away. Shall we settle for less than enough? If so, we become fools.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

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<sup>1</sup> Elliott, Elisabeth. *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliott*. Harper: New York, 1958.