



THE ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN

After the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the disciples' lives were forever changed.

Christian, when you accepted Jesus as the one who died on the cross for your sins and trusted Him as Lord, your life was changed—you became a new person. Still, you had to learn what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

The disciples—even after sharing his life for three years, even after being witnesses of His resurrection and His ascension—still needed to learn what it meant to be a Christian.

These early verses in the Book of Acts record the ascension of Jesus; but also how Jesus Christ opened up a wider world for the disciples. These same things are ours to use in our Christian walk and to grow the church. (Read Acts 1:1-8)

1. Spiritual power

A garage man in Mangum, Oklahoma, went to help a lady whose car had stalled. After checking it out he informed her that it was out of gas. “Will it hurt,” she asked, “if I drive it home with the gas tank empty?”

It would be cheaper to drive cars without gas but anyone who has ever tried it has found out that it just does not work. The same is true in the Christian life.

Christians who attempt to go on without divinely provided power find that they are able to coast down hill for awhile; even roll up a little grade for a moment. But a time comes when the road will not permit further coasting; then their life is stalled.

Fortunately, God provides the power for us. But we have to be aware of it and willing to use it. Jesus said in Acts 1:8a “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...”

We have spiritual power for our Christian lives, so that we can be an essential Christian—able to make a difference in our church, community and world. Where does this power come from? From the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Every Christian gets the Holy Spirit. His power is ours in our Christian walk. This is not insignificant. The Greek word for power is *dunamis*.

From this come our English words dynamite (a powerful explosive), dynamic (referring to a powerful person), and dynamo (a power-producing machine).

Jesus gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer you have received this gift. You have the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is worldly power and there's spiritual power. The royal wedding this past Friday was beautiful. Loved Kate's dress! She is now "Her Royal Highness Duchess Catherine of Cambridge," and someday may be the Queen.

But it remains to be seen what impact she will have in the world. As I thought about her I thought about two other extra-ordinary women from a few years past: Princess Diana was one. It was said that a third of the world tuned in to Diana's funeral.

I also thought of Mother Teresa. When Mother Teresa's died, the world lost a great humanitarian. As different as they were in age, responsibilities, appearances, material possessions, and social class—both were women of tremendous power, the power of influence.

Other kinds or powers include physical power. At Young Lives Ablaze three weeks ago at Hoffmantown, a group of young Christian athletes called Team Impact, demonstrated feats of strength to the Children gathered there.

They are strong and powerful and use that physical power to attract people to Jesus.

There is the power of might when someone or some nation forces someone or some nation to do something.

The United States has had the power of might because we have more guns and bombs than anyone else. We used to have more influence, but that is waning now.

There is also power of authority—the IRS has authority to tax you, to fine you, to garnish your wages, to put a lien on your house, and all backed up by the authority of the government.

These are not the kinds of power Jesus meant when He talked about Holy Spirit power. I think that this spiritual power is the ability, the capability and the possibility to live a Christian life.

We cannot be an essential Christian in the strength of our own flesh.

The word, “power” as used here in Acts, means that when we become a Christian, through the Holy Spirit, God gives to us the ability, the capability, and the possibility to serve Him and live an abundant Christian life.

You have that power—you have the ability and the capability of living a pleasing life to God. You have God’s Holy Spirit in your life.

And you have the possibility because you choose whether or not to use that power to live a victorious Christian life.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, said, “Many Christians estimate difficulty in the light of their own resources, and thus they attempt very little, and they always fail. All giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His power and His presence to be with them.” (John Maxwell, *Be All You Can Be* (Victor, 1987), p. 15)

To live in the world of Holy Spirit power doesn’t mean that you become a fanatic or religious freak. It doesn’t mean that you have to speak in some unknown language or have some ecstatic emotion.

It means that within every Christian, there is a godly power available for us to experience and enjoy.

You may hear someone ask, “Have you been anointed?” If you are a believer you can confidently reply, “Yes.” The Spirit of the Lord is upon you. You have been anointed. You don’t have to pray for it. You don’t have to ask for it. You already have it.

A second thing is needed to be an essential Christian:

2. Spiritual passion

Acts 1:6, So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

After the cross and the resurrection the disciples were changed men and women. Yet they were still consumed with the thought that Jesus was going to restore the earthly kingdom of Israel.

They were confused; their passion was directed toward an earthly kingdom; it was for their own kind only. What they were really saying to Jesus was, “Jesus, are you now going to get rid of those terrible Romans and set up your Kingdom here in Jerusalem?”

They were thinking only about themselves. Now let’s be honest—aren’t we guilty of doing the same thing? Too often our passions are limited and narrow.

“Where do your passions lie?” What if we start growing to the point that you would have to give up your S.S. classroom?

What if I asked all of us to move closer to the front so that our visitors would have no difficulty finding a place to sit? What if I asked you to start parking farther out so that the closer parking could be used by visitors?

Some of you don’t like it when I talk this way. We like our own little comfort zones, and don’t like them challenged.

It’s good when you are a little restless and somewhat uncomfortable, yet excited and enthusiastic and wanting to be a part of something bigger than just you. This is what passion is.

When the Crystal Palace Exhibition opened in 1851, people flocked to London’s Hyde Park to behold the marvels. One of the greatest marvels back then was steam. There were team plows, steam locomotives, steam looms, steam organs, and even a steam cannon.

The most popular exhibits that year and first-prize winner was a steam invention with seven thousand parts. When it was turned on, its pulleys, whistles, bells, and gears made a lot of noise, but, ironically, the contraption didn’t do a thing! Now, seven thousand moving parts makes a lot of commotion... but it has no practical use. [GF 636]

We don’t want our church to be hundreds of parts spinning and turning and making a lot of noise, but accomplishing very little for Jesus.

When our passion is self-centered, we can have all kinds of whistles and bells of programs, yet accomplish little for the Kingdom.

Jesus redirected the disciple’s passion. He puts inside them a new, spiritual passion to share with their world the mission of the resurrected, living Messiah. Look at v. 8b...

8b...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus is the Messiah, not just of the Jews, but also of the hated Samaritans and the despised Gentiles. He is the Savior for the world. This is an important lesson that should help direct our passion.

Jesus wants His followers to have a passion for His Kingdom, not just for people who are like us, but for every person. To do that we have got to enlarge our perspective.

3. Spiritual perspective

When his followers asked if now he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus replied in v. 7, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

When-oh-when will we learn that God’s timetable cannot be deciphered? The disciples were thinking in the here and now—restoring the glorious Israel of the past.

They want to know God’s timetable: “Is it now You are going to restore the Kingdom?” Jesus replies, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set.”

Jesus wants us to understand that we cannot look forward into the mysteries of the future. No one can decipher and determine God’s timetable.

Since this is true, and we know it, we are to live our lives in absolute confidence that God is at work in this world.

Here’s how that changes our perspective: We understand that the here and now is not all there is—that there is heaven waiting for us.

And secondly, with this confidence we now live in the expectancy of eternity. Knowing that we are part of God’s eternity and that God is working according to His plan and timetable, not ours.

Why is this so important? Well, when our perspectives are changed to an eternal perspective, we will wake up every day with a kind of expectancy and anticipation.

We will know that God is working and that today and tomorrow are in His hands. That’s an exciting way to live! When we live in godly anticipation we will see those divine appointments when God intervenes in a moment—He acts, He speaks, He works.

Application:

Every Christian should want to be an Essential Christian. It is impossible in your own strength. Jesus understood this and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to every Christian. As a believer you have this special Gift available in you for every area of your Christian life. Let the Holy Spirit work through you.

Pray for Jesus to open for you a world of spiritual power. Pray for a passion for Jesus' church and family.

Pray for God to explode your passions and give you a concern and burden for people in the world in a way you have never known. Pray for a new perspective.

See your life and your time in God's hands with God working in your life. God wants to open up a wider world to you today. Would you ask Him and receive from Him what He has for you?