

Lesson
5

Is Being a Christian Enough?

. . . Perhaps I should consider my actions.

Tom Watson's business was successful and growing. He did not mind hard work and expected the same from his employees. He had no patience with laziness and did not hesitate to reprimand an employee who was not producing enough. And Tom was a Christian.

He was active in his church and brought the same zeal to his responsibilities there as he did to his job and business. But many times he felt his way of doing things was resented by other Christians. Often sermons seemed to speak against his actions while they appeared to praise the results his actions produced. Tom was forced to admit to himself that though he could defend his actions as being right, sometimes he did not feel pleased about them on the inside. One thing he was sure of: there was a conflict in him that had not been resolved.

Maybe you've asked yourself, "What is my true self? Am I what the Bible says I am, or am I what I feel I am?" Even when we study the Scriptures, it



may be hard for us to understand what we are. Are we soldiers or peacemakers? Courageous or meek? Patient or aggressive? In this lesson we will compare what the Bible *says we are* with our own experience and actions. We will discover what God considers to be important. Then we will study how we can actually become what God expects us to be. This is our true goal.

In this lesson you will study . . .

How God Sees Us

What Is Important to God

Fulfilling God's Expectations

This lesson will help you . . .

- Describe the way God sees us.
- Explain the importance of Christ's work and our response to it.
- State reasons why we can fulfill what God expects of us.

HOW GOD SEES US

Objective 1. Choose a description of how God sees us.

As we try to discover how God sees us, let us begin by examining what the Bible says we are.

What the Bible Says

We may hear some Christians talk about what they are “in Christ.” It almost seems to be a language of fiction or fantasy. But in fact, the Bible does describe our position.

In Ephesians 1 we are told that we have blessings in the heavenly world (v. 3). We are holy and without fault (v. 4). We have been chosen to be God’s people because of His purpose and decision (v. 11). In chapter 2 we read that we are alive with Christ and have been raised with Him in the heavenly world (vv. 5-6). God has made us what we are (v. 10), and we are fellow citizens with God’s people and members of His family (v. 19).

We find these same ideas in 1 Peter 2:9. We read there that we are a chosen race, royal priests, and a holy nation. And there are many more descriptions besides these. What higher names or titles could be suggested?



For You To Do

1 Read each of the verses referred to below. Circle the letter in front of the reference to a verse that gives another description of what we are “in Christ.”

- a) Ephesians 2:22
- b) Ephesians 4:1
- c) Ephesians 4:17

What We Experience

Yet in our actual experience, we find a struggle. We are subject to tiredness, hunger, thirst. We have ambitions and dreams. We feel driven on the inside and find attractions on the outside. Temptation to sin is not taken away. When we think we have conquered in one area, we find that the battle has just shifted to another.

Some of us as children of God do not find ourselves in perfect harmony with other believers. We experience fear, hostility, and frustration. God seems to give us names with meanings that reach to the sky. We are all too well acquainted with our limits, and they are more identified with the earth than the sky.

In addition, our actions seem to come more out of our earthly nature than our heavenly one. It would be easy if really praying one time were enough to solve our problems. But instead we often find that our prayers did not solve the problems at all. We *still* faced temptation and frustration.

How do all of these difficulties relate to finding God’s design for our lives? It is relatively easy to make life decisions—such as deciding whether to be a teacher, pastor, or doctor. But God’s will for us includes more than simply making life decisions. It includes all our actions. The real difficulty is *how* to do what we *already know* we should do.

We place importance on things that are unimportant and treat things that are important as if they were not. Our relationships become complicated. Our goals show that we are double-minded. When we have trouble making life decisions, it is because our daily decisions are not good.

It becomes evident from this, then, that knowing about our position in Christ is not enough if it has little to do with our attitudes, actions, goals, or desires.



For You To Do

2 Perhaps you have realized that in some areas of your life, you have difficulty in actually living according to what you are in Christ. Opposite each area listed (left) mark an X under *None* for no difficulty, *Some* for some difficulty, or *Much* for a great deal of difficulty. As you continue to study, expect God to show you ways of solving the problems you have indicated.

	None	Some	Much
Moving toward worthwhile goals			
Overcoming selfish motivations			
Making correct decisions			
Dealing with temptation			
Relating well to others			
Concentrating on important matters			

What God Sees

After children are grown, parents often remember only the good times of their children’s earlier years. The difficulties of raising them are forgotten—the nights without sleep, the childhood sicknesses, the vomiting, the toilet training, all the “unpleasant” times. Only the moments of closeness and affection are remembered. A child who was difficult to train is often remembered as an angel. Is this how God sees us—through biased eyes? Absolutely not!

God has an unyielding, absolute standard of righteousness. He calls us “saints,” “His children,” “priests.” What does He see when He looks at us?

When God looks at us, He sees us exactly as we are. He sees our natural appetites—which are not sin—but He also sees the old or sinful nature that takes a lifetime battle to conquer. He sees selfishness manifested in a variety of ways. He sees good beginnings that too often end in less-than-hoped-for results.

God saw Noah with faith to survive the Flood (Genesis 7:6-10), yet He also saw him drunk (Genesis 9:20-21). He saw Moses in his faith (Exodus 14:13-14) and in his anger and impatience when he smote the rock (Numbers 20:11-12). He saw David writing great psalms or songs of praise and worship (2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18). Yet He also saw him with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). He saw Peter with his inconsistencies (Matthew 16:17; Luke 22:54-62) and Paul with his impatience with Mark (Acts 15:37-40). And which of the Twelve were faithful to Christ through His suffering? None! He was alone (Matthew 26:56).

Imperfect, failing saints. But still saints!

God sees us as clearly as He saw the people we read about in the Bible. And if our lives were recorded in as vivid detail as theirs are, the same pattern would be visible. It *is* visible to Him.



For You To Do

- 3 Circle the letter in front of the paragraph below that most completely describes how God sees us.
- a) We are risen with Christ and are God’s children. Our position is that of priests and fellow citizens in His family.
 - b) We are a holy nation, chosen by God to belong to Him. Yet we also have times of failure and inconsistency.
 - c) We are human and subject to failure. We have times of frustration, and often our relationships with others are not right.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO GOD

Objective 2. *Identify a description of what God considers to be most important.*

We have considered what the Bible says we are and the facts of our daily experience. But what is important to God? Does He place more value on our position as saints or on our behavior?

This question can be answered clearly; the answer to it includes two aspects that must be considered.

The Work of Christ

God places priority or highest value on the work of Jesus Christ—on His righteousness, His perfection, His obedience. Both Scripture and reason indicate this clearly.

The message of salvation is that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, the just for the unjust, that *He* might bring us to God. He is the cause, while our coming to God is the effect. *His* righteousness causes our righteousness!

So when God calls us saints (and we do not feel or behave as saints), He is not seeing a false picture. He is seeing the final result of a process—the cause of which is already clear and complete and the effect of which is already perfectly assured. He is not limited to time in the sense of needing unfolding knowledge. He sees the end (or the process) from the beginning. He sees the end *in* the beginning.



For You To Do

- 4 God can truly call us “saints” or “holy ones” because He
- a) knows that we want to serve Him.
 - b) does not see our faults and failings.
 - c) sees what we will become.

It is reassuring to consider the cause of our salvation. Colossians 1:15-27 clearly states the priority the work (and person) of Christ has in the plan of God. Christ has delivered us; our

redemption is in Him. He is the visible likeness of the invisible God; He is the creator of all things. He existed before everything and is the upholder of all. He has *first place* (priority) in everything, including what God sees. He is the cause, actually: “Christ is *in* you . . . you will share in the glory of God” (Colossians 1:27).

Your Response

The result of the cause (Christ and His work) is assured: sainthood is consummated, the glory of the children of God is revealed (Romans 8:19; 1 John 3:1-2)! If the time needed for the process is not considered (since God is not subject to it), then cause and effect happen together. That is, in God’s view, we already are what we will be.

The assurance is *great*, yet your part is important. You remain significant, not by adding to the work of Christ, but by remaining *in* the process (Colossians 1:23).



For You To Do

5 Suppose a believer you know were to ask you this: “What does God consider most important—what Christ has done for me or how I respond to His work?” Circle the letter in front of the best reply.

- a) God considers the work of Christ to be more important because He knows that our human weaknesses make us unable to participate in the process. This means that God does not consider our response to be significant.
- b) God considers both to be important in different ways. He considers Christ’s work to have priority as the cause. Our response is important because we must remain in the process for the effect to occur.

We recognize the difference between what God calls us and what we view ourselves to be. Our goal is clear—His cause, His plan fulfilled in us. But now we must discover how we can cooperate to make God’s view of us become true in our experience. We must find out how we can *be* the saints that we *are*.

FULFILLING GOD’S EXPECTATIONS

Objective 3. *Recognize reasons why we can become what God expects us to be.*

The wrestling, the battle of the Christian experience, the unsureness, the tensions of the Christian life all arise because we are trying to find an answer to this question: *How do we daily choose God’s design for us?*

Most of the instruction of the New Testament relates to this question. Its passages that tell us how to *become* Christians are short; its passages that tell us how to *act* like Christians are comparatively long.

The ability to change comes from two basic storehouses of strength. The first is the reality of the work of Christ in His defeat of the law of sin and death. The second is the particular power of good to overcome and replace evil.

Christ Was Victorious Over Sin

The first reason why we can fulfill God’s design in our lives is because Christ won the victory over sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us. It has *influence*, but not *dominion*.

How real was the victory and work of Christ? Christ's work was not an idea or thought. It was a real event; it happened at a certain time in a certain place. And it was a real battle. There was real bloodshed, real death, real resurrection, real victory. It was real because the power of sin was real.

In the history of humankind, no one has ever escaped from the power of the law of sin (Romans 3:23). This is enough evidence of its reality. But though there is evidence to prove the reality of this law, there is also evidence to prove the victory Christ had over it. The resurrection was examined for forty days by many people (Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). There was no question. Christ had risen!

The power of sin was based on Adam's fall. The victory over sin is through the obedience of one, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:18-19). This victory is the "life" triumphing over the "law," hope over hopelessness, the purpose of God over the foolishness of humanity, love over impulse.

You can have righteousness and freedom from the law of sin because, in a real sense, Christ died for your sin. He was your substitute. Satan's method of tempting you is to discourage you, make you doubt the reality of your victory. He uses intimidation, accusation, deceit. *But you are free!*



For You To Do

- 6 Sin no longer has dominion or rule over us because
 - a) Adam's disobedience brought sin on the whole human race.
 - b) the real victory of Christ overcame the real power of sin.
 - c) the Bible explains to us how to act like Christians.



Good Overcomes Evil

The second reason why it is possible for us to fulfill God's design in our lives is because good (from God) triumphs over evil (from Satan). Scripture reveals this fact to tell us how to defeat the old or sinful nature that causes so much heartache.

Sinful practices are not just stopped. They are replaced. Sin is not creative; it is perverse. That is, it is the wrong use of energy, skills, and action that could be used in a right way. So the Bible gives several examples to show the good that will replace evil. These good deeds are not just superficial actions; they are expressions of the new nature instead of the old. Our part in the warfare that rages between flesh and spirit is to replace evil with good.



The old nature lives on falsehood (the gift of Satan, the father of lies). The new nature expresses itself in truth. So we are to stop lying and replace it with speaking the truth (Ephesians 4:25). In the next exercise you will study more examples of this process.



For You To Do

7 Read in your Bible the following verses. Below the description of each evil action, describe the good action the verse says should replace it.

- a Ephesians 4:28; robbing and stealing
.....
- b Ephesians 4:29; using harmful words
.....
- c 1 Peter 3:9; returning evil for evil
.....
- d Galatians 5:16-26; doing the evil actions our human nature wants
.....
- e 3 John 11; imitating what is bad
.....

This process shows a pattern that is found throughout Scripture. Satan has always tried to put evil action in the place of good. That is what brought about the Fall (Genesis 3). We are to put good action in the place of evil.

To act rightly is not to become *self*-righteous. It is to use the power of our mind and will on the side of the new nature, which is created in holiness. As God works in those ideas that are beyond our power, we turn *our* power and ability away from doing evil to doing good and giving expression to the “Christ in us.” This is the process of *becoming* (and we are *all* still in that process).

When we accept the fact that we are in that process, several results will follow. We will find it easier to accept others who are still in the process. We will understand our own battles better. We will be strengthened in resisting temptation by knowing how to respond. We will use the power of habit, a power that Satan so often uses, to make ourselves stronger rather than weaker. That is, we will develop good habits to replace the evil ones of our sinful nature.



For You To Do

8 We have studied some reasons why we can fulfill God’s expectations. Circle the letter in front of each statement that gives one of those reasons.

- a) God expects us to be completely righteous and perfect in all that we do.
- b) Sin has influence over us, but not dominion.
- c) The good that comes from God is victorious over the evil that comes from Satan.
- d) The battles of the Christian life arise from our trying to become what we already are.
- e) We share in the real victory that Christ won by His triumph over sin.

It is possible for us to fulfill God's expectations. We can be successful because Christ has won the victory over sin, and the power of His life in us can overcome evil with good.



For You To Do

- 9 As you conclude your study of this lesson, take a few moments to find and read 1 John 3:1-3, 9-10 in your Bible. Then in your notebook, write answers to the following questions.
- a What hope do we have (v. 2)?
 - b Why do we not continue to sin?



Check Your Answers

- 5 b) God considers both to be important in different ways.
- 1 a) Ephesians 2:22
- 6 b) the real victory of Christ overcame the real power of sin.
- 2 Your answer. Any difficulties you have are really opportunities for victory!
- 7 a) Work and give to others. (Notice: we will relate to things, either by stealing or by working and giving.)
- b) Use helpful words that do good. (Notice: words will be used. The question is which habit we will develop.)
- c) Return blessing for evil.
- d) Do the good actions the Spirit wants.
- e) Imitate what is good.
- (Your answers will be in your own words.)
- 3 b) We are a holy nation, chosen by God to belong to Him. Yet we also have times of failure and inconsistency.
- (The other choices do not give *both* sides of what God sees.)
- 8 b) Sin has influence over us, but not dominion.
- c) The good that comes from God is victorious over the evil that comes from Satan.
- e) We share in the real victory that Christ won by His triumph over sin.
- 4 c) sees what we will become.
- 9 a) That we will be like Christ
- b) God's very nature lives in us.
- (Your answers will be in your own words.)