

More Like Jesus

April 2005

One does not have to be around Embury Hills very long before hearing a sentiment like: “Our main goal in life is to be more like Jesus.” From the perspective of an “outsider,” as I was two years ago, it made a favorable impression on me to hear this frequently spoken.

But what do we mean when we say this? First, we must not use this as a mere slogan. The Israelites of old continued to acknowledge God in their speech even as their hearts wandered far from Him. One of their favorite habitual phrases was “*As the Lord lives ...*,” and they prefaced everything with this empty line to justify their wickedness:

“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem ... and seek in her open places ... if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ surely they swear falsely.”
[Jeremiah 5:1-2]

God told of a coming day when:

*“You shall swear, ‘The Lord lives,’
in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness.”* [Jeremiah 4:2]

By the same principle, when we say we want to be like Jesus, we must mean it. But, again, what does it mean to be like Jesus?

First, it means to follow His example. As Peter contemplates the suffering that inevitably comes upon the righteous, he points us back to Jesus: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pet 2:21). Jesus’ demeanor, words and actions should be a pattern for us (“example” is from the Gk. *hupogrammos* and literally meant “an underwriting (from *hupographo*, ‘to write under, to trace letters’ for copying by scholars,” Vine, p. 213). Truly, consistency demands that “*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked*” (1 Jn 2:6).

But surely there is more to our relationship with Jesus than merely trying to copy Him. After all, there have been various humans that I have tried to emulate, but this only went so far as one or two attributes that I wanted to incorporate into my own life.

The drive to be like Jesus goes deeper than this. It is a full abandonment of self-will and self-identity – that Self which has put me at odds with God so often in my life – and the replacement of it with the very mind or character of God as manifested in Jesus.

*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;
and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* [Galatians 2:20]

Paul’s stated purpose in life was to so completely absorb the spirit of Christ into his consciousness that a visible, living presence of Jesus could be seen by other men who interacted with him ... “*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*” (2 Cor 4:10).

But this was not some mere apostolic duty. It wasn’t reserved for the “super-spiritual.” It must be the mindset of everyone who identifies himself as a *Christian*. It was God’s plan all along that His people would be “*conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*” (Rom 8:29).

“But why?” howls the protester. “Why should I give up my only life for someone else?” Ah, friend, your life is *already* gone. Our present state is not *life* but *existence*. So long as we exist apart from union with Christ, we are merely treading water in a river that is flowing toward the falls. “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*” (1 Jn 5:11-12). Jesus modeled total fellowship with God. That is the only life worth living. That is the only life there is. That is why we strive to be more like Jesus.