

Wonderful milestones in the growth of a Christian

Jason has asked the question: What is the difference between being made dead to my flesh and being conformed to the likeness of Christ?

Phil 3:8-11 **...That I may gain Christ and be found in Him** (now, and at His second coming)...**being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** NKJV

A good question, the two are related since part of being conformed to Christ is to be conformed to His death. This means being made dead to sin, dead to my sin nature, to the world, to the law and to Satan. For an answer, let's look at some of the beautiful milestones in the intended spiritual growth of all Christians:

CONVERTED TO CHRIST

(1.) I am born again the moment I believe, with my heart, God's words – for those words are the grace of God (1 Pet. 1:23 KJV and Eph. 2:8). Specifically, those of His words that tell me Christ died for my sins and rose again from the dead so that I could be offered God's forgiveness (1 Cor. 15:1-4, Acts 26:18). It is this first entry of God's words into my heart that makes it new again, clean from sin and righteous (John 15:3). By believing these first words part of the nature of Jesus Christ, who is the living word of God, has entered into me; that is, into my heart or spirit (Rev. 3:20). The process of being conformed to the likeness of the Son of God has therefore begun (Rom. 8:29). But I'm still very much alive to, meaning my will is still largely controlled by, my human nature.

A SEMI-CARNAL (often in the flesh) CHRISTIAN LIFE - PARTIALLY SAVED

(2.) While I do have a new heart with the beginnings of the life of Christ in it, I'm still saddled with my old human nature or flesh, which constantly draws me back into the sin of my old ways. But now my conscience bothers me when I give way to them. I haven't yet, out of gratitude, made an irrevocable surrender of my life to God, therefore "self" often still rules. I'm miserable when sin separates from God (Isa 59:2). But I'm so glad to be taught that if I repent God will re-forgive me (1 John 1:9) or, if I believe with my heart a fresh word from Him it will re-cleanse me and restore me to peace with Him. As my heart does believe some more of God's words I notice I'm being changed little by little; even some old habits amazingly just drop off. This encourages me and I begin to want to be totally free from sin; I keep trying but find I can't free myself (Rom 7:19 & 24).

SURRENDERED AND CONSECRATED TO GOD

(3.) My understanding of how much God loves me has grown, as has my own genuine love for God. I will later learn that this love comes entirely from Christ's

nature in me, for the word of God is the love of God (1 John 2:5). Since I do love God more I have an increasing desire, and even that comes from God (Phil. 2:13), to surrender my life fully to Him and to always do His will, even though right now I still keep stumbling back into sin. But I've come to hate this sin and love righteousness (Heb. 1:9). One day love moves me, as a conscious act of my will, to unconditionally surrender my will and consecrate my life to God. I do.

BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT – JESUS IS NOW MY LORD

(4.) Because now I really am willing to obey God, although not able yet to fully do so, I'm brought, by God, to the truth in the scriptures of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). I ask God to fill me with His Spirit and, on the authority of His word, I believe that He has (Luke 11:13). God now takes over, by His Spirit, the control, that is the Lordship, of my life (1 Cor. 12:3). His purposes include:

- a) To anoint and empower me by His Spirit as His witness, to preach the gospel and to both become and to make others, His disciples (Mk 16:15, Mt 28:19).
- b) To teach me to pray believing prayers in God's will (Mt 21:22, 1 Jo 5:14-15).
- c) To cause me to overcome my spiritual enemies by winning thought life battles (2 Cor 10:4-5) like: always forgiving and casting my cares on God (1 Pet 5:7).
- d) To guide me into all the truth of God's teachings and sweep away falsehoods.
- e) To lead me in all my decisions and cause me to walk in the light of His words.
- f) To speed up transforming me into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).
- g) By His Spirit filling my spirit, to enable me to have direct fellowship with God.
- h) To reveal that God is my Father (Rom 8:15) (But I'm not yet dead to my flesh)

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST AND DEAD TO MY SINFUL FLESH

(5.) Part of the truth of God's word that the Holy Spirit reveals to my spirit is my unchangeably wicked human nature, my flesh, where the seat of sin in me resides. Sin is everything that, out of pride, resists God and wants to be independent from Him (Rom 7:17-18). I see that while I remain alive to this sin nature, sin will and does constantly ensnare me and separate me from God (Isa 59:2). It also hardens my heart towards Him (Heb. 3:13) and stops me from bearing the good fruit of His living words into the lives of others (John 15:4).

Thank God, my loving and all providing Father, He, by His Spirit, now opens my heart to those of His words which tell me I must now believe that I have been crucified with Christ; Words such as: **"Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh"** (Gal. 5:24). It is unveiled to me that I can instantly share in Christ's own crucifixion to His flesh on the cross (Rom 6:6) by simply believing these words brought to me by the Holy Spirit. I take God at the word He speaks to me and believe what He says to be so. Now I know, at last, that my old sinful nature is crucified with Christ and I've ceased to be a slave of sin, now I only serve God. Oh what a freedom this is – the freedom to not to have to sin against God.

BEING SANCTIFIED AS A SAINT OF GOD

(6.) My sanctification, which is the second great and necessary pillar of Salvation (2 Thess. 2:13) – conversion being the first – is now in full operation: I'm dead, in Christ, to sin; I'm alive continually to God, my will is in complete submission to my own spirit, which is filled with God's Spirit, thus I live "in Christ" and in His resurrection life. I remain dead to sin as long as I continue, daily, to re-affirm my belief that my old sin nature is crucified with Christ, in other words to pick up my cross daily (Luke 9:23). God's Spirit can now, without sin's devastation, continue to rapidly conform me to Christ by the engrafting of more of His words into my heart, as I believe them (Jam. 1:21). With this purpose:

Gal 4:19 **...Until Christ is formed in me,**

Eph 4:13 **Until I come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure (to the degree) of the stature (the spiritual maturity) of the fullness of Christ.** In order that:

John 15:5 (Jesus)...**He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit** (meaning he speaks God's words into the lives of others by the anointing of God's breath, His Spirit); **for without Me you can do nothing.** (Vs. 8) **By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.**

LIVING AS A FRUIT BEARING DISCIPLE OF CHRIST - TILL HE COMES

(7.) Now I am dead to self and my life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). I remain dead to sinful self as long as I pick up my cross daily (Luke 9:23) and daily I renew my inner man in the knowledge of God, by His word (Col. 3:10, 2 Cor. 4:16). By continual obedience I stay full of God's Spirit in unbroken fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3), hence I pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17). By Christ living in me I am enabled to fulfill God's calling on my life to be His disciple and to speak the good fruit of His living words (Himself) into the hearts of others. As I believe, He keeps me from falling so that I will be found, without sin, abiding "in Christ" at His coming (Jude 24, Phil. 3:9-11, 1 Jo 2:28,).

1 Thes. 3:13 **So that He may establish your hearts blameless (without sin) in holiness (sanctified) before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.** NKJV

2 Thes. 1:10 **When He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints (the ones He has sanctified), and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.** ESV