

## STANDARD B: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?

# Lesson 6: What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus as a Way of Life?

### Introduction

Once there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was not very tall. He collected taxes among the Jews for the Roman government. He may have even cheated some people. The people in his own town did not like him. One day Zacchaeus learned that Jesus was coming to the town where he lived. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. As Jesus came near, people pushed Zacchaeus aside. Being short, Zacchaeus could not see Jesus.

So, Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree. He could see Jesus from there and then go home. Soon Jesus came under the tree where Zacchaeus was sitting. Jesus stopped, looked up, and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:6). Zacchaeus was happy. He came down and led Jesus to his house where they enjoyed a meal together. Jesus brought the Good News of the Gospel to Zacchaeus, who received it gladly. Jesus said on that day salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus. Jesus also said He had come to find and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Out of joy and thanksgiving, Zacchaeus said to Jesus, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8). This was a dramatic change from what Zacchaeus had been before Jesus came to him. What caused the difference?

**Question:** Why did the people of the town not like Zacchaeus?

**Question:** Why did Jesus go to Zacchaeus’s house?

### A. Following Jesus Means Living as a Forgiven Person.

The difference was that Zacchaeus was a forgiven man. He was a sinner who had been forgiven and received by Jesus. Jesus, who was the Gospel in flesh, changed the way Zacchaeus thought about himself and others. In the past, Zacchaeus was selfish, but that changed when God forgave him. Before he met Jesus, Zacchaeus was selfish. But God’s forgiveness, changed him. Zacchaeus now thinks of the poor and anyone he might have cheated. He wanted his actions to show his thanks for God’s forgiveness. He began to act toward others as Jesus had acted toward him. Zacchaeus wanted the Gospel to shape his whole life. He was a changed person because of God’s forgiveness.

**Question:** What caused a change in Zacchaeus?

**Question:** What does being forgiven mean to you?

### B. Following Jesus Means Living as a Changed Person.

Receiving forgiveness changes a person. Zacchaeus rejoiced that Jesus had forgiven him and restored him to God's favor. Zacchaeus was a changed person. Immediately he wanted to do something that would show how grateful he was for God's forgiveness and restoration. So, without being forced to do so, Zacchaeus gladly told Jesus he would give half of his possessions to the poor. If he had cheated anybody out of anything, he would pay back four times the amount (Luke 19:8).

This is exactly what must happen if a person truly understands what God's forgiveness means. If God's love and forgiveness reach into a person's heart, then God's love will change the person. A disciple of Jesus will want his or her words and actions to show they have received God's love. They have been forgiven, restored, and changed. Now, more than anything else, they should want to express God's love to others in all they do, just as Zacchaeus did.

**Question:** How did Zacchaeus show that he had changed?

**Question:** How has your life changed since you became a Christian?

### **C. Following Jesus Means Being Shaped by God's Story.**

Jesus told many stories. He told stories so His hearers could learn about God. The stories Jesus told are parts of one big story we call the story of God. This big story is the full account of who God is and what He has done. The big story is also the full account of what God wants for those who love and obey Him.

The story of God includes all He did to create the world. It includes His call and promises to Abraham. The story continues through Moses, Joseph, King David, the prophets, and all of the Old Testament. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God fully tells the story of who He is. He also tells the story of who He wants His children to be. In Jesus, God tells us how we are to live among our families and neighbors. In Jesus, we learn how God wants us to treat His creation and the things that are ours.

Jesus also told stories because He wanted stories to shape His followers. All of us have been formed by stories. Many of the stories that have formed us are not pleasing to God. Being a Christian means we will now be shaped by a new story, God's story. For example, Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan used his possessions to give aid to a wounded man, who was a Jew. He bandaged the man's wounds. Some Jews, who thought they were very religious, refused to help the wounded man. But the Samaritan man helped the Jew. The Jews hated the Samaritans. The Samaritan actually used his possessions and money to assist someone who hated him.

Now, that is quite a story. After telling the story, Jesus said, "Now you go and live just like this" (Luke 10:25-37). So, Christians are persons who are being shaped by the story of God that Jesus told.

A very important part of God's story is that we come to know Him in fellowship with other Christians. No one learns and lives God's story alone. The community of God, which we call the Church, is the community in which we learn and live God's story. The

New Testament sometimes speaks of the Church as Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:6; 4:4, 16; 5:30; Colossians 1:18; 3:15). This does not mean Christ had a physical body like ours. Rather, the apostle Paul compares our relationship to our own bodies to Christ's relationship with His Church. Just as our physical bodies have many parts, so the Church has many parts. Christians make up the parts of the Church. The apostle Paul said, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Our physical bodies have a head that gives directions to the whole body. Likewise, Jesus is the head of the Church and He instructs it (Ephesians 5:23). Paul even says that as the body of Christ, the church is a part of Christ's fullness or completeness. Paul says that God made Christ the head of the Church and the head over all things (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Church is the fullness or completeness of Christ who gives life to the Church. He fills the Church with himself. Or, He gives himself completely to the Church. Paul uses this language to show just how closely related Christ and His Church are.

Paul also speaks of the Church as Christ's body to teach us how closely related we are to one another. He uses this language to help us see how important each member of Christ's Church is to all of the other members. No single part of our physical body can say to the others, "I am more important than you are." And no one part can say to the other parts, "You are not needed." Indeed not. We know all the parts of our bodies work together.

This is the way God made us. And that is the way the Church is (1 Corinthians 12:21-26). Paul even says that just in our physical bodies, so in the Church "God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it" (1 Corinthians 12:24). Christ is the head of the Church and all of the members serve Him, including those that don't seem to receive much recognition. With Christ as the head, the members of the Church also serve each other. Just as the Church is beautifully fitted together, so is the Church. Paul says the many members of the Church should have "equal concern for each other."

Now, just as our physical bodies are beautifully fitted according to God's plan, just so Christ must form the Church. Our fingers don't decide by themselves what they want to be and do. Nor do our eyes. All of our body parts serve one unified purpose. Likewise, Christ shapes the Church according to His will. The whole beautiful story of God, as fulfilled in Jesus, must shape the Church and all of its members. So we learn how to be Christ's Church by hearing, receiving, and living God's whole story. It forms the community of Christ, and we learn of Him in community.

There are no lone, isolated, independent members in Christ's body. We learn together. We grow together. Together we should learn how to serve and minister to the world that Jesus came to save. In fact, our lives are supposed to retell the story of God that we see in Jesus. But this cannot happen unless we have been changed by Jesus. Actually, the Christian life means that Jesus is living His story through us. He is living himself through His Church. This is what it means to say we are members of His body.

**Question:** What is the story of God?

**Question:** How is our physical body like the body of Christ?

**Question:** What does it mean to be shaped by God's story?

## **Conclusion**

The apostle Paul summarized the way Christians should live. He said to some early Christians: "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). Paul meant that the Good News of Christ should completely form our lives. All of our thoughts, actions, and habits should be brought under Christ's rule. How we act and speak in our families is included. So, too, is the way we speak and act when we are working. Nothing is excluded from being changed and formed by Christ. Paul added, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

**Activity:** Describe what you were like before God saved you.

**Activity:** Tell someone about a time God forgave you.

**Activity:** Think about this question: Is there anything you need to do to show God's forgiveness to other people? If so, go and do it this week.

**Activity:** Think about this question: Are you living as a changed person? If your answer is yes, praise the Lord for what He has done in your life. If your answer is no, talk with your pastor or discipleship leader. Let them pray and talk with you.