

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN OUR CHRISTIAN WALK

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The Christian life can be summed up with just one word: walk. The term “walk” as found throughout the New Testament referring to the Christian denotes specific conduct. When an individual obeys the gospel he or she is raised from the watery grave of baptism to “**walk in newness of life**” (Ro. 6:4). The life of a Christian is to be as becoming of one who is in Christ Jesus (Co. 1:10; 2:6). Because we are in Christ Jesus, we are to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus (2 Pe. 3:18).

The Christian “walk” is all about progression. It is all about not being satisfied with the “status quo” but going on toward perfection or spiritual maturity (He. 6:1). It is a life that is about becoming more like Christ every single day (Ro. 8:29; 12:2). The Christian’s life should be all about excellence, that is, it should be the best it can be. The mindset of the Christian should be: *“How can I be better spiritually tomorrow, than I am today?”* It should be a life that is never satisfied spiritually.

Unfortunately, there are Christians who are willing to accept the “status quo”, who believe that all they have to do is not engage in sinful behavior. These individuals don’t want to pray or study. They don’t want to work for the Lord. They don’t want to grow; they have settled for mediocrity and as such they possess a mediocre faith as a result of apathy and lethargy.

Why should we strive for excellence in our walk as Christians? Joe Theisman played quarterback for the Washington Redskins for twelve years and led the team to two Super Bowls, winning one and losing the other. After retiring from football, Theismann reflected on his final years in the NFL when he learned a hard lesson. Theismann, in an interview with Readers Digest, (January 1992) said:

“I got stagnant, I thought the team revolved around me. I should have known it was time to go when I didn’t care whether a pass hit Art Monk in the 8 or the 1 on his uniform. When we went back to the Super Bowl, my approach had changed. I was griping about the weather, my shoes, practice times, everything. Today I wear my two rings—the winner’s ring from Super Bowl 17 and the loser’s ring from Super Bowl 18. The difference in those two rings lies in applying oneself and not accepting anything but the best.”

Excellence is the difference between winning and losing. Theismann believed his team lost because he did not fully apply himself to his craft because he was willing to accept good instead of greatness, mediocrity instead of excellence.

Excellence is the difference between an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell. As Christians, if we don’t pursue excellence, we will not be able to finish our course (2 Ti. 4:7) because we will not be progressing in our course, our walk as

Christians. We will not be able to finish the race set before us (He. 12:2) if we are not progressing. If we do not finish, we will not win the crown of life. If we do not win, then we will lose in eternity (Re. 21:8).

How then can we achieve excellence in our Christian walk? Let us consider briefly five things that will enable us to achieve excellence.

First, we must **pursue righteousness**. Sin is unrighteousness (1 Jn. 5:17) and it is diametrically opposed to God because He is righteous. When we obeyed the gospel, which reveals the righteousness of God (Ro. 1:17), we were accepted by God, who accepts all who work righteousness (i.e., do His will) (Ac. 10:34,35; Ja. 1:22,23; Lk. 6:46; Mt. 7:21-27). However, it is not enough to be made righteous in the sight of God; we must remain righteous. Righteousness, in its simplest definition, is “right doing” and it is the state or quality of being right. In a world of wrong doing, as Christians, we must be actively involved in right doing. If we are going to achieve excellence in our walk as a Christian we must make righteousness a continual practice in our lives and we do such by making it our life’s pursuit.

Second, we must **prioritize righteousness**. If we truly are making righteousness a priority in our lives we must seek it (which ties in with our previous point). Christ said, “**Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....**” (Mt. 6:33). To seek after is to search for something in order to find it. What is it that we are seeking after? Righteousness. When should it be sought? First. Righteousness should be at the forefront of our minds as Christians at all times. If it is at the forefront of our minds, it will be manifested in our lives; and if it is manifested in our lives, then our lives will be lived in such a way that we will not grow complacent or stagnant in our walk as Christians. We will be growing and improving spiritually day by day while we live here on earth. We will not fall into the pit of mediocrity.

Third, if righteousness is truly our priority, we will crave it. Christ said that those who are truly blessed are “**they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**” (Matt. 5:6). We all know what it is like to be hungry, we need food and thus when we hunger we seek food to satisfy our hunger. We also know what it is like to thirst, spiritually our souls hunger and thirst and our soul needs those things by which the soul is refreshed and strengthened. What is it that will satisfy our soul’s longing? Righteousness (in the context of this article, dealing with that which involves purity of life, correctness of thinking, feeling and acting).

How is the soul’s hunger and thirst for righteousness satisfied? By feeding on (studying) the word of God, which instructs us in righteousness (2 Ti. 3:16) It serves as our spiritual food as well. It is our milk (1 Pe. 2:2). It is our meat (He. 5:12-14). It is our bread (Jn. 6:35-ff). It is our water to assuage our spiritual thirst (Jn. 4:13-14). Because we will be feeding on the spiritual food that God has

provided, it logically follows we will be applying the teachings of God's word to our lives. This nourishment, in turn, will lead us to...

...practice righteousness. Practicing righteousness begins with right thinking. Our thoughts reveal who we are (Pr. 23:7). If we think unrighteousness, our actions will produce unrighteousness. If we think righteously, then our actions will manifest righteousness. The key for developing such thinking is to make sure our affections are set on those things which are above rather than on those things here on the earth (Co. 3:2).

However, it is not enough to think it, we must do it. It is both simplistic and true, but there really is nothing more to add but just do righteousness. John wrote **“Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous”** (1 Jn. 3:7).

If we think righteously, we will act righteously, which in turn will result in a continual pursuit, prioritization and practicing of righteousness and as a result of such actions we will then **produce righteousness** in our lives by the fruit that we bear because that fruit will be that of righteousness (Ja. 3:18; Ep. 5:9). The fruit we bear glorifies God (Jn. 15:8). But, it is not enough to bear fruit, we must keep on bearing fruit lest we become a fruitless branch within the true vine which is Christ and thus become cut off from the vine fit to be cast into the fire (Jn. 15:4). The necessity of continual bearing of the fruit of righteousness in our lives will stimulate us to a life of spiritual excellence.

Finally, we must **purge unrighteousness** from our lives. This purge implies the need for constant improvement as a Christian. The temptation to commit sin is an ever present danger for us (1 Pe. 5:8; 1 Co. 10:13) and as such reveals the importance of striving to grow and improve spiritually day after day so that we can overcome temptation and consequently, sin.

A righteous state of life involves a forward and upward direction (which is what walking in the light entails per 1 John 1:7) and not a backward and downward direction (which is to walk as the world does). In order to maintain righteousness in our lives we must examine our lives (2 Co. 13:5) to make sure sin has not reentered. If it has we must have the willingness to repent and confess those sins unto God (1 Jn. 1:8-9).

Maintaining righteousness and keeping unrighteousness out starts by laying God's word up in our hearts (Ps. 119:11; 1 Jn. 3:9). We do this by consistently turning to its pages and meditating and properly applying its teachings to our lives. This process must be an ongoing thing in our lives. We will never master the Word of God, but we can allow it to master our lives by keeping it at the forefront of our lives by spending time in personal study.

Why strive for excellence in our lives as Christians? Because excellence, in its simplest definition, is being better tomorrow than we are today. Is this not what

Christianity and personal growth is all about? If we are not seeking to be better tomorrow than we are today, we are not seeking to become more Christ like, and we must if we desire heaven as our home (Ro. 8:29). If we are not seeking to be better, we are in essence saying that who we are now is as good as we can get. We are accepting mediocrity, but God will not accept mediocrity, He expects and demands our best in all we do, including how we live (Re. 2:10).

We can achieve excellence in our walk as Christians because we can be a better Christian tomorrow than we are at this present time. However, in order to achieve excellence, we must possess the discipline and tenacity necessary to accomplish the task. When we pursue, prioritize, practice, produce righteousness in our lives, and keep unrighteousness purged, we will be improving day by day which produces true excellence, genuine, consistent, and constant growth as a Christian.