

Becoming Like Jesus

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Introduction – Rom 8:28-30

The Bible does not claim to reveal all the reasons why God created man. But without getting too much into the philosophical and theological ideas behind that question, Romans 8 gives us one reason for our existence. For eternity before the creation of what we call “Universe,” God had a Son – though He may or may not have been known as the Son at that time: John 1 simply introduces Him as the Word. God loved and glorified this Son, for in every way He was perfection and the very image of Himself. But God desired to share that same love with a whole multitude of children who were just like His perfect Son, not because He forces us to robotically imitate Him, but because in reciprocation of His love we choose to transform and conform to the image of the Son of God. Thus, God predestined (or predetermined) that all those who would be members of His great, divine family would be just like His Son – and since God is omniscient, He foreknew all who would make this transformation (of their own accord) before time began.

I. How Do We Judge Success?

The world uses many methods to judge success. But generally speaking, any given thing is a success if it accomplishes whatever it is intended to do. And we apply that same kind of standard to people as well, often using phrases like:

- He was born to be an athlete
- He was meant to be an artist
- He was just made to be a politician or businessman
- And a person is said to be a success by excelling at whatever role in life he/she finds through luck, or talent, or some form of persuasion.

As Christians, we are sometimes so influenced by the thinking of the people around us, sometimes we begin to think that these things are the things that really matter. We begin to be led to think that we are successful when we achieve greatness at work or in academia or in employing some talent. Or sometimes Christians begin to take pride that their children achieve these things and so find success through them.

However, as the children of God, how should we really define success? Are these carnal achievements what God defines as true success? When we reflect on God’s purpose for us as it is expressed in Romans 8, the answer is a resounding, “No!”

- Our success is not defined by the world’s standards, but by God’s will
- The judgment of the world matters nothing at all compared to the judgment of God
- Our perspective on what we were made to do is completely different than that of the world!
- We were not created by God to make money, to excel at athletics, to achieve fame or political office or success in business
- Some of those things may be attained by some godly people, but these are not the things that are truly important, these are not the purpose of our existence

God’s purpose for us is that we should become more and more like Jesus: and if we can look back on the day or the week or the year and see that we’ve conformed more to His image, then it

doesn't matter if we're rich or poor, married or single, important or insignificant in the community, educated or ignorant – if we can look back and say that we've become more like Jesus, then we are successful! But if we are not becoming more like Jesus, it doesn't matter what we attain in any other field, we are not successful in life!

I. To Become Like Jesus We Must Have Knowledge Of Him

Luke 6:40 – Must be taught and must receive instruction to be like our Teacher

Rom 12:1-2 – To become like Christ we need His instruction, and we need a renewed intellect, and renewed values and perspectives in order to truly conform to His image.

Realizing the importance of being like Jesus, and making decision like Jesus, many people wear some kind of symbol, like WWJD, and this is a commendable practice. But a WWJD symbol doesn't mean anything if we don't have the knowledge of what Jesus would truly do! Many people in the religious world, as well as many people in the church I'm sure, really have no idea what Jesus would do.

- *“Jesus would never judge a person”* – Not by appearance or in hypocrisy, but read **Matt 7:15-19; John 8:11**
- *“Jesus would never argue about religious doctrines”* – read **Matt 15:7-9**
- *“Jesus would never reject worship in whatever form it is offered”* – read **John 4:24**
- *Jesus accepts anyone who accepts Him as Lord”* – read **Matt 7:21-23**

We need to practice not just what *we think* Jesus would do, but what Jesus truly would do in a given situation! And this requires instruction and knowledge – **John 20:30-31**.

- In our Bible studies and Bible reading, we must not neglect reading and rereading the gospels, soaking in the teachings of Jesus, absorbing His every action and behavior
- We might find truth to refute every denominational false doctrine or persuasive arguments on every controversial topic, but if we're not learning to be more like Christ all of that academic knowledge is for nothing!
- *“No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* (I Cor 3:11)

II. To Become Like Jesus We Must Meditate On Him

But knowledge alone is not enough: just because we could pass a test on what Jesus did and said does not necessarily mean that we live like him. In addition to our knowledge of Jesus and His gospel, we also need meditation on Jesus and His gospel if we going to renew our minds and conform our lives to become like Him.

- **Eph 3:14-19** – Several references to our need for meditation:
 - To *“dwell”* is more than a one-time or occasional occurrence: Christ dwells in us by faith as we continually read and meditate on His word (Rom 10:17), absorbing it into our minds and hearts to guide our actions and thoughts
 - To comprehend and grasp the width, length, height and depth of Christ's love demands meditation, not rare and fleeting moments of study or reading
- Our behavior in any given situation depends on the preparation of our minds before that situation actually arrives! If we are going to act and think like Christ....

- Read and reread the gospels, meditating on the portions you know: new thoughts and new applications are constantly evoked by this kind of study
- Read books on the life of Christ written by authors who have devoted countless hours of study to his life – but beware of books and movies that are fictionalized and dramatized to the point of nonsense: we need truth, not fiction!
- Spend time in worship with your brethren studying and singing in worship about Christ’s life and teachings

Doesn’t all of this reading and meditation take up a lot of time? Yes – it really requires a lifetime of humbly learning about Christ and applying His examples. But that’s exactly what this life is for: it is merely a time of preparation, a time to make choices and decisions that mold us in Christ’s image. On the last day, when we stand before the Lord in judgment, He is looking to grant heaven to those who have strived to be conformed to His own image in His Son. This life is not intended just for fun and recreation and labor and friendships – though all of these things have their place. God eternal purpose for mankind is that they strive to become just like Jesus. And at the time of our final exam, that’s all that matters – none of our other accomplishments will come to light or bearing at all on our future from that point on!

Every day, let us strive to ask ourselves, “*What would Jesus really do?*” And then take the time to humbly learn and meditate on the answers given to us by God in His word, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, and that each day we become closer to the glorious image of God’s perfect Son.

III. To Become Like Jesus We Must Admire Him

People tend to be like the people that they admire:

- Younger people often dress like and act like the people who are their heroes
- Athletes often develop similar movements adopted from the sport heroes they admire
- Musicians often incorporate the styles of other singers or musicians
- Some people have heroes who have written books, and they just soak up everything that their particular hero has ever written – even imitating their mannerisms and idioms

If we’re going to become like Jesus, we must admire and adore Him as our greatest Hero!

II Cor 3:18 – We are beholding the glory of the Lord through the gospel as if we were looking into a mirror, and by it we are being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to the next.

- This admiration grows as we read about Jesus and hang upon His teachings: the honest and feeling heart cannot help but be touched by the goodness, compassion, mercy, wisdom, honesty and faithfulness of Jesus Christ!
 - But if we never spend time learning about Christ and meditating on Him, how can we grow to admire Him as our greatest Hero?
- This admiration grows as we study and worship together: think how groups of people with similar admirations tend to flock together. This is the very reason that we congregate together: to share our love and adoration of Christ!
 - As we sing songs about Jesus

- As we remember Him on the Lord's Day through the Lord's Supper
- As we study and meditate together on the things He did and said
- As we gather with other people whom we love and admire who are also trying to be just like Jesus, and as we see His righteous attributes in them
- All of these things work together to build our adoration and admiration of Christ!

IV. To Become Like Jesus We Must Adopt His Actions and Attitudes

Upon our knowledge and meditation on Jesus and His teachings, and upon our admiration of Him, to truly become like Jesus demands our conscious imitation of Him in our actions and even our thoughts.

1. *Imitation in Action* – John 13:15; I John 2:6

Conscious imitation means that we know what Jesus would do in a given situation and no matter how difficult it is or how much against our nature and will it happens to be, we behave as He would.

- When we have the opportunity to give to someone who has need, what is our conscious decision at that moment? Keep it for myself or give without expecting anything in return...
- When we are tempted to sin with our speech, do we exercise our right to say whatever pops into our minds or do we make a conscious effort to avoid harmful words...
- When we are hurt by another person, do we return good for evil or do we live by the motto, "I don't get mad, I get even..."
- When we have the opportunity to help our brethren with their problems, do we set aside time to listen and share the load, or do we remain totally absorbed by our own problems and other priorities...

This is more difficult than it sounds: conscious imitation of Jesus demands that when my will comes head to head against the will of Christ, I try to swallow my pride and put my will behind me in order to be like Jesus! Clearly, this takes more than just actions and movements: it demands a transformation of thought:

2. *Imitation in Thought* – Phil 2:5; II Cor 10:4-5

To have Christ's mind in us means to adopt His attitudes and perspectives, to imitate Him in thought, not just in words and deeds.

- This is the power of the gospel, to transform not just our actions but the very motivation and will that brings those actions to fruition (cf. Rom 12:1-2)
- His attitude toward sin: Matt 5:29-30
- His attitude toward the lost: Matt 9:35-38
- His attitude toward His enemies: Phil 2:5-8 with Rom 5:6-11

V. To Become Like Jesus He Must Live In Us

The apostles were not immune to temptation and stumbling: Peter at least struggled with the loss of friends and Jewish brethren who did not approve of his life under the gospel. When he and

Barnabas were dragged into temptation and sin, Paul reminded them in no uncertain terms what their loyalty to Christ demanded:

Galatians 2:20

If all Christians had the same attitude as Paul, this would answer so many questions for those who struggle with moral decisions:

- What kinds of clothes should I wear to school, when I work out, when I go out with friends, when I'm on vacation – are there some types of clothes that I should not wear?
- Where should I hang out with my friends – are there some places I should not go?
- What types of activities should I allow to keep me from worshipping with the church – how many excuses are really valid for missing the congregation of my family in Christ?

You see: living as a Christian is not a simple checklist of things we should or should not do. The answer to every question we have about morality is really a question, *“Would Jesus take part in this behavior – is HE living through me?”*

When we became Christians we made a life-long, every minute of every day decision, not just to admire Christ, not just to learn about Christ, not just to meditate on Him, and not just to imitate Him, but to allow Him to live in us! And when this calls for certain behaviors and sacrifices that are not pleasant, or when this calls for the abandonment of certain behavior and activities that are impure and selfish, the Christian must be ready to echo Paul's words in saying, *“It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me!”*

Conclusion – John 17:20-23

This is what God made you to do! When it comes to the end of the year will you have more money than you did last year? Doesn't matter. Will you be better at your particular hobby or talent than you ever were before? Doesn't matter. Will you have achieved more popularity and recognition than you ever have enjoyed previously from your peers or professional community? Doesn't matter.

You and I were made by God to be transformed into the glorious image of His Son. Are we becoming more like Jesus? Are we helping others to become more like Him? These are the only questions that truly matter!

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