

Christ, The Ultimate Man

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Study Guide

The little boy's body sat bolt upright in the rough wooden chair, but his mind was very busy. This was his weekly hour of revolt. The kindly lady who could never seem to find her glasses would have been terribly shocked if she had known what was going on inside the little boy's mind. "You must love Jesus," she said every Sunday, "and God."

The little boy did not say anything. He was afraid to say anything; he was almost afraid that something would happen to him because of the things he thought. Love Jesus! The little boy looked up at the picture which hung on the Sunday-school wall. It showed a pale young man with flabby forearms and a sad expression. The young man had red whiskers.

Then the little boy looked across to the other wall. There was Daniel, good old Daniel, standing off the lions. The little boy liked Daniel. He liked David, too, with the trusty sling that landed a stone square on the forehead of Goliath. And Moses, with his rod and his big brass snake. They were winners—those three.

But Jesus! Jesus was the "lamb of God." The little boy did not know what that meant, but it sounded like Mary's little lamb. Something for girls—sissified. Jesus was also "meek and lowly," a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He went around for three years telling people not to do things.

The little boy was glad when the superintendent thumbed the bell and announced: "We will now sing the closing hymn." One more bad hour was over. For one more week the little boy was done with Jesus.

Years went by and the boy grew up and became a business man. He began to wonder about Jesus. He said to himself: "Only strong magnetic men inspire great enthusiasm and build great organizations. Yet Jesus built the greatest organization of all. It is extraordinary."

One day he decided to wipe his mind clean of books and sermons. He said, "I will read what the men who knew Jesus personally said about him. I will read about him as though he were a new historical character, about whom I had never heard anything at all."

The man was amazed! A physical weakling! Where did they get that idea? Jesus pushed a plane and swung an axe; he was a successful carpenter. He slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favorite lake. His muscles were so strong that when he drove the money-changers out, nobody dared to oppose him!

A kill-joy! He was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem! The criticism which proper people made was that he spent too much time with publicans and sinners (very good fellows, on the whole, the man thought) and enjoyed society too much. They called him a “wine bibber and a gluttonous man.”

A failure! He picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world.

When the man finished his reading, he exclaimed, “This is a man nobody knows.”ⁱ

Discussion: Think about the common perception of Jesus and the way He is portrayed in the Gospels. In what ways might we need to revise our perception of Jesus?

In the life of Christ we can find the example of what God intended for man when He first created Adam. In Christ we find the perfect example of a man.

Read: Ephesians 5:1

Discussion: If we are going to imitate Christ, what tools will we need? Answer: Knowledge of what He is like, encouragement in the task of imitating Christ (because it is easier to imitate the world).

Point #1 – Christlikeness is Walking in His Example

If we look beyond the opening verse of Ephesians 5 which challenges us to be imitators of our Lord, we come upon an example Jesus set which pertains to a man’s most important relationship, that being with his wife. It begins like this:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24).

I had a friend in college who would regularly, and teasingly, quote this passage: “Wives, submit to your own husbands.” Perhaps not surprisingly, that friend remains unmarried.

Is this instruction then the answer for a healthy marriage; that the wife should submit to the husband in everything? After all, it is clearly stated in Scripture.

Read Ephesians 5:20-21

Discussion: How would you reconcile the instruction of this passage stating that we submit to one another, with the following that the wife should submit to the husband?

Teaching: Notice that the model which Scripture gives to the wife is the relationship of Christ to the church after the cross. As the church submits to the Lord in everything, the wife should submit to the husband in everything. There is a biblical authority which the husband has which the wife should recognize. But we must not stop there because there is a second part to the instruction which is here given.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25).

Discussion: The model for the wife in relating to her husband is the relationship of Christ to the church after the cross. What is the model for the husband in loving his wife? Answer: The relationship of Christ to the church before the cross.

If we are to love our wives in the same way that Christ loved the church, we must answer the question: In what way did Christ love the church?

The passage in Ephesians says that He gave Himself for the church. That giving certainly happened at the cross, but it began sometime earlier, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Discussion question: In what way did Jesus respond to those who came to arrest Him in the garden?

And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people...And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place...do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:47, 51-53).

Key Thought #1 – Jesus had the power and authority to force submission.

Read Isaiah 53:7

Discussion Question: In what way does a lamb go to the slaughter? Answer: Fully submitted to the one who is leading him.

Discussion Question: What motivated Jesus to submit to those who came to arrest Him?
Answer: Sacrificial love

Key Thought #2 – Rather than impose his legitimate power and authority, He submitted to the call of sacrificial love.

Teaching: If we are going to imitate Christ, we will love our wives as He loved the church. In Philippians 2:7 we read that Christ “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant.” What authority does a bondservant have? If we are modeling our love for our spouse after Christ’s love to the church, we will love our wives as though we have no authority. And she will submit to her husband as though he has all authority.

So what will be the effect if husbands and wives are following the biblical model? (See Ephesians 5:21). There will be mutual submission.

Discussion question: Read Romans 12:10. In what ways can the husband/wife model relate to our other relationships? Answer: We can love others as though we have no authority and submit to others as though they have all.

Point #2 – Christlikeness is demonstrated by living for something greater than oneself

Discussion question: Have you ever experienced feelings of futility in your career or relationships? Describe the situation and your experience.

Teaching: King Solomon experienced the same. In Ecclesiastes 2:10-12 he wrote:

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

Solomon had the wealth and power to accomplish and experience all that he wanted, and at the end of it he concluded that it all was vanity. Jack Higgins is a British novelist and one of the best-selling authors of all time. He was once asked what he wished he would have known as a young man. He replied, “That when you get to the top, there is nothing there.”

The key to the futility which many experience is found in Solomon’s words: “under the sun.” What this means is that Solomon had shut God out of the equation. He was only interested in that which pertained to his own little world. At this stage in Solomon’s life there was nothing beyond.

Read 1 Peter 1:17-19.

Teaching: Part of Christ’s purpose in coming was to redeem us out of a futile life. He wants to expand our little world and get us living for something greater. At this point you may be thinking: Does this mean that I may need to quit my job?

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

Discussion question: What do you notice in this passage?

When Jesus found His disciples, they were fishermen. When He was through with them, they were fishermen. But in the process, he set them on a course of eternal significance. The place of purpose which God has for you may not be that far from where you are presently. It will however be a place of immensely greater purpose than where you began. He will set you on a course of eternal significance. If you are a farmer, his purpose may be that you find a way to get involved in the harvest of souls. If you are an engineer, His purpose may be that you would help engineer health within your church.

Discussion question: What are some meaningful things towards which Christ may direct us?

Point #3 – Christlikeness is seen when we embrace responsibility

Discussion Question: Is responsibility given by God or taken on by us? Answer: Both. When you choose to get married and have kids you are taking on the responsibilities that may follow. When you accept a job you are accepting the same.

In the message last weekend we saw a contrast between the way Adam shirked his responsibility in the Garden of Eden and the way Jesus embraced responsibility in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Read Romans 5:12-18.

Discussion Question: Based on that passage, what were the consequences of the way these two men responded to responsibility? Answer: There were long-term, significant consequences in both cases.

Discussion Question: What positive or negative impact might there be to the way that we respond to the responsibility we have accepted?

Point #4 – Christlikeness is seen when we acknowledge dependence

Read 1 Corinthians 4:7.

Discussion Question: How would you answer that question, “What do you have that you did not receive”?

- 1 Natural ability is not so natural. It is received from our parents or given by God.
- 2 Expertise comes because others have trained us, provided us with opportunities and have given us the space to fail.
- 3 Read Deuteronomy 8:18

Discussion Question: Everything we have was dependent on someone else. With that in mind, how will you acknowledge your dependence on others in the future?

¹ Barton, Bruce. *The Man Nobody Knows*. Chicago: Ivans R. Dee, 2000, 3-4.