

FIRST STEPS

The New Life in Christ is a life of learning. Jesus is the Word. He is the Alpha and the Omega, He is the beginning and the end. As we begin our Spiritual life there are some simple lessons that we may learn to get us started on the remarkable journey which begins with Justification by faith and ends when we stand before the Judgment seat of Christ and give an account of what we did along the way.

These Seven short lessons are not the Alpha and the Omega of Christian education, but they are a beginning. They are first steps in following God's Word. Like any alphabet they start with "A."

A- Assurance

B- Baptism

C- Communion

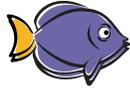
D- Discipleship

E- Evangelism

F- Fellowship

G- Giving

A



Assurance – Understand that Salvation is by Grace through faith. It is not based on what we feel, but on what we have found and received. The Lord Jesus told two stories of men finding a treasure. One seemed to have stumbled across it in a field. He may have been a farmer or may not. When he realized that there were riches in the field, he somehow bought it, perhaps giving everything he had. We don't know the nature of the "treasure." It may very well have required faith on his part.

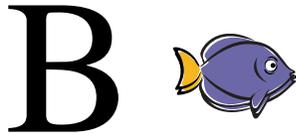
The second story was about a man who was a pearl trader. He had no doubt seen many, many pearls, in his lifetime. When he came across what Christ called a "pearl of great price" we imagine it took his breath away. He had never seen anything like it. He wanted it so badly that he sold everything he had to purchase it. ¹

Without getting into different interpretations, some of which try to relegate this parable to Jewish Kingdom truth, and imagine the main idea to be dispensational truth, I see this and the parables as "spiritual truth." These two stories reflect the two basic salvation stories I have heard hundreds of times. Some men sort of stumble upon Christ and Salvation. They recognize its value and worth, and want it no matter what it may cost. Salvation, they discover is free since it is a gift bought and paid for by Christ himself. Others search the world of philosophical or religious pearls looking for meaning, peace or happiness. They come across a Pearl of Great Price which may be called salvation or Christ's salvation and they recognize the New Birth and forgiveness of sin as an eternal treasure, and like Moses see it as more valuable than the treasures of the world or Egypt. ² The idea is that Moses realized what real treasure was. Moses chose God.

Salvation is salvation from sin and the consequences of sin. Salvation is not the result of anything we have done or merit of our own. Salvation rests on the merits of Jesus Christ and what he has done. He was born of a virgin (and is the eternal son of God), lived a perfect sinless life, and then offered himself as a sacrifice to pay for our sins and purchase a place in heaven for us. This is what he claimed was his purpose and his mission. He predicted that on the third day after his crucifixion he would rise again from the dead. We could dismiss his fantastic claims as fantasy were it not for the fact that that is exactly what happened. The fact that millions have believed in him and his resurrection is evident in the witness of the Church. The fact that he is indeed the Savior is personally evidenced in the witness of millions of changed and transformed lives.

Our assurance is not based on how we feel. It is based on what the Bible says. The Bible clearly says that "*as many as receive him, to them gave he the power to become the children of God, even to them who believe on his name.*"³ The Bible also says that "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting*

life.”⁴ The Scriptures also teach that “*He who has the Son (Jesus) has life, he who has not the Son of God, has not life.*”⁵ Salvation is a gift. “*For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.*”⁶ Assurance comes from the same source as Faith. It boils down to the simple confidence that “I will believe God.” Without going into great length about the durability or development of the New Life in Christ (which is called Eternal) it should be sufficient to point out that God does not take back his gifts. We are saved, once and for all. Paul said, “*Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*”⁶



Baptism- The first step of obedience after obeying or believing the Gospel is commonly called “Believer’s Baptism.” The first followers of Christ were told to go into all the world and tell people about Jesus and his salvation, and to baptize those who come to faith in Christ. When a person gets married he invites his family, friends, and neighbors to a ceremony in which vows and promises are made. When a man joins the army, he raises his right hand and pledges himself to the defense of his country and is then issued a uniform which he proudly wears. A uniform does not make a man a good soldier, nor does a marriage license make a man a good husband; but a person who thinks certificates and uniforms are not important, call the depth of their commitment into question. The Christian life also has a ceremony to mark a believer’s coming to faith in Christ. That ceremony is Believer’s Baptism.

How can a new believer let everyone know that he has come to place his faith in Christ? He could put a notice in the newspaper, hire a brass band to march down the street, display a banner behind a low flying aircraft down at the beach, or he could simply obey God and follow his ordered and prescribed method, baptism.

Jesus himself was baptized, not to mark the beginning of his new life, or confession of sins (he was sinless), but to mark the beginning of his public ministry. Baptism marks the beginning of our public confession as a follower of Jesus and points back to the miracle of Salvation, our faith in Christ, the end of an old life, and the beginning of a new. Baptism is an outward picture

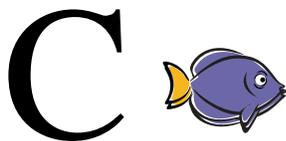
of an inward and spiritual experience. Romans chapter six is a good illustration of the meaning of baptism and the basis for the method employed.

Water baptism is a picture of our dying and being buried with Christ (water being symbolic of the grave) and rising up clean and new (symbolic of the new life). Sprinkling a little water on the head is not a very good picture of being buried with Christ, so we practice baptism by complete immersion.

Second, baptism must be a personal act demonstrating a personal faith in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Since a baby cannot perform such an act of volition and confess "with their mouth the Lord Jesus," babies and little children are not baptized. When the Ethiopian Eunuch believed in Jesus through the evangelistic efforts of Philip, he immediately pointed to a body of water that they came upon in their journey and asked "what prevents me from being baptized?" Obviously Philip mentioned the great commission of Christ to make disciples and baptize those who believe in Jesus.

Paul spoke of Baptism in Romans saying, "*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.*"⁸ Baptism is a matter of identifying ourselves with Christ.

While it no more makes a man a patriot just because he puts on a uniform, we would question a man's "so-called" patriotism if he refused to wear the uniform or salute the flag if called upon to do so. Baptism is one of the first acts of Christian obedience, therefore it is called an ordinance. In it we declare our faith and allegiance to Christ.



Communion

Christ left his church two ordinances. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a one time act that marks our "union" with him. The Lord's Supper is an often repeated act that marks our "communion" with him. Communion and union both describe our relationship with Christ. Christianity is not a religion as much as it is a relationship. The name Emmanuel means, of course, "God with us." What is more important than having God with us? Nothing! The Gospel is the story of Christ redeeming us to God. We were bought at a great price. Christ paid for our sins with his own blood on the cross. It tells us that by believing in him and receiving him we receive forgiveness of sins and a future with him in his glory. We enjoy union with him the moment we repent and believe (some say believe and repent). We have already seen how baptism pictures our union with him. The Lord's Supper pictures our communion with him.

We also call it the Lord's Table. A table is what brings a family together. At the end of the day, the many members of a family make their way home and to a table. The spiritual family also has a table, the Lord's Table. On this table are two elements: bread and wine. Each of these simple items speak of Christ. One speaks of his body that was broken for us. The other speaks of his blood that was shed for us. According to the scriptures, as often as we do this we remember his death.

Remembering ones death might seem a very sad thing. It is not meant to be as sad as it is sobering. It reminds us of what Christ had to do to redeem us. Yet remembering his death is a very satisfying thing, because by it we have been saved. And it is never somber since we are remembering one who defeated death by rising from the grave on the third day.

The method or mechanics may vary from group to group. Some use one kind of bread and others a different one. Some use fermented wine, others only juice. The tokens and elements are only aids to help us remember, they are not magical. They never become more than what they appear, bread and wine. They are not transformed into the literal body or blood, they are merely pictures of Christ and his mission and ministry of redemption.

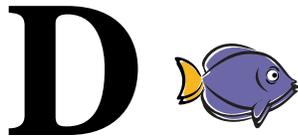
Why we do it is simple also. We do it because he asked us to. He said, “do this.”⁹ If a Christian cannot do this most simple thing (in faith and faithfulness), it is unlikely Christ will ask him to do anything else of spiritual consequence. We do it once a week, on the first day of the week, because that is when the early church did it.¹⁰

We sing appropriate hymns because we know that is what the disciples did¹¹. We speak of him and honor him because he asked us to “remember” him. Jesus said, “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*”¹² It should be pointed out that we do not gather together as a denomination, or particular group or sect. We gather in his name. We gather as Christians. Second, he does the gathering. The word means “have been gathered.” Communion is a spiritual thing. Third, notice the words “*two*” or “*three*.” It does not say “two hundred” or “two thousand.” It says two or three. Numbers are not the important thing about the church. The fact that we have been included, drawn, and gathered by Christ unto himself is absolutely pure grace. Likewise, consider how much grace is in the word “*together*.” We, like the first disciples, are so different. Christ has overcome all our differences and black sits next to white, young sits next to old, male sits next to female. We are one. We are together with Christ.

The most important part of communion is likewise the most important element to any Church. Jesus said “*there am I in the midst.*” When we come to the Communion Service he is the only one we should look for. If he is there, everything is ok. If he is not, we are alone with ourselves.

While baptism is a one time affair marking our new birth and faith in Christ, the communion service is a continuing testimony of our love to him. This act of love is counted as worship and gratitude to Christ for his love to us. The bread is a symbol of his body broken for us, and the wine is a symbol of the blood he shed on the cross. This service has been called the “breaking of bread.” As practiced by the early church it was observed on the first day of the week. The actual protocol of the practice may vary from group to group, but the purpose is the same. It is a ceremony which glorifies and honors Christ. “*Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen.*”¹³ The communion is a memorial service that emphasizes the glories of Christ (that is calls attention to him alone) and honors him as believers speak of his work, love, person, passion, and greatness.

The Lord himself instituted this as a continual feast during the Last Supper. With some similarities to the Passover feast, it is different. It is the Lord's Supper. He left us with this simple request to remember him in this way. He said "*do this.*" It is a simple thing. We can only wonder, If believers are unwilling to obey this "simple" thing will they ever be asked to do some "greater" thing?



Discipleship- Christ's Great Commission was to go into all the world and teach or "make disciples" of all nations. Jesus also said, "learn of me." The Christian life is one of constant learning. There is so much to learn. Paul told Timothy, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" ¹⁴

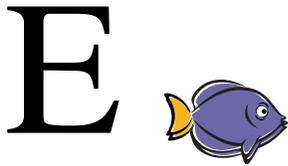
Eternal life is in knowing God, not just knowing "about" God. This involves an intimacy with God which is not just the result of knowing doctrine, but in knowing devotion. This devotion will bring you into the center of God's word and the center of God's will.

The Gospel of John begins with Christ giving an invitation to two men to "*come and see.*" It ends, after the crucifixion and resurrection with the invitation to "*come and dine.*" Discipleship lives between the two "comes," and prepares life for the "goes" of Christian obedience.

It does not really matter which portion of the Scriptures the new disciple studies first. It is important that the disciple finds the Lord Jesus Christ each day (preferably early) in order to walk with him along the way.

Since however, God is a God of order, it will make sense for most to follow some prescribed program of learning. There are many such programs and many groups offer assistance in this area of discipleship. I suggest the new believer soon become acquainted with the Book of Romans because it touches each aspect of God's redemption story. The great themes of Romans are Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty, and Service.

Which ever course one takes there are some basic aids that will help the new disciple. 1) Determine to set aside a time specifically for study each day. It does not matter if it is half an hour or an hour, it should be marked as sacred for being alone with the Master. 2) A good study Bible will prove invaluable and will become in your hand the Sword of the Spirit, so lay hold of one. 3) Start a spiritual journal or notebook into which you shall record important truths you discover as well as record your progress through the Bible. 4) Begin a program of Scripture memory. Memorize one verse a week or one verse a day, but memorize. The Psalmist said, "*Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" ¹⁵



Evangelism- An evangel is someone bringing Good News. The Gospel means “Good News.” The world can still stand Good News. The early church was not made up of religious professionals. Every Christian is supposed to be an Evangel. The Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all the implications of that most historic fact, spread through Jerusalem like a wild fire. Then from Jerusalem it spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. Each person told another person about the only person that who can save any person: Jesus. Jesus told his disciples that they would be “witnesses.”

Sharing our faith with others is no more complicated than learning the A,B,C’s. Admit that you are a sinner. *“All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God.”*¹⁶ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. *“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”*¹⁷ Come to Christ, or ask Christ to come into your heart and life. *“He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”*¹⁸

Remember, Christianity is not a religion as much as it is a relationship. *“He that has the Son, has life. He that has not the Son of God has not life.”* There are only two kinds of people in the world, those who have Jesus and eternal life, and those who don’t. God wants everyone to have life. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*



Fellowship- *“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”*

¹⁹ First and foremost, our fellowship is with God through Christ. But as we are drawn close to him, we notice that others are likewise drawn to him as well. We along with these others, who have also been attracted to him and caught up in the magnetism of his grace, and who are moved to both worship and serve him, make up what is called the church.

On the one hand, every believer is a member of one church, the universal church which knows not time nor boundary. Then there is the visible or local church, which consists of various men and

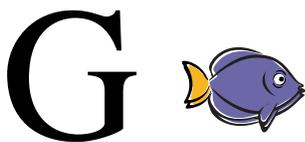
women in a particular city or community that have joined in fellowship with and around him. This is a more organized thing.

God is a God of Order. The local church is an example of organized obedience. Christ set up a simple, but practical system of government that is for the good of the individual and for the glory of God. Each local church is made up of many members as each physical body has many members as in hands and feet. The local church is a visible manifestation of Christ in the community.

Every Christian should seek out and unite with a local body of believers in fellowship. Christ has given the church many spiritual gifts and no single Christian can be complete by himself. The Lord has also given Pastor/Teachers, Elders, and Leaders to the church who are Shepherds and guides for our spiritual good.

Christ has also charged men to be Overseers to guard both the individual as a precious part of Christ's church, but also the integrity of the message and truth of God's word. The early church had a simple pattern of gathering together in local assemblies. *"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers."*²⁰

The local church you unite with should be a Bible-Believing Church (Doctrine). It should be evident that they love God's Word. It should be clear that they not only like to hear it, they like to do it. Second, the church you unite with should love people (Fellowship). *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one another."*²¹ It should be plain to see that this church loves people, for God is love. A church is people. Look for a fellowship that loves. Thirdly, Fellowship should have Christ in the center. The Lord's Supper should have a central place and Christ should be the centerpiece and only celebrity of the church. Such a church knows what it means to worship. Too many local churches gather around a dynamic "people person," or charismatic personality. When that person fails or falls away, or goes away, the church suffers. Christ should be the center. The breaking of bread is a euphemism for worship. Worship should be foremost. Lastly, a good church is a praying church. A praying church knows God's power.



Give- God gave us his only-begotten Son. The natural response to this is to want to give back to God. Nothing we give or do can ever earn God's free gift or trump God's grace, but giving is part of Christian living. God wants us to freely give. There is a secret about life that holds true for the Christian life as well. He who gives the most, lives the most. Paul put it this way, *"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."*²² Every farmer knows he has to give if he hopes to get.

Giving is godly. *“For God so loved the world that he gave....”* Satan would have you believe God is trying to rob us. Satan is the thief, not God. Jesus said, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*²³ Stealing is the opposite of giving. God is a giver. When we give to God, not only does it please and glorify God, it sets in motion a wonderful system of blessing.

What can we give. First we are to give ourselves to God. Once we have really given ourselves, the rest is easy. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”*²⁴ We can give God our time. Every minute of our life is a gift from God. We should make sure that we do not “rob” God of minutes he desires to fellowship with us, teach us, help us, and fill us. Sunday is the Lord’s Day. God can and will be with us every minute of every day, but Sunday is his in a special way. We can give God our talent. God has also given each person unique gifts and talents. While they are technically different, it is important that we don’t use our skills and abilities only for ourselves. Use what God has taught you for his glory. We can give our treasure. The wise men gave him gold. The Bible says, *“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*²⁵ Those who give to the Work of God, not only share in that work, but are promised that God takes notice, and remember, you can’t out-give God.

Conclusion:

These are the A,B, C, D, E, F, G’s of the first steps of Christian obedience. Read God’s Word every day. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Your faith will grow as you read and believe God’s Word.

¹ Mt.13:44-46; ² Heb. 11:26; ³ Jn. 1:12; ⁴ Jn. 3:16;

⁵ 1Jn. 5:12; ⁶ Eph. 2:8-9; ⁷ Phil. 1:6; ⁸ Rom. 6:3;

⁹ Lk. 22:19 ¹⁰ Acts 20:7; ¹¹ Mt.26:30; ¹² Mt. 18:20;

¹³ 1Tim. 1:17; ¹⁴ 2Tim. 2:15; ¹⁵ Ps.119:11; ¹⁶ Rom. 3:23;

¹⁷ Rom. 10:9-10; ¹⁸ Jn. 6:37; ¹⁹ 1Jn. 1:3; ²⁰ Acts 2:42;

²¹ Jn.13:35; ²² 2Cor. 9:6; ²³ Jn. 10:10; ²⁴ Rom. 12:1;

²⁵ Mt. 6:21