



THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

Part 12 A New Life in Christ

Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Romans 3.21-26, Romans 5.1-2, Galatians 3.10-14.**

Question 1

What does it mean that we are righteous before God – in other words, to use a Bible term, justified? What is the significance of this for our relationship with God, and for our daily lives as Christians?

When we repent of our sins, and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, God declares us **“Not guilty! You are cleared of all charges!”** *Jesus has borne the penalty for our sin and paid the debt that we owe to God and to other people because of our sins.*

And because we believers are united with Jesus Christ, *God also credits us with Jesus’s righteousness.* We receive **“the free gift of righteousness”** (Romans 5.17). God sees us in Christ Jesus. When God, so to speak, looks at us, He looks at His Son Jesus Christ, and sees us in Him. So – incredible as it may seem – He sees us as righteous as Jesus Himself!

Of course, we’re not perfect. We’re still a work in progress. We’ll look at this in our next question. Nonetheless, we do have a new legal status before God. To use a Bible word, God has *justified* us. We are right with God! *This new legal status is God’s gift to us. We can’t do anything to earn it.* We have been **“justified by faith in Christ”** (Galatians 2.16). In other words, we’re justified by repenting of our sin and trusting Jesus Christ completely for our salvation.

And so, as Paul writes, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Romans 5.1). What does it mean, to have **“peace with God”**? It means that God is no longer angry with us believers because of our sin. We were once His enemies. Now we are *reconciled* to Him. *We are His friends.* Paul writes, **“... while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,”** (Romans 5.10 NIV).

All this has huge implications for our relationship with God, and for our practical daily lives as Christians.

- ▶ **Firstly, it means we have free access into God’s presence.** We may confidently draw near to God (see Hebrews 4.16, 10.22). Paul tells us that, through Jesus Christ, **“we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father.”** (Ephesians 2.18). In Christ, we have **“boldness and access with confidence”** into God’s presence (Ephesians 3.12). Of course, sin can cloud our sense of God’s presence. If this happens, we may repent and turn to God, and we may enter His presence again.
- ▶ **Secondly, it affects the motivation for our Christian lives.** Do we have to live righteously in order to gain God’s approval? No! We have been **“justified by faith”** (Romans 5.1). We can do nothing to earn our acceptance with God. Instead, we live righteous lives because we *want* to please God and glorify Him. This is our new heart’s desire as Christians. It gives us pleasure to please God.
- ▶ **Thirdly, we can live free from Satan’s condemnation.** Satan is our great accuser. He accuses us of sin and demands that God punish us. But now God has declared us not guilty! Paul writes: **“There is . . . now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8.1). Satan has no legal case against us any more. We need to get hold of this truth and live free from Satan’s condemnation. (Of course, God’s Holy Spirit may convict us of sin – in other words make us aware of sin that needs to be put away. This is quite different from Satan’s accusations. Then we must confess our sin, repent and turn back to God.)

Read **Ephesians 4.20-24, Colossians 3.1-17, James 1.12-15.**

Question 2

The Bible tells us that *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5.17). So why does sin still trouble us? And how do we overcome sin?

Something fundamental and very wonderful has happened to us believers. We were once part of the old sinful humanity headed up by Adam. But when Jesus died and rose again, He 'included' in His death and resurrection all those who repent from their sin and trust Him alone for their salvation. Their *"old self"* – the old self-willed, self-reliant person that they once were – was *"crucified with him"* (Romans 6.6). And they were *"raised with him"* (Colossians 2.12). We are now part of God's new humanity in Christ. Paul tells us that God *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, . . ."* (Colossians 1.13).

But we are not automatically or instantly made perfect. We still face temptation daily. And we still – all too often – fall to that temptation. So how do we resist sin?

Firstly, it is vital to understand that we have a new identity in Christ. As believers, we are united with Christ, in other words, *"in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 5.17). And that changes everything. God has justified us (as we have already seen). We are reborn from above (John 3.3,7) into God's new humanity. God has given us *"a new heart"* (see Ezekiel 36.26). God has adopted us believers into His family. We can call God *"Father"* (Romans 8.15, Galatians 4.6) And God lives within us believers. We're in living relationship with God. Paul writes: *" . . . your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, . . ."* (1 Corinthians 6.19).

So, we have a new identity in Christ. *But we need to bring our behaviour in line with our new identity.* And so we have to *"put off" our "old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires"* (Ephesians 4.22). We have to put off our old way of life – our wrong attitudes, wrong ways of thinking and speaking, and sinful habits. And we have to *"put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4.24). New attitudes, right ways of thinking and speaking, and godly habits, have to be formed.

That's where our will comes in. We have to choose to obey God and live a life that is pleasing to Him. We must be intentional and diligent about this. We must turn away from sin and pursue righteousness and godliness.

God's Holy Spirit lives in us. He guides us and gives us the power to say 'no' to temptation. Only the Holy Spirit can transform us; our part is to co-operate with Him. We must obey Him and make the right choices. Paul wrote: *"Let all you do be guided by God's Spirit, and you will not gratify sinful desires"*. (Galatians 5.16, author's paraphrase). Paul also wrote, *" . . . if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."* (Romans 8.13 NIV).

In this present life in this world, we will always be subject to temptation. We can still be drawn into sin. Jesus taught us to pray to our Father: *" . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* (Matthew 6.13). This most likely means, *"Spare us from difficult circumstances that would tempt us to sin"* (compare Matthew 26.41). God never directly tempts believers (James 1.13). However, we will experience trials and hardships. Jesus tells us to pray that God will deliver us from situations of overwhelming trial that we cannot bear without falling into sin. And God will answer that prayer. Paul writes: *"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* (1 Corinthians 10.13)

What practical steps can we take to avoid and resist temptation? Here are four steps we can take:

- ▶ Do things that strengthen us and help us live holy lives – for example, reading the Bible and praying regularly, and meeting often with other believers.
- ▶ In moments of temptation, think of what God has said in the Scriptures, as Jesus Himself did when He was tempted (Matthew 4.1-10, Luke 4.1-12). And we must call out to God in prayer.
- ▶ Avoid things that are unprofitable and likely to tempt us – for example, places we could go to, books and magazines that we could read, TV programmes and films we could watch.
- ▶ Nip temptation in the bud. Temptation so often begins in our minds. Act at once, and resist it! There's an often-quoted saying that goes, *"We sow a thought and reap an act; we sow an act and reap a habit; we sow a habit and reap a character; we sow a character and reap a destiny."*

Paul said: *"sin will have no dominion over you"* (Romans 6.14). That's God's promise to every believer! We have no legitimate excuse for habitual sin. Paul writes *"you who were once slaves of sin . . . having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."* (Romans 6.17-18).