

Becoming a Follower of Christ...

by Alistair Begg

There is Something to Admit...

First of all we have to admit that we are all sinners. *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*
Romans 3:23

Each of us has failed miserably when it comes to keeping His [God's] commandments. We haven't honored our parents as we should, we have tolerated untruthfulness, we have been envious of our neighbors and while we may not have actually committed murder, we have tolerated murderous thoughts. Our natural tendency is not to acknowledge our sin. We are prone to blame our circumstances or our genes. We are keen to gain comfort in the assurance that we are not as bad as some people.

So what brings us to the place where we know that we must admit we are sinners? This is something God does. Jesus explained to His disciples that He [Jesus] would send the Holy Spirit, *"When He comes, He will convince the world of the meaning of sin, of true goodness and of judgment."* John 16:8

There is Something to Believe...

Jesus is the only Savior from the sin to which we have just admitted. We may have begun our journey fairly convinced Jesus was a "good man," but as we considered the evidence we were forced in a different direction. We certainly did not set out predisposed to believe. So we find ourselves agreeing with this statement: *"Faith is forced consent. That is to say, when evidence is judged by the mind to be sufficient, the state of mind we call 'faith' is the inevitable effect....whenever the reasons are judged sufficient, faith or belief is induced."* (John Murray "Collected Writings II" p237)

So we come to believe that God has made provision for our sin in the person of His Son. *"We see real love, not in the fact that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to make personal atonement for our sins."* 1 John 4:10 JBP.

There is Something to Consider...

We need to come to terms with the cost of following Christ. He said, *"If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, carry his cross every day and keep close behind me. For the man who wants to save his life will lose it, but the man who loses his life for my sake will save it."* Luke 9:23,4.

Now be careful not to misunderstand this. The only thing we 'contribute' to our salvation is the sin from which we need to be saved. One way to learn the important distinction is to remember that while entrance to the Christian life is free, the annual subscription is everything we have!

There is a cost involved in Saying No to Sin. Jesus said, *"The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!... Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

Notice that His first call is to 'repentance' This means to turn from sin to God. There are certain characteristics which Sinclair Ferguson points out are commonly present in repentance. A sense of shame, such as when David cries to the Lord after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight..."* Psalm 51:3,4.

This leads to humbling. Instead of jumping to our defense or trying to blame our actions on people or circumstances, we acknowledge our accountability. There is an accompanying sense of sorrow and regret. If we had been in the corner of the bedroom of the prodigal son on his first night at home, I think we would have heard the sobs and seen the tears and watched in wonder as he knelt by his bed and mourned the wasted years and the squandered privileges. The memory of sin is distasteful to the truly penitent. There is also a recognition of God's pardon. It is the kindness of God which leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). While we are emphasizing the need for repentance at the gateway of faith, this is something which continues through our entire life. *There is a cost involved in saying **No** to self.*

What we mean by this is simply that Christ comes first, before everything and everyone else. This has a peculiarly challenging ring in the midst of a culture that has gone to great lengths to bolster self-esteem and make much of the individual. It means that my time and my talents and my relationships and my career will all be brought under His jurisdiction.

There is a cost involved in saying No to secrecy. When a man or woman discovers the freedom Jesus brings, they will be ready and willing to let others know. The Bible confirms this in a number of places. *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* Romans 10:9 While coming to trust in Christ is undoubtedly a personal matter, it is not private.

There is Something to Do...

Genuine Christian faith is more than saying, "I believe Jesus is who He claimed to be." After all even demons are orthodox when it comes to this, but clearly they are not Christians! (James 2:19) Faith means accepting the facts can be trusted, and acting upon what you believe to be true.

Alister McGrath uses an analogy which you may find helpful. Imagine I am suffering from blood poisoning and there is a bottle of penicillin sitting on my bedside table. What are my options?

1. I may accept that this bottle of penicillin exists.
2. I may trust that it is capable of curing my illness, but I shall never cure my blood poisoning, unless -
3. I act upon that trust and take the penicillin. Acceptance and trust prepare the way for the final component of faith - entering into the promise, and receiving what it offers.

Mere mental assent to these facts without any corresponding action no more brings us to personal faith than memorizing a menu allows us to enjoy a meal. True faith means moving beyond the awareness of the existence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to a living personal relationship with Him.

If God has shown you your need and given you this desire, then you must forsake everything and trust Christ NOW! There's a time coming when it will be too late.

So here is the most crucial question you will ever face: **"Do you take this Savior?"** If your answer is "yes," then let me encourage you to deal with the matter immediately. You may want to find a quiet place to seal your commitment. God is not so concerned with your ability to articulate your thoughts as He is aware of the sincerity of the response of your heart. A simple prayer such as this may be of help to you in marking the moment. Depending on the kind of person you are, you may want to write this in your journal or the fly leaf of your Bible. This is a unique occasion.

"Lord Jesus Christ, I confess that I am a guilty, lost and helpless sinner. I want you to save me, to take your rightful place as Lord of my life. I want to turn from my sin and trust only in your atoning sacrifice. I give my life to you. Take charge of it all and help me by the power of the Holy Spirit to follow after you."

It is important for us to recognize the mystery which surrounds this. Jesus referred to this when he was talking with Nicodemus about being born again. He said, *"The wind blows where it likes, you can hear the sound of it but you have no idea where it comes from and where it goes. Nor can you tell how a man is born by the wind of the Spirit."* John 3:8 JBP.

This recognizes the amazing wonder of God's grace whereby Jesus comes to where I am, calls me by my name and changes me. So this life-changing encounter takes place both mysteriously and individually. Faith is the gift of God, and we may be confident that having given it, He will not take it back. Allow me to offer you the same encouragement Paul gave to the believers in Philippi, *"I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."* Phil.1:6

***"Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth:
for I am God and there is no other."*** Isaiah 45 : 22