

missionaries and youth workers.

(e) The Connexion makes no provision for the financial support of any personnel other than its central staff, evangelists and overseas missionaries.

## 5

### MISSION

The Connexion is concerned with the spread of the Gospel at home and overseas. Where required, Churches and Missions are assisted and new Churches or Missions may be formed, using Connexional resources of finance and personnel.

# Christian Foundations

## A Manual of Christian Discipleship

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## 1 - Introduction

So now you have become a Christian? You have a new life given to you by God and you need to know how to live it. This booklet is all about the next steps which follow on from your commitment to Christ. Hopefully, it will answer some of your questions too.

It will help to have another Christian to take you through the teaching in "Christian Foundations" - preferably a church leader, because it covers church membership amongst other things. Possibly you will be able to study with a group of people over a few weeks, when you can share some of your experiences and problems.

When a new building is constructed, it is important to get the foundations right. In the same way, the Christian life has to be built on good foundations. There is a need to understand basic Christian beliefs clearly, to know how to handle some of the problems that arise in the Christian life and to know the resources which are at your disposal to help you live effectively as a Christian. By completing this course of study, you will be in a better position to stand your ground as a Christian and to move forward in God's service.

May God be with you as you grow in your new life.

*Note: The references in brackets are to books of the Bible. The first number is a chapter reference and the second a verse. One the front pages of any Bible will show you where to find the book you need*

## Statement of Practice

The Statement of Practice is intended to describe how the Independent Methodist Connexion and its churches function. The churches adhere to the outlined modes of practice on a voluntary basis only.

- 1 CHURCHES**  
Each Church is self-governing. Subject to the Church's trust deed, the members meeting is the final authority in all matters affecting the Church.
- 2 CIRCUITS**  
Groups of Churches are associated in Circuits for mutual benefit. The meetings of the Circuits are deliberative in character and recommendations can only be effective by the cooperation of each Church. The organisation of each Circuit is outlined in its rules.
- 3 CONNEXION**  
All member Churches constitute the Connexion of Independent Methodist Churches. The organisation of the Connexion is outlined in its constitution.
- 4 MINISTRIES**
  - (a) Every believer is called to service in the Kingdom of God, there being no distinction between one service and another beyond that of function. It is recognised that differing talents, spiritual gifts and ministries are bestowed on believers for the benefit of the Church as a whole. Each Church should, therefore, recognise and cultivate the talents, gifts and ministries of its members.
  - (b) To assist in church leadership, pastoral responsibility and the ministry of the Word and sacraments, the Connexion commissions to its ministry those who have been called to ministerial appointment in one or more of the Connexion's churches and who have met the qualifications laid down in the current Statement on Ministry.
  - (c) To assist in the wider ministry of the Word, the Connexion commissions and accredits preachers who have been nominated by their Church and Circuit and who have met the appropriate qualifications laid down in the current Statement on Ministry.
  - (d) The Connexion may, from time to time, provide training and accredit people to other specified ministries in the Connexion, such as Bible teachers, evangelists, missionaries,

are the inspired Word of God and are the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

## 8 THE CHURCH

We believe that the Church is the whole company of the redeemed in heaven and on earth and consists of all who are united to God through faith in Christ.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which is His body. The purpose of the Church is to worship God, to promote the fellowship of his people, to preach the Gospel and to make disciples of all nations.

## 9 THE SACRAMENTS

We believe that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are to be practised in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that in the observance of the Lord's supper, Christ is certainly and really present, though not bodily in the elements.

When used by believers with faith and prayer, the sacraments are, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

## 10 THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

We believe in the priesthood of all believers, affirming that each believer has direct access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The individual believer is required to render obedience to Christ in every area of life, seeking always, under His direction, the advancement of His Kingdom.

## 2 - The Good News

A good start is to look at what happened when you became a Christian. What did it all mean? The implications may be bigger than you realise! The Bible describes it as "becoming a child of God" (John 1:12) or being "born again" (John 3:3). Each Christian is said to be "converted" or "saved". However you express it, what has happened to you is a wonderful change which came about when you trusted Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Saviour and you handed your life over to Him.

### Why Change?

Let's go back to the beginning and see *why* it is necessary for a person to experience this kind of change. The facts are these:

1. In the beginning, God made the world and the first people. It was His intention that they should live in harmony with Him and that their lives should be filled only with good things. Evil wasn't even in the picture.
2. Into God's perfect creation came an enemy who set out to undo God's perfect plan. By means of temptation, he led our ancestors into disobedience towards God. The enemy is called SATAN or THE DEVIL and the process of disobeying God is called SIN.
3. Sin has been part of human nature ever since then. It affects the way we think, speak and act. Like the bias in a wood (in a game of



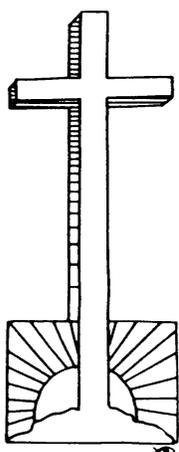
bowls) it pulls us off course, however hard we try to go straight. It is like a force which keeps us from doing right. Even worse, it separates us from God in the same way that people are separated when one person offends another.

4. Sin also exacts a price. As the man said to the boy whose cricket ball shattered a pane of glass in his greenhouse: "There's a price to be paid for that - and someone will have to pay it!" Without this

principle, there would be no justice - and God IS just. He tells us that the price of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which means exclusion from heaven when this life is over. However, He loves people and does not want them to perish (John 3:16) so He has provided a means to show mercy to mankind without being unjust or leaving the price of sin unpaid.

### God's Answer

Into our world, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who was born as one of us and lived a sinless human life: the only person who has ever done so (Heb.4:15). Jesus willingly gave His own life to pay the price for the sin of the human race. He took our sins upon Himself and carried them to the cross. No one else could have done so (1 Peter 2:24).



Because of what Jesus has done, the price of our sin is paid and the problem of separation from God is also overcome. We can know a restored relationship with Him. So does this mean that sin doesn't matter? Are we free to go on doing what we like because the price is paid anyway? Far from it - to secure this new relationship with God, there are two things which we have to do:

#### 1. Repent

Have you ever found yourself travelling in the wrong direction and you've had to turn right round and go the opposite way? That's what it means to REPENT. It means that you admit to yourself that your life has been going the wrong way and you set yourself to go the way that God directs. This involves changing the way you think, your attitudes, motives and values. From this will come a change in your habits, practices and lifestyle. It is not enough just to regret what has happened in your life - there must be definite change in the way you live (Matt. 3:8, Acts 26:20, 2 Cor. 7:10-11).

#### 2. Believe

To receive new life in Christ, it is necessary to believe completely that Jesus died for you. But what does that mean?

- Believing doesn't just mean THINKING - it means

## Statement of Faith

of the Independent Methodist Churches

- 1 THE TRINITY**  
We believe in One Living and True God, Creator of all, eternal in three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Him alone we worship and adore.
- 2 GOD THE FATHER**  
We believe that God the Father Almighty, in holy love, gave His Son for the salvation of mankind.
- 3 GOD THE SON**  
We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son. For our sake He became man, was truly human and truly divine, and lived a sinless human life.  
We believe that He reveals the Father, that He died to atone for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and was exalted. He is our Advocate, Mediator and Lord.  
We believe that He will return personally in power and glory.
- 4 GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT**  
We believe that God the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement. He causes those who repent to be born anew and dwells within them, witnessing to their salvation and developing the fruit of a Godly life. He endows believers with gifts for the up building of the Church. He glorifies Jesus.
- 5 MANKIND**  
We believe that all people are sinful and are unable to deliver themselves from the guilt, penalty and power of their sin.
- 6 SALVATION**  
We believe that salvation from the guilt, penalty and power of sin to eternal life is a free gift of God.  
Salvation is His purpose for all mankind and is only possible through personal faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
We believe that all must stand before the final judgement of Christ and that those who have refused His salvation will be separated eternally from God.
- 7 THE BIBLE**  
We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments

putting your whole TRUST in Jesus. We are made right with God not by our good deeds but through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9).

- Believing doesn't mean that you force yourself to accept something which goes against your real convictions. Belief rises from experience - you come to faith in Jesus as you realise that He is indeed the Way, the Truth and the Life. This is how God draws you to Himself and awakens faith within you.

When you put your trust in Jesus, you receive Him into your life as SAVIOUR (John 1:12-13). You then become part of God's family - His child. You also hand over your life to Him and submit to His authority, so that He is your LORD (Romans 10:9-13).

### 3 - Behind it All - God

God is the source of all life and existence - so it will take more than a few short statements to enable us to understand Him. If you tried to explain all the functions of the most powerful computer, it would require a whole array of complex textbooks which would only be meaningful to anyone who understands computers. When you consider that the mind of God is more powerful than the greatest computer, it gives just a small inkling of His greatness. Equally, when you try to imagine the sheer size of the universe, you realise that the Creator is much greater than His creation - and that's a breathtaking truth which is beyond the grasp of the human mind.

To help us to find out what God is like, we shall look at a few key words which convey some important truths about Him:

**God is Three**  
(Matt. 28:19, 2

**in One (The Trinity)**  
Cor. 13:14)



More people struggle with this aspect of God than with any other! How can God be One, yet Three? Yet this truth is vital because it separates authentic Christian belief from the cults which profess to be Christian - such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists. They all deny the Trinity.

The first thing to remember about the Trinity is that God is ONE. He is not divided into three parts, nor is there any distinction of character or purpose between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All were involved in the process of creation (Gen. 1:2-3, Col. 1:16). Yet God is revealed to us as each of these three. The **FATHER** sent the **SON** into the world and gives the **HOLY SPIRIT** to us today. You can compare this threefold aspect of God to the role of a man whom we may call Mr. Brown. He is a bank manager, but when he goes home he is husband to his wife. He also runs the local scout group. His group holds its account at his bank, so he fulfils more than one function without any conflict or division. He is the ONE Mr. Brown. It may be an oversimplification, but it illustrates that God has no more difficulty in being three in one than Mr. Brown has!

**God is Eternal** (Ps.90:2)

He is without beginning or ending. He has always been and will always

process of loving fellow members - through caring, welcoming, giving hospitality, practising forgiveness and bearing each other's burdens.

As we come to the end of this series of studies, we close with the words of Jesus to His disciples, as He looked ahead to the lifestyle which would characterise the new community of His people, the church.

*A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35)*

## 10 - Becoming a Church Member

Church membership is one of the ongoing steps of the Christian life. It is also one of the privileges of being a Christian, as it joins you to a family which is there to love, support and include you.

There are two basic aspects to becoming a church member: one is your own request to become part of the church and the other is the church's willingness to receive you into membership. Mutual acceptance is essential to the harmony of a church (Rom.15:7).

The church will be concerned to ensure that anyone joining it is doing so from the right motives and with the right attitudes. A welcome can be assured to those who are coming into the church out of a sense of love for its members, a willingness to maintain its harmony and a desire to serve God through its fellowship.

A new Christian will normally go through a course of preparation, using this booklet, while established Christians who have come from other churches may be received on transfer.

Each church has its own procedure for dealing with membership applications. After acceptance, arrangements are made to receive new members into fellowship, usually during a Sunday service.

### Membership Obligations

In addition to the conditions for acceptance as church members, the following points should be borne in mind:

1. In becoming part of a church, each person needs to be willing to fulfil a role according to his or her gifts. All members, whatever their gifts, complement each other and are needed to make the whole body function effectively.
2. It is essential that members work under the church's appointed leaders and accept the decisions which they make. This also applies to leaders of the various sections of the church.
3. Members' Meetings are held from time to time and all members have the opportunity to share in the church's planning and running by attending the meetings and using both voice and vote. Each church determines the age at which adult membership is defined.
4. Above all, love is the cement which binds God's people together. Everyone in the church fellowship has a vital part to play in the

be. As we exist within a framework of time and have never known anything else, this is hard to imagine - but, as a problem of understanding, it stems from our limited ability to grasp this truth.

### God is Creator (Gen.1:1)

Everything which exists comes from Him. His creativeness, in all its detail and harmony, tells us much about His nature and purpose. We are the result of His handiwork and our creative instincts are part of being made in His image.



### God is Holy (Deut.32:4)

The word "holy" refers to the essential character of God – His goodness, love and purity. He calls us to be holy even as He is holy (Lev. 20:7), which means that we aim, with His help, to grow to be like Him. That means recognising that certain things are right and others are wrong. The Bible helps to show us the difference between what is acceptable to God and what is not. Far from being an imposition on mankind, God's values offer us security and protection. Otherwise we would be subject to a Creator who would be totally without scruples - a prospect too horrifying to imagine. Holiness is tremendously positive in showing us that the Christian life is meant to be a life of God-like quality.

### God is Love (1 John 4:16)

God shows His love to us in creation. Our food, homes, family life and all the resources of the world are signs of His love to us. He also explains His love in the Bible - but most of all, He has shown His love in sending His son to die for us. When Jesus died on the cross, He did so to pay the price for all the wrong which we have done. (See more under "God the Son - Jesus")

### God the Father

When we speak of "God the Father", it doesn't mean that we can fully compare him with a human father, as they come in varying qualities. It is more helpful to see God as the true model of fatherhood on which human fathers should base themselves. As we live in a world where there is much emphasis on gender equality, some have tried to replace the concept of God as Father with that of God as "mother", or simply "parent." This does not convey the picture which God Himself has given in the Bible. Once you change to the idea of "Mother God" you undo the order for society which God intended from the beginning,

which is reflected in nature itself. To say that God is "Father" does not imply male superiority, but depicts the responsibility for the leadership and protection of the family which falls to the father. As Our Father, God is our guide, protector, provider and the one to whose authority we submit. As His children, we receive the benefits of His love to us.

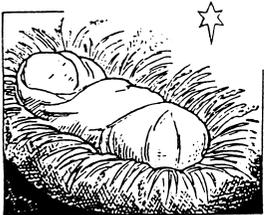
## God the Son - Jesus

The Apostles' Creed says more about the person of Jesus than anything else. This underlines how important it is to have a right understanding of Him. We need to know and believe what the Bible says about Him.

Because Jesus is God, He is eternal and has neither beginning nor end. However, in order to save us from our sins, He had to become man, to die as a man. So, the eternal Son of God entered our world and became the God-man. Jesus did not begin His existence when He was born at Bethlehem. He merely became man.

## His Birth

Jesus was born of a virgin mother without any human father (Lk. 1:34-35). The conception which took place in Mary was from the Holy Spirit - an act of divine involvement in the birth process which has never happened before or since. God was born in human form. We call this miracle the INCARNATION.



*God sent his own Son.*

## His Nature

Jesus was completely human, yet completely divine. As a human being he experienced temptation, hunger, pain, sorrow and finally death itself. No one can say that God is remote from suffering, since He suffered it intensely in the person of His Son. Jesus demonstrated the heart and nature of God

and finally broke down the barriers of sin and death which keep people from Him.

## His Death

Jesus died on the cross as one who was completely innocent of any wrong. A Roman crucifixion was one of the most barbaric forms of execution ever devised - yet Jesus endured it without a single wrong thought, word or action. Just as the Jews used animal sacrifices as signs of the need to put themselves right with God, so Jesus allowed

Meeting and organises various support and fellowship activities through the year. Examples of its work include a Ministry Education Course, a magazine and assistance to overseas missionaries.

Neither the Circuit nor the Connexion makes decisions which are enforced on the churches. However, churches honour the results of shared decision-making.

The Connexion is currently in the process of entering into a covenanted relationship with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, with the intention of integrating the work of the two denominations during the coming years.

## 9 - The Churches' Network The Denomination

It is an outcome of history that churches in the United Kingdom (and many other countries) are formed into groups known as denominations. There are Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Salvation Army, United Reformed Churches and many others, some of which have very recent origins.

Some Christians find this hard to live with. They feel that the church of Jesus Christ should be one and undivided, without any denominations at all. Some refuse to join a church because they do not wish to join a denomination. This can lead to an attitude of mind by which individual Christians stay aloof from their Christian brothers and sisters; instead of identifying with the whole of God's Church, they identify with none of it. There are also churches which are unattached and regard themselves as non-denominational. In fact, each one of these is a denomination in its own right, because the term "denomination" simply refers to the name by which a group is known.

Denominations, then, are simply groups of churches which operate in a particular manner. The fact that you belong to a particular type of church does not mean that you should regard it as "right" and others' churches as "wrong". We have a oneness in Christ with all who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, regardless of the denominations to which they belong.

This booklet is a publication of the Independent Methodist group of churches. Their main features are:

1. Each church is completely independent and self-governing, owning its own property and making its own rules of government, subject to its trust deeds.
2. Most churches have an unpaid ministry, though this is not uniformly the case.
3. All members are expected to share in responsibility for the local church, whether by office holding, practical service or general participation in the life of the church.
4. Most churches are members of a local CIRCUIT, where several churches work together on matters of shared concern, support each other and meet for fellowship. All the Circuits form the CONNEXION of Independent Methodist Churches. This body holds an Annual



Himself to be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind - not just for a limited time but forever.

### His Resurrection

For Jesus, death on the cross was not the end. As the sinless Son of God, He broke down the power of death which could not hold Him. When He rose from the grave, He was never to die again. It is important to know that Jesus rose *bodily* - He invited one of His friends to touch Him and be sure; He ate something and even cooked a meal over a



fire. Yet He was not bound by physical limitations - He appeared and disappeared from among them at will. All this was to prepare them for when they would no longer see Him.

He is Risen



### His Ascension and Reign

40 days after He rose from death, Jesus was seen by His followers for the last time. After commanding them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, He ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:9). In seeing Jesus apparently "ascend" visibly, His followers were being shown, in the only way possible, that he was going to something greater and higher. So what is He doing now? The Bible tells us that He reigns

with the Father and intercedes on our behalf to protect us from the judgement which we would otherwise face.

### His Return

The Bible tells us that one day Jesus will return to our world in power and glory. We do not know WHEN this will happen, but we know that His return will be visible to everyone and that He will separate those who are His own from those who are not (Rev. 1:8, Matt. 25:31-46). For those who believe, this is something to look forward to, for it means the start of being with Him forever.

### God the Holy Spirit

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, it is important to know that we are talking about the third PERSON of the Trinity - so we talk of "He" rather than "It." The first mention of the Holy Spirit in the Bible is right in the very beginning, where He is referred to as the Spirit of God who is active in creation. Right through the Old Testament, He is shown as the one who inspires God's appointed leaders. In the New Testament, we see an Old Testament promise fulfilled: "I will pour out my spirit on all

flesh..." God the Holy Spirit promises to make His home in the lives of all of God's people. The disciples received Him just a few days after Jesus ascended and found a new power which made them bold and effective as Christians. We shall find out more about His work in the lives of Christians later in this course. (See "The Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian")



good of the church as a whole.

See Acts 20:28-31, 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17, James 5:14-15.

Members' meetings are held to enable the whole fellowship to be involved in decision-making.

## **7. Finance**

Members' giving should not be seen simply as supplying money to "keep the church going". The Biblical picture of giving is that each Christian is called to give a TITHE (that is, one tenth) of his income to God (Mal.3:10, Lk. 11:42). This should be seen not as a grudging obligation, but as an expression of gratitude to the Lord for all that He has done for us. Much of this may go directly to the church, but some may go elsewhere - to missionary work, perhaps.

The commitment to tithe has to be understood in the light of personal circumstances. It is not right, for instance, for Christians to avoid debt obligations or family responsibilities as a result of their tithe commitment.

Each member should recognise that giving is a necessary aspect of responsibility to the church. How much that individual chooses to give is between himself or herself and God.

countries.

### 5. Social Concern

The church is meant to be salt and light in society - having an effect for good both locally and nationally (Matt. 5:13-16). This may entail programmes which are concerned with specific needs in the community, such as luncheon clubs for the elderly, care of vulnerable families or support for victims of violence. It may also involve church members taking up positions on the local council or school governing bodies. Alertness to moral issues at national level may give rise to correspondence with Members of Parliament. The scope is vast.



### 6. Leadership and Service

The church needs the gifts, talents and energies of all its members in order for it to function. Whether or not a church has any full time workers, each member is called to serve the Lord willingly and gladly. Whether you are called to a leadership office or simply to serve in a quiet, background role, your contribution matters.

Perhaps the most important truth to underline about leadership is that the Head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ; this is a position which no one may usurp. Human beings are His servants, some of whom carry leadership responsibilities as directed in Scripture.

A church has to have a leadership structure. This can take a number of forms such as:

- (a) a MINISTER or PASTOR, who may be paid or unpaid, according to the church's preference or circumstances. (Some churches have more than one.)
- (b) a LEADERSHIP GROUP, sometimes termed an ELDERSHIP.
- (c) a PRESIDENT and VICE-PRESIDENT who are elected annually.

In each case, there are other officers who work alongside the leaders. Those in positions of leadership have general oversight of the church. Under God's guidance, they chart its direction, define its teaching and rule on matters of a spiritual nature. They carry the greatest responsibility for the fellowship's well-being, so it is important they are supported and upheld as they fulfil this role. This does NOT mean that they are special people, but they DO carry a special burden (1 Thess 5:13). Nor does it mean that any personal adulation should be given to them, but it DOES mean that their direction should be accepted, for the

## 4 - Making Your Stand Baptism

When people became followers of Jesus, he required them to be baptised, as a sign that they were now committed to Him. Why did he choose this sign? What did it mean? Does it apply to Christians today?

In baptism, water is used to demonstrate that a person's life has been made clean in God's sight as a result of turning away from sin and turning in faith to Jesus. It doesn't mean that the person will never do anything wrong again, but it demonstrates two things very effectively:

1. The person who is being baptised has "repented" of his previous life (see "The Good News"). This may include feeling deeply sorry about past behaviour, but above all it means that he has turned from a life of pleasing himself to a life which is pleasing to God. (Luke 3:3)
2. When we turn in believing faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask for His forgiveness, He makes us clean in God's sight. It is like the slate being wiped clean - our sinful record is cancelled out (1 Peter 3:21).

In combining these two principles, the water of baptism serves as a sign of what Jesus has done in the new believer's life. It shows that the past has been "washed away" and the person has a clean, fresh start.

Jesus was baptised, though He had no sin and did not need cleansing. In the act of baptism, He was identifying with His followers and showing them the starting point for their new lives. (Matt. 3:13-15).

The method of baptism carries a meaning too. Paul talked about this when he explained that it was like being "buried with Christ", while coming out of the water was like rising again (Rom. 6:1-5). It is the sign of dying to your old life and coming into the new life that Jesus gives. To convey this meaning, the method of immersing the person in water is used. This is what the Greek word "baptizo" means - to dip, sink or immerse.

So when should a new Christian be baptised? The New Testament shows that this should be soon after becoming a Christian (Acts 2:40-41). Quite apart from the meanings which we have considered, it also serves as sign to everyone who knows you that you have made the great step of turning away from your past and into a new life with Jesus.

## Infant Baptism

Some churches allow not only for the baptism of new Christians, but also of 'infants', meaning babies or small children who have been brought by their parents. This practice switches the emphasis from baptism as a sign of personal faith on the part of the participant to a sign of the anticipated working of God's grace in the life of the young child.

Among those churches which practise infant baptism, some will offer the rite to all who request it, whereas others will limit it to the children of professed believers. This is based on the view that when God brings people into a covenant relationship with Him, He includes their children, so infant baptism expresses the family's oneness in faith.

Among Independent Methodist Churches, some practise the baptism of believers only, while others also make provision for infant baptism.

## What next?

Baptism is linked to belonging to a church. It is a sign of becoming part of the community of God's people. When we read of the early Christians we are told that they believed, were baptised and **ADDED TO THE CHURCH**.

To undertake baptism with no thought of commitment to a local Christian Church is to miss out part of its meaning. We shall see this presently when we look at the section on the church.

However, it is important to point out that we are saved by faith alone, not faith plus baptism.

Christians are commanded to worship God (Deut.6:13) and to meet together for the purpose (Heb.10:25). However, this should not only be a Christian's duty but his delight (Psalm 100:4) and done with due reverence towards God (Psalm 95:6).

Worship may contain traditional hymns and set prayers, with a pipe organ accompaniment or may be a time of spontaneous praise with a music group and modern worship songs. The important thing is not the format of worship but the spirit in which we participate.

## 2. The Lord's Supper

One special worship service is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Through this, we obey Christ's command to remember His death (1 Cor. 11:23-24). The bread and wine symbolise Christ's body and blood. Just as food and drink nourish the physical body, so Christ nourishes the spiritual body and draws near to His people in a special way during this service. No service expresses our oneness in Christ more than this one does. We come to the Lord's table at His invitation, in total equality, as forgiven sinners. It is a service which all Christians should be especially concerned to attend, as it expresses their ongoing relationship with Christ.



## 3. Fellowship

The Christian faith is a shared faith by its very nature. There is no such thing as a Christian hermit! Through the shared life and activity of the church, we come to know people, develop friendships, share each other's problems and show love and concern to one another, so that everyone is able to feel a sense of belonging.



## 4. Proclamation and Teaching

One of the church's functions is to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to its local community through its worship services and evangelistic work. It then has the further function of building up believers in the faith through its teaching. All believers need to continue to come under the sound of the Word of God, as delivered by those who have been appointed to this task. In connection with this, we are concerned with the spread of the gospel overseas, so we support this work through our prayers, our giving, our correspondence and sometimes by sending out missionaries to other

## 8 - Christians Together The Church

### What is the Church?

The Church, in its global sense, is made up of all the people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (Matt.16:18, Eph. 5:25). This includes all believers on earth and all believers in heaven. The head of the church is Jesus Christ Col.1:18). When you became a Christian, all other Christians became your brothers and sisters. You are now part of a family in which God is Father.



In the local sense, there are communities of Christians who make up the church in a particular place (Matt.18:17, 1 Cor. 1:2, Romans 16:3-5). Every Christian should belong to a local church, as this is the place where Christians gather and live out the shared life of God's people.

The Bible uses a number of expressions to say what the church is. These include:

- 1. A Building** - 1 Cor. 3:9. This does not mean an actual physical edifice of bricks and mortar, but a structure of PEOPLE - the buildings which they use are simply meeting places for God's people. Each one of us is needed to make the building complete.
- 2. The Bride of Christ** - Eph. 5:23. This is a picture of the union of Christ to the Church and its preciousness to Him.
- 3. The Body of Christ** - Eph. 5:30. As parts of the body, we complement each other and together we make up the whole.

Read also 1 Peter 2:4-10 to see a further series of pictures of the church as God sees it.

There are several aspects of the life of the local church which need to be considered here.

#### 1. Worship

## 5 - Under Orders Discipleship

When Jesus began His ministry, He gathered people around Him and called them to become DISCIPLES. The word means a learner, pupil, follower or someone under instruction. Many great teachers and thinkers of the time had disciples, whose aim was to become like their masters. In the same way, a CHRISTIAN disciple aims to become like Jesus. We shall now look at what this entails.

### 1. An ongoing relationship with Christ

Jesus once described the relationship of His disciples to Himself as like that of a vine to its branches (John 15:1-8).

God has promised to keep us and will not let go of us. We can be confident that He will keep His promises.

(John 10: 29, Philippians 1: 6)

However, we have to play OUR part in keeping our relationship with Christ alive so that we can draw on His life and power. This is a link of faith, which can be kept alive constantly by the following means:

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| a) prayer                           | d) worship   |
| b) reading the Bible                | e) the companionship of the Holy Spirit who is always with us. |
| c) fellowship with other Christians |  |



2.

### A Christlike character

By ourselves we cannot ever hope to become like Jesus, but when we became Christians, the Holy Spirit began to change us. This is rather like having the "seed" of new life within us. Just as a seed planted in the ground eventually leads to the growth of fruit, so does the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. We call the results "the fruit of the Spirit" - you can read about it in Galatians 5:22-23.

Other qualities of the Christian life are shown in Colossians 3:12-15

and 2 Peter 1:5-9. It is important to remember that ALL of the things listed in these passages should be a part of a Christian's life - not just some of them. Remember the picture of the vine, mentioned above. The fruit is the outcome of our life in Christ.

Fruit, in the natural sense, takes time to grow - and so does fruit in the life of the Christian. Most of us take time to lose our old ways. However, a life that is lived in daily contact with Christ will produce fruit in increasing abundance as our relationship with Him grows and develops.



### 3. Being under the discipline of Christ

The words "disciple" and "discipline" have the same source - when we become disciples of Jesus, we come under His discipline. That means we place ourselves under an obligation to obey His commands and to live a Christian lifestyle, despite the fact that it may set us apart from the way in which people around us live. For instance, a Christian is required to be diligent, not lazy; a hardworking employee or a just employer; truthful, not deceitful; faithful in marriage; a good parent or an obedient child. For some new Christians, this may entail a radical change in lifestyle and attitude - but it is part of a disciplined Christian life and cannot be avoided.

Study the following passages and see how they apply to your own situation: Eph. 5:22 - 6:8 and Col. 3:18-25. (For "slaves" read "employees" and for "masters" read "employers". The principle is the same.)

Discipleship can be costly, involving renunciation (giving up what is wrong) and sacrifice (giving up some of the good things in life in order to serve God more effectively.) See Matt. 16:24-26. However, it is also tremendously positive as it motivates us to be better people who want to make our world a better place.

### 4. Awareness of the Enemy

Forget any ideas you may have of Satan as a comic figure, with horns and a forked tail! He is real and is constantly working against the purposes of God. In so doing, he sets out to bring Christians down and destroy their faith. His tactics include deceiving us with lies (Gen. 3:4-5) and tempting us to sin (1 Thess. 3:5, John 8:44). But there is a difference between sin and temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted - even Jesus experienced temptation, but he did not sin (Heb. 4:15). God gives us strength to resist every form of temptation (1

Christian lives (Eph. 5:18).

6. The name "HOLY Spirit" tells us what His nature is. We need to examine our lives regularly and ask the Lord to deal with things in our lives that are wrong, so that His Spirit can operate freely through us.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, there is a release of God's power in our lives. This is often evident in a new boldness of faith, freedom in worship and deeper prayer life. There are also gifts which the Holy Spirit gives. We shall look at these briefly now.

In 1 Cor. 12:7-11, a list of spiritual gifts is given. The same chapter (verses 27-31) blends in some more. There are further lists in Eph. 4:11-13 and Rom. 12:4-8. Others are mentioned individually elsewhere. In all, there are at least 27 named spiritual gifts in the New Testament. Some appear spectacular at first sight - such as healing and miracles. Others seem much more mundane - like service, helping others and hospitality - yet they are all essential to make up the complete picture of what God gives to His people. To understand the gifts in a right perspective, bear in mind the following points:

1. No one gift is more important than the others (1 Cor. 12:21-22).
2. No one gift is given to all believers (1 Cor. 12:29-30).
3. Gifts are not spiritual status symbols. God gives them as HE pleases - and they are shared around His people (1 Cor. 12:11)
4. Gifts are not for the individual believer's private satisfaction, but for the benefit of the Christian community as a whole, "so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Eph. 4:12, 1 Cor. 12:7).

Be open to God for whatever gifts He gives to you - and then be prepared to use them for the good of the whole church. YOUR gifts are essential to the effective functioning of the body.

## 7 - The Holy Spirit in the Life of a Christian



As we have already seen, the Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in the lives of believers to make them more like Jesus. In addition, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as our companion - to live within us, to make Jesus real to us and to lead us into truth (John 14:15-18, 15:12-14).

We are also told in the Bible that we need to be *filled* or *baptised* with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as being like living water (John 4:14) which will satisfy the deepest needs of our inner beings and keep us refreshed in our Christian lives.

Every Christian will (or should) want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The following points may help to show what this means:

1. The Holy Spirit is at work in the life of every believing Christian, having led him to believe in the first place (Rom. 8:9). Without the Holy Spirit's work we would never become Christians.
2. It is God's plan that the Holy Spirit should not only enter but FILL our lives from the moment we believe (Acts 2:38). However, not all believers experience this at the time (Acts 8:14-17). For some people, there is immediate, powerful evidence that the Holy Spirit has filled them from the word "go", whilst others find that their newfound faith is quiet and unspectacular. Some may have a new experience of the Holy Spirit at a later date. We should never judge our own experiences by those of others; nor should we expect others to conform to our own expectations.
3. All of us, whatever our experience, need to be open to the Holy Spirit, seeking to be filled - and filled again - so that we can receive all that Our Heavenly Father longs to give us in love. He has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Matt.7:11).
4. The Holy Spirit is a free agent, blowing like the wind, visiting whom He chooses, when He chooses (John 3:8). In this sense, we can't "arrange" when He will fill us. David Watson explains:  
*"Although no one can create or control the wind, we can put ourselves in a place where we can experience the wind when it blows. We can throw open the windows and the doors to let the fresh breeze come in, and we can also do the same with our lives by opening them to the Spirit."*
5. Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't just once for all. We are commanded to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit throughout our

Cor.10:13) and turn our back on sin (James 4:7).

### 5. Letting others know about your faith

When people give evidence in court, they TESTIFY to what they know and serve as WITNESSES in the case. The same terms apply to Christians when they make known their faith. Sharing the good news can be a natural expression of the joy of knowing Jesus (Acts 4:20).

Disciples are witnesses to their faith:

- a) by the way they live (Matt. 5:16)
- b) by speaking of their faith (giving testimony) when the opportunity arises (1 Peter 3:15).

A good witness, by life and word, is the most effective way of leading someone else to Christ, which is what Jesus has told us to do (Matt.28:19-20).

## 6 - A Christian's Devotional Life

In the chapter on discipleship, we looked at how a Christian maintains a living relationship with Christ. Two of the ways of doing this are through prayer and reading the Bible. While these are included in worship services, they are also meant to be used for personal, private devotion and, where appropriate, in family devotions. Most Christians set aside a time each day for this purpose - often first thing in the morning or during the evening. You need to decide which is best for yourself and make it part of your daily programme of life. It is easy to let the habit slip through tiredness or "not feeling like it." This is where discipline comes in again; it is vital that regular, daily prayer and Bible reading are not neglected.

### Prayer

When we pray, we do so -

- TO the Father. We come as His children to share with Him the things of life which concern us.
- THROUGH the Son. Jesus is the only way to God. We need no-one else to mediate on our behalf.
- IN the Spirit. The Holy Spirit prompts us and helps us in our praying.

What do we include in our prayers? The following acronym may help:

- A Adoration** We bring to God first the praise that is due to Him. If you find this difficult, the words of some of the Psalms may help.
- C Confession** We ask God to forgive us both for things we have done wrong and things we have neglected to do. We also ask Him for strength to overcome temptation.
- T Thanksgiving** We bring our thanks to God for all that He has done for us.
- S Supplication** We lay before God the needs of others and our own needs. Praying for others is known as "intercession".



In addition to your daily devotional time, you can pray "on the spot" in any situation of life which requires it. Posture doesn't matter - you can sit

stand or kneel. God simply wants you to keep in touch with Him.

### The Bible



The significance of the Bible to a Christian is that it is the Word of God - not just an ancient book from the past. It provides spiritual food to nourish us and forms the yardstick against which a Christian's standards are measured. It is also the "Sword of the Spirit", the weapon which enables Christians to make their faith known. We build our lives on its authority and truth (2 Tim.3:16).

In terms of daily use, it is helpful to read perhaps a chapter each day. If you use Bible Reading notes such as "Our Daily Bread" or "Every Day with Jesus", these will give you a specified portion to read. For a new Christian, it is not a good idea to try to read right through from Genesis to Revelation! If you have no notes, start with a gospel - Luke, perhaps, followed by Acts. Take advice from a church leader if you are unsure.

A few thoughts on HOW to read your Bible:

1. **Systematically** - as suggested above. Don't just dip here and there.
2. **Prayerfully** - Ask God to speak to you through it.
3. **Obediently** - Be ready to act on what God has shown you.

If you don't already have a Bible, you will find it helpful to obtain one of the modern translations, like the New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Contemporary English Version or Good News Bible.