

Articles

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Article for the week of June 1, 2008

A Personal Relationship with Jesus?

Have you ever heard religious people talk about making Jesus their “PERSONAL” Lord and Savior? We all know that when you become a Christian, Jesus becomes our Savior and our Lord. But why do they stress the word “personal”? Is there something we’re missing here? Let’s take a look at that today.

How can you tell if it’s personal?

Have you ever had someone say something that aggravated you? Perhaps they insulted your favorite football team. Perhaps they contradict you on politics. Perhaps they spoke ill of your family. Perhaps they even insulted you. How did that make you feel? Mad? Upset? Why would that be? It’s because those things are all personal to us. Our family means a lot to us. To some, college football is their life and to insult their team is to insult them. If someone insults you, does it not hurt? Is there something that gets you bent out of shape? You know those things are personal.

Do you feel the same way when someone uses the Lord’s name in vain? Or when someone speaks of the earth being here for billions of years (contrary to the Biblical record)? Does it really bother you when people twist the Word of God around and lie about what it teaches?

If someone trashing Arkansas bothers you more than someone trashing the Bible, then something is wrong. Your relationship with Christ is not personal.

Do you have a friend that you would always stand up for? Perhaps someone you’ve known for a long time and would do anything for? If someone called them stupid, or went so far as to even hit them, would you stand up for this friend? Christ should be your best friend. If you are not willing to stand up for Christ as He’s insulted, you do not have a personal relationship with Him.

You know the words of the song:

There’s not a friend like the lowly Jesus, No not one, No not one!
There’s not an hour that he is not near us, No not one, No not one!
Jesus knows all about our struggles, he will guide till the day is done!

That’s personal! We need to make sure our relationship with Christ is personal. But how?

Making it Personal through Study

2 Timothy 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The scriptures can make us wise. I've often heard wisdom described as the ability and understanding to apply knowledge to ourselves and others. How are we to even know who Christ is if we do not study the scriptures? But where did scripture come from?

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Now we see that all scripture came from God! And in studying it, we may be perfect or complete, and fully ready and able to accomplish all the good that can be done!

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

All these verses show the benefit of studying God's Word. But how does that make it personal? After all, many people study the Bible like they study for a history test. They memorize the main names, places, and events and can rattle them off without much problem, but they still don't understand the reasons for them. Yes, they know Jesus was born and died on the cross, but do they know why?

When you study the Bible and look beyond just the people, places, and events you can start to see what you need to learn from it. For example: Jesus died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for us. Sin came into the world, and those who sinned deserved death. God, in his grace, allowed animal sacrifices to be used in place of the sinners. Then Jesus came to earth and allowed himself to be the ultimate sacrifice, and in doing so, ended all need for animal sacrifices, as well as paying the debt that we owed--that being our own lives because of our sin. That's pretty important.

What kind of person would go before the judge and say "I know Brad's been sentenced to death for what he's done, but I would like to take the death sentence in his place."? Only a true, personal friend. So, we can see in just reading about Jesus on the cross that he's ready and willing to be a true personal friend to us. Are we ready to make the same commitment to him?

Making it Personal through Prayer

Studying is great for accumulating knowledge, but it is still not enough.

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

If we want to continue getting wisdom (the ability to make knowledge apply personally), we must pray to God and ask for it! Why, though? Is not study of the Word of God enough? No it is not! Please understand, I am not saying that God will give us some knowledge that is not found in scripture, but he will give us better understanding and wisdom on how that knowledge applies to us. Because even the most intelligent person on the planet is still not even on the same playing field as God is. God knows and understands infinitely more than us.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

While praying for wisdom is all well and good, there are more reasons to make it personal through prayer. We are to be in constant contact with God (Pray without Ceasing - I Thes. 5:17).

When you have a problem with something, who do you turn to? Who do you tell it to? A friend, right? Be it your spouse, or a friend you've known for a while, telling someone your troubles, problems, and concerns always seems to make things better. Especially when you have someone who understands what you're going through. Why are so many people willing to tell their troubles to a friend, but not to God? Should God not be the FIRST one we turn to with our problems and cares? After all, he's the only one who can actually do anything for every problem we have!

You'll notice that the more you talk to someone, the better friend they will be. The same way with God. The more you talk to him (and listen to what he says to you through his word), the better friend you will have. As the old saying goes, "To have a friend, you must first be a friend." Be in constant conversation with God.

Making it Personal in our Worship

It is high time that we stop worrying about whether we--or anyone else--are hitting the right notes, or singing in the right key. Like Paul says in I Corinthians 13, if our actions are not done in love, they are useless! Our concentration should be on the words we are singing. When we focus on what we are singing, and why we are singing it (I Cor 14:15), it becomes personal. Have you ever written a letter to someone you love, or a poem? When you read it to them, is it not meaningful and personal to you? Singing songs to praise God should be done with just as much--in fact more--meaning!

When we take of the Lord's Supper, is it just a nibbling on some bread and sipping some grape juice? What are you thinking about when you partake of them? Remember what the Lord said,: we are showing His death until He comes again. We are showing it to ourselves, and it should be constantly reminding us of what Christ did for us!

Should we stop doing these things if we aren't "feeling" like it? By all means, NO! When you stop singing, you not only discourage yourself, but those around you as well. You may cause other people to take notice of you and take their minds off what they should be focused on.

Psychologists and counselors have a saying that they use quite frequently. Feelings follow actions. If you have a problem feeling happy, start acting like you're happy, and you'll be surprised that you will soon begin to feel the way you are acting. Many movie stars have confessed this is true. The late Charlton Heston told that after acting the part of Moses in the movie the Ten Commandments, he really began to feel more like he could follow God and lead people.

Continue to sing, and participate in the worship service. But when you do it, try to think about what you are doing, and why you are doing it. That will help make it more personal.

Making it Personal through Action

You've all heard about "just saying the sinner's prayer" and invite Jesus into your heart. Nowhere in the entire Bible is one instructed to pray for salvation. If that was necessary,

then obviously the Holy Spirit would have seen fit to include that in the scriptures. But he didn't. So, what action is needed to make it personal?

First one must believe that Christ really is the Son of God, as said in Scriptures. For if you don't believe in Him, you'd have no reason to want a relationship with him. If you don't believe He's the Son of God and that He was raised from the dead, you'd have no more reason to want a personal relationship with Him than with Atilla the Hun (another famous dead guy).

Second you must repent of your sins. If you aren't willing to put away your old life and live for Jesus, he can't help you. In fact, He said that if you don't repent you'd perish!

You must confess. The Ethiopian eunuch confessed his belief before God and Phillip after being taught. Jesus also says that if you don't confess Him before men, He won't confess you before God. That means if you're not willing to confess Christ before men, you've not got Him as your friend.

You must be baptized. It's stated over and over throughout the New Testament. Baptism Saves! Baptism makes us Christians! It puts us into Christ! It's the way we accept Christ's friendship and tell Him that we will be His friend too!

And after entering into that personal relationship with Christ, we must continue to make it more and more personal. Even if every person on earth were your close friend, no one could be closer than Jesus Christ. We must make it more personal through study, through prayer, through worship, and through our actions.

Won't you make it personal?

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