

Three Stages In A Christian's Life

By Casey Head

If we were to *generalize* the process by which godly people develop in this life, I believe that we could identify three main stages. First, there is the “pre-Christ” stage in which a person lives with little regard for eternity. Some people may acknowledge God at this point in their life, but for the most part, they place most of their focus on secular matters. When a person graduates from the “pre-Christ” stage, they enter the “disciple” stage. Now, a disciple isn't necessarily a saved person. The word “disciple” simply implies someone who is learning and following, whether saved or lost (although considering salvation). Those in the “disciple” stage are interested in spiritual matters and they may even have a great desire to do what is right, but they lack maturity and true commitment. Finally, there is the “cross-bearer” stage. This is when a disciple comes to embrace the true character of Christ. They desire to imitate Christ as they live. Let us illustrate these three stages by examining the life of Peter.

When we are first introduced to Peter in Matthew 4:18, he is fishing on a boat with his brother, Andrew. This was his occupation. He did it every day. Now, Peter was certainly religious at this point, but he had not yet encountered Christ, therefore placing him in the “pre-Christ” stage. As I mentioned above, not all people in this stage are religious- some are and some are not. What everyone in this stage shares in common is a commitment to secular matters rather than a commitment to Christ.

When Jesus approached Peter in Matthew 4:19 and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” Peter arose immediately and followed Christ, serving as one of His twelve disciples, or apostles. At this point, he entered the “disciple” stage. He made many wonderful statements and for the most part was committed to the cause of Christ, but at the same time, he lacked true maturity and understanding of the plan of God. We know that He denied Jesus in a moment of weakness (Mt. 26:69-75), and he also failed to comprehend the true character of Christ, expecting a physical kingdom and reign (Ac. 1:6). He had a lot to learn, as do most people in stage two. Most in the “disciple” stage are babes in Christ, but some have not yet reached the point of conversion. They will, however, before they graduate to stage number three, the “cross-bearer” stage.

I derive the term “cross-bearer” from Matthew 16:24-25, which says, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.” After the ascension of Christ, Peter reached this stage. He finally comprehended the purpose and mission of Jesus Christ. Despite his own moment of weakness during the time of Jesus' trial, he willingly confronted thousands of Messiah-murdering Jews in Acts 2. Those in the “cross-bearer” stage are not perfect, but they are driven by a deeply-planted love for God. They desire to draw closer to God and to know as much about Him as possible. Their primary objective is to reach heaven.

These are the three identifiable stages in the life of a godly person- the “pre-Christ” stage, the “disciple” stage, and the “cross-bearer” stage. Most godly people will encounter all three stages as they progress down the path of life. Where are you? Are you in the “pre-Christ” stage, placing most of your focus on...your career? Are you in the “disciple” stage, learning about Christ but unwilling to devote yourself entirely to Christ? If you are not in the third and final stage, what is holding you back?