

A photograph of a man and a woman exercising in a gym. The man is in the foreground, lying on his back, lifting a black dumbbell with his right arm. He has brown hair and is wearing a black t-shirt. The woman is in the background, also lying on her back, lifting a black dumbbell with her left arm. She has dark hair and is wearing a white sports bra. The gym floor is light-colored wood. The title text is overlaid on the image.

# Becoming a Strong Christian

By Tom Shanklin



“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

# What shall we do?

Just as in the days of the early church, we are presently living in a great time of a move of God in the earth. Many lives are being touched, many are being transformed by the power of the living God. It is possible that you are reading this as a new believer in Christ. Perhaps you are one of the people that Jesus is touching in this present hour. If so, I am excited with you for what God is doing in your life.

Perhaps you are like the people that Peter was preaching to that day. You have been convicted in your heart and realized that you have been living foolishly, serving self, serving the devil, dishonoring God. . . and it was because of your sins that Jesus was crucified. As the scripture says: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (ROMANS 3:23, KJV). All of us have sinned. All of us need forgiveness. We all need Jesus.

Maybe your sin is sexual immorality, or stealing, or hatred, or self-righteousness, but whatever it is, you won't get into heaven with it. Maybe you have gone to church all your life, but now you have realized that you're not right with God.

Jesus Christ came to this earth, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and then died on the cross for our sins. He was buried and was raised from dead on the third day. After that, He poured out the Holy Spirit upon the early believers and they began to speak in unknown languages by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

A group of people heard them and wondered what this unusual phenomenon was all about. Some were amazed and were questioning. Others were mocking. Then Peter stood up and preached to the crowd. He told them that this outpouring of the Spirit was predicted in the Old Testament and that it was related to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He told them that Jesus is Lord, is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and that they, the people, had crucified the Lord. They became deeply convicted and asked Peter, "What shall we do?"

## Repent

The very first thing that Peter told them to do is to “Repent”. . . to turn from their sins. God may touch your life. You may have experienced His presence. You may understand the message of the cross. You may believe mentally that Jesus died for your sins. But until you make a decision from the heart to turn from sin and unto God, you have not yet experienced the miracle of the New Birth. You are still in the Old Birth, the old nature, the old way. Jesus said, “You must be born again.” (JOHN 3:7) You must get a new nature. You must be delivered OUT OF the kingdom of darkness and into his glorious light.

As long as you are by choice living in darkness, you cannot be in the light. It's either one or the other, light or darkness. So, repent, and come into the light. Jesus said, “. . . except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (LUKE 13:3, KJV). The Apostle Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;” (ACTS 3:19, KJV). And, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2PETER 3:9, KJV). True repentance (turning from sin and unto God) is an absolute necessity to salvation. This means that you need to give your life to Jesus and let Him be your Lord and Master.

Any true repentance or conversion is a miracle from God. It is not you or I deciding to turn over a new leaf and be good from now on. How many of us have tried that over and over, without success? No, it is a turning to God that involves faith in His ability to make us different, and when it happens, we ARE different.

This is why faith in the cross of Jesus Christ works with repentance to bring salvation. Faith and repentance are inseparable. You can't have one without the other. True faith requires repentance. True repentance requires faith.

## Be Baptized

Not only are we to repent, but we also need to be baptized. Baptism is the normal and scriptural thing to do once a person has

decided to follow Jesus. It is the Lord's command, and in the early church it was always done immediately upon conversion to Christ.

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you need to be baptized. He said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you. . ." Not some of you. Not those of you who don't have relatives who would object. No, "everyone of you."

Baptism in the Bible was always done after a person received Christ. It is a physical act that represents the washing away of sins, the death to the old nature and rising up in newness of life. Any "baptism" that is done as a infant or before a person has made a personal choice to follow Christ is not Scriptural water baptism.

The word baptism means "to dip by immersion," so sprinkling or pouring do not meet the Scriptural definition of baptism.. The dipping in the water represents our burial with Christ, because we have died to the old way of life.

Baptism is a powerful event at the starting gate of the believers life in Christ, which enables him or her to separate from the old mode of living and begin to walk in the empowered Christlike life. It is very significant, powerful and necessary in the life of the believer. "Be baptized, every one of you. . ."

## Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost

There is a promise associated with repenting and being baptized that involves that involves a supernatural empowerment called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8, KJV).

God says that if you'll truly repent and be baptized, he'll give you the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Now this is the original gift that the church received on Pentecost in Acts 2. He said that the same thing will happen to you. You'll be filled with the Spirit, and you'll speak in unknown languages as the Spirit enables you. You'll then have power in your life to live the Christian life and to be a witness for the Lord.

The baptism of the Holy Ghost is just as much a part of the Bible as John 3:16 and Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received it and then to begin to preach the Gospel. So if you haven't received the Holy Ghost, ask the Lord to fulfill His promise to you and baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire. The open your mouth and begin to speak in unknown languages by the inspiration of the Spirit.

## It's for everyone!

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:39-41, KJV)

Peter said that this message of forgiveness and empowerment was for everyone, including children, and including people from every nation and culture.

## *In other words, this message is for YOU!*

God wants you to enjoy the fullness of His blessings through Jesus Christ. He wants you to be forgiven, cleansed and full of the Holy Ghost. You don't have to twist His arm and talk Him into doing these things. He's already made the way through Jesus Christ and the work of the cross.

But Peter said "save yourself" from this crooked generation. How do you "save yourself?" By repenting, being baptized and being full of the Holy Ghost, and then by living a holy life. In other words, stop acting like the rest of the world.

Stop watching soap operas. Stop going to the bars. Stop chasing women, or men. Stop cussing like a sailor. Amend your ways. Change your mode of operation. Start living the new life.

I'll never forget when the Lord changed my life. I had been involved in drugs and alcohol for many years. I was bound with habit, with sin. But God Almighty spoke to me, "Turn from the things of the

world.” Hearing His voice touched me so deeply, that I immediately replied, “Yes, Lord!”

I tell you the truth: I have never been the same. Jesus instantly set me free of drugs and alcohol bondage. He gave me a new life. He filled me with His Spirit. The scripture says, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;” (EPHESIANS 5:18, KJV). When you get filled up with God’s Spirit, you don’t need alcohol or drugs. Instead you can soar like an eagle with Jesus.

Some people are convinced that it is painful and costly to serve the Lord. They want to wait to the last few moments of earth to breathe a prayer of repentance, so they won’t miss out on all the things of this world. But I tell you the truth, I’m glad I’m saved. I wouldn’t have wanted to wait another day. In fact, I only wish I had gave my life to the Lord sooner, so I could have enjoyed forgiveness and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and all the blessings of God in my life.

*It’s a joy to serve God, not a burden.*

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Save yourself from this crooked generation, repent, be baptized, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## Going on with God

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (ACTS 2:42, KJV).

**Once these people were baptized, they “continued steadfastly.”**

In life, we know that persistence pays. In every endeavor of life, steadfastness, commitment, perseverance is required. The Christian life is no exception. The early church continued steadfastly.

- ✚ When they faced persecution, they continued steadfastly.
- ✚ When they faced affliction, they continued steadfastly.
- ✚ When it didn’t seem like their prayers were getting answered, they continued steadfastly.



And if you and I are going to be successful in the Christian life, we are going to do the same. There are difficulties, obstacles, contradictions and problems in life. When we get to heaven, all that will be done away with. But while we are here, there is a devil to resist and people that will oppose us. There is a fight of faith to fight. The Christian life is not for quitters, so put on your battle garments and get ready. God will equip you and enable you to face every battle victoriously.

## The Apostles Doctrine

The scripture says that they continued steadfastly in “the apostles doctrine.”

First of all, the apostles doctrine IS the New Testament. The entire New Testament was written by the early apostles or by people that were closely associated with them. So, praise God, we have the “apostles doctrine” (or teaching) available to us in written form.

Many times people get hungry for the things of God and they begin to read the Bible, starting with the book of Genesis. Well, the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and it's all beneficial. But as a new believer, you should do most of your reading in the New Testament, beginning with Matthew.

The New Testament records the life of Jesus in the first four books, or the Gospels. It then relates the history of the early church in the book of Acts. The remainder of the New Testament is letters that were circulated in the early church that provided instruction in how to live the Christian life. It ends with the book of revelation, which gives prophetic insight to the fulfillment of all things and the coming of Jesus to the earth again. These beautiful books of the Bible will help you to lay a foundation for your faith that will be with you all the days of your life. Read the New Testament.

We cannot overstate the importance of the Word of God in the life of the believer. When you receive Christ into your life, God does a miracle in your life called the New Birth. In this miracle, you are translated, transformed, and miraculously changed spiritually.

Your spirit (or your inner man as the Bible calls him) is changed. Your mind, which has for years been programed to society's way of thinking, remains the same. However, through Bible study,

meditation and sitting under the teaching of the Word by anointed ministers, your mind can be renewed. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (ROMANS 12:1,2, KJV).

By renewing our minds, we can be progressively transformed to be like Jesus and to demonstrate God's will in the earth. Just as a baby must learn to walk and do other things, so we must learn progressively to walk in the things of God. Old habits, negative thoughts, speech and actions, must be progressively changed as we come under the influence of God's Holy Word. He says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1PETER 2:2-3, KJV).

To truly continue in the Word of God, we must be willing to obey the principles of the Word of God, putting them into practice in our lives. This is God's call to become a disciple of Christ. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (JOHN 8:31-32, KJV).

Another aspect of receiving the "apostles doctrine" is receiving ministry from anointed messengers of the Gospel that are operating in the church today. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:" (EPHESIANS 4:11-12, KJV).

If we are to grow strong and mature, we will need ministry from these ministry gifts. Primarily, everyone needs a pastor, and, of course, the other ministry gifts also contribute greatly to the strengthening and building up of Christ's body, the church.

This is why it is so vitally important that you get involved in a good, strong local church where the uncompromised Word of God is preached and taught. This is God's environment for learning and without it God's people become weak, sickly and disoriented.

Find a church that first of all preaches the born again message, that we are saved by grace through faith, not by church membership, baptism or ritual. Find a church that believes in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and miracles, where Jesus is presented as Savior, Healer, Baptizer in the Holy Ghost and the coming King. Find a place where Jesus is exalted as Lord and people are encouraged to live a holy life of obedience to God.

## Fellowship

God has not called any of us to be lone ranger Christians. We need fellowship with other believers in order to grow and to remain strong in the Lord. Fellowship (sharing) with other believers serves to strengthen our values and commitment to the Lord and enables us to experience the Lord's presence in a special way.

God in His wisdom has made us dependent upon one another and He moves in a special way in services involving groups of believers. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (MATTHEW 18:20, KJV).

As you experience fellowship with the Lord's church, you will soon find that everyone in the church is in a process of development, just like you. You will find problems, troubles and difficulties in your relationships, but persevere, because God has chosen this method to bring growth and development in your life. Not every member of Christ's body will always build you up. In fact, some will let you down, but learn to walk in forgiveness and pray for others and you will grow in your love walk with the Lord.

Many people have left the church and strayed from the Lord because they have been offended in a church situation. I know of one man that ended up with seven addictions after having been saved because he allowed an offense to dominate his life. Guard your heart from such offenses and try to realize that everyone, just like you, is imperfect until the Lord comes back and we are totally changed. Remember, Jesus is the only perfect one. He died for you. Your relationship with the body is because of Him.

## Breaking of Bread

I once read an article by a man that stated that he felt a great deal of the problems in the church today were a result of either neglect or an improper approach to the Lord's Supper. Jesus said that we are to "do this in remembrance of me."

The communion table is God's ordained method of helping us to remember both the benefits and responsibilities associated with the cross of Jesus Christ. The bread represents his body that was broken for us. The fruit of the vine represents His blood. When we partake of the Lord's supper with an attitude of repentance, humility and thankfulness, it causes a cleansing and empowerment to take place in our lives. It renews us spiritually.

It is also a time of reflection concerning our relationship with Christ's body, the church. It is a time to let the Lord set our heart right from the disagreements and disunity that might be in our heart towards other believers. It is a time of both releasing and receiving forgiveness and recognizing our unity with all members of the body of Christ.

## Prayers

"The continued steadfastly in. . . prayers."

The Bible tells us that in the garden of Eden after Adam sinned, he hid himself from God. He was afraid, because of his sin.

When God sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross, his purpose was to restore us to fellowship with himself. We were separated by sin, but by the precious blood of Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we now have access to God. In fact, the scripture states, "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1CORINTHIANS 6:17, KJV).

So, we have been joined (brought into close contact) with the Lord. He also states, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of JESUS," (HEBREWS 10:19, KJV). The holiest is the place where God dwells. So, by the work of the cross, we can enter into the closest kind of fellowship with the Lord.

Now, if we have been given this great privilege of fellowshiping, spending time with, and talking with the Lord, it really doesn't make a whole lot of sense to live your Christian life without enjoying

intimacy with the Lord. We were created for intimacy, united with Him for intimacy.

Prayer is simply talking to God. It is not necessarily religious. It is not a certain acceptable phraseology that touches the heart of God. It is simply a believer that is willing to live close to the Lord and visit with Him frequently.

It is through prayer that we receive that spiritual interchange and infusion of life from God. We can receive wisdom and strength and courage to live the Christian life. So pray early and pray often. Learn to maintain a spirit or attitude of prayer in your life. I have found it easiest to do this when I spend time with him early in the day. Then throughout the day, whether working or driving or whatever, you can fellowship and live close to the Lord. This constant communion with the Lord will help you to overcome temptation and resist the devil's evil influence upon your life.

## Keep on Continuing

So continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, and you will find tremendous things happening in your life. Notice the results of their faithfulness in Acts 2:

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:43-47, KJV).

Signs and wonders, unity, joy, favour and people getting saved all around us. Like the early church we can see a strong work of the Spirit in our lives and in our churches as we repent, are baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost, continue in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. Do it and be blessed, in Jesus name!

Pray this prayer out loud  
and from your heart.

Dear God. Thank you for Jesus Christ. I believe that He died for my sins on the cross and through Him I have the forgiveness of sins. I turn from sin and unto you today, expecting You to change my life. I believe in My heart that you raised Jesus from the dead and I confess Him as Lord of my life today. I determine today, Lord, to continue on with you, in repentance, in baptism, in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in the teaching of the Word, in fellowship, in communion and prayer. Thank you for making me a strong Christian, in Jesus name.

## Write to us!

Write to us and tell us about your decision to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and to become a strong Christian. We will send you some more material to encourage you in your faith and keep in touch with you through our monthly newsletter.

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### About Tom Shanklin

Tom Shanklin travels in the United States as well as internationally preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and encouraging people in their walk with God. Because of the strong work of grace in his own life, he is greatly used to help people overcome their own personal difficulties and to find peace with God.

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