

- We have all seen the pictures that were in a word “perfect.” We’ve seen the picture perfect family at the photographers office. We’ve seen the picture perfect home at the realtors office and we have seen the picture perfect, amazingly delicious hamburger at the restaurant. Now, we all know that those perfect things do not exist. When we get that family photo back, someone is is blinking or not looking at the camera. That house looks great on the outside, but the inside has major issues. That burger looks good on the menu, but the one that is brought to your table just isn't as big, juicy, and delicious looking.
- Sometimes we do the same thing with new disciples. For some reason we get this image in our minds that new disciples come up out of that water and all of their problems and struggles are now gone and life is good for them. The reason I think we think like that sometimes is because we seem shocked when we learn that a new Christian is still struggling with something from their previous life. In reality, new disciples rarely fit that type of mold. New disciples don’t come up out of the water with all their problems fixed. In fact, the Bible never gives us the idea that the Gospel will be a cure all for all things and just because we have obeyed means that we no longer have the issues that we had before.
- The reality of the matter is that the Bible shows us examples of many different types of people who obeyed the Gospel, and these different people had to deal with different things post-obedience. Some had a much easier time transitioning to the life of a Christian and some had a much more difficult time with the transition because of continuing problems or issues from their past. I want to look at 3 individuals who would fit into these categories and see what we can learn from them and how we can be better when it comes to how we deal with new Christians. Lets look at some snapshots of new Christians from the book of Acts.

### **I. Apollos: The “Preferred” New Disciple (Acts 18:24-28)**

A. Prior to his becoming a Christian, Apollos was a pretty upstanding man.

1. He was mighty in the Scriptures, being a Jew. **(v.24)**
2. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. **(v.25)**
3. He was very fervent in his teaching of Jesus as the Christ, but He was only aware of the baptism of John for the remission of sins looking towards Jesus. **(v.25)**

B. Priscilla and Aquila teach Apollos the who truth of Jesus and he goes on from there as a strong teacher of God’s Word.

1. He went on to Achaia and taught many people the Gospel there. **(v.27)**
2. He used his learnedness and powerful ability to speak to help encourage believers and teach others the truth of Jesus. **(vv.27,28)**

C. There will be some new Christians that fit the mold of Apollos.

1. There are some good people who really aren't going to have to make many adjustments to live as a Christian.
2. However, those people are the exception and not the rule.
3. You might find this to be the case if a person comes out of some other type of faith, but this isn't the standard when it comes to converting those who have no religious background.

### **II. Simon: The “Messy” New Disciple (Acts 8:5-24)**

A. Simon lived as a sorcerer before His obedience to the Gospel.

1. He astonished the people of Samaria as he claimed to be someone great. **(v.9)**
2. He was a man who used his “power” to gain popularity among the people. **(vv.10,11)**
3. It is fair to say that he was a man who loved the popularity, power, and wealth that came with his “magical” talents.

B. He obeyed the Gospel that was preached to him and many others by Phillip, but his desire for that popularity, power, and wealth seemed to continue on with him.

1. The Apostles came down to Samaria so they could pass along the Holy Spirit to the Christians there.
2. When Simon saw this power being passed along, he wanted to purchase it with money so he would have that power. **(vv.18,19)**
3. Peter strongly rebukes him for having a heart that is driven by the desire for power and fame. **(vv.20-23)**
4. Simon is receptive to the rebuke and he requests prayers from the Apostles. **(v.24)**
5. Simon still struggled with his sinful desires even after he obeyed the Gospel.

C. There will be times where new Christians will still struggle with issues of sin even after they obey the Gospel.

1. That new convert might be an alcoholic. They might be drug users. They might have other character issues that are not becoming of Christians.
2. That doesn't mean that they are any less worthy of the Gospel or God's grace, but they just have more struggles than some of us do. Or they might have vastly different struggles than we do as people who have grown up in this type of environment within the church.
3. We must, as brothers and sisters of that "messy" Christian, be patient and give every effort to encourage that new disciple to stay on the right path and work hard to overcome that struggle that they might have in their new life as a Christian.

### **III. Paul: The "Damaged" New Disciple (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-28)**

- A. Paul's life prior to coming to Christ has been well documented.
  1. He was a the stoning of Stephen and even was in agreement with it. **(8:1)**
  2. He became one of the most prominent persecutors of the church in Jerusalem as he took men and women to prison. **(8:3)**
  3. He wanted to expand his persecution of the church so he asked to go to Damascus in order to do the same.
- B. It was on the road to Damascus that he saw the Lord. He converts to Christianity, but that doesn't automatically erase his past as a persecutor of the Way.
  1. Ananias was even skeptical at first when he was told to go and share the Gospel with Paul. **(9:10-14)**
  2. Those who heard him teaching in the synagogues were amazed what they were hearing from this man that they knew had been persecuting the Way he was now speaking in favor of. **(9:21)**
  3. The saints in Jerusalem had a really hard time believing his story because they knew exactly what this man was capable of doing to Christians. It wasn't until Barnabas vouched for him that he was accepted by them **(9:26-28)**
  4. It was hard for Paul to escape his past even though he had come to obey the Gospel.
- C. There will be times when a new Christian who comes to the Lord from a damaged or stained background.
  1. They might be convicted felons. They might be people who have ruined their reputations. They might not be that person like Apollos, but instead they were Sauls of Tarsus not that long ago.
  2. How will we respond or treat them? Will we even give them a chance? Will we show them love, respect, and acceptance like those Apolloses?
  3. It is really easy for use to not trust those people, but that shouldn't be the case for Christians. We all have sinned and are in need of grace and love.
  4. More people might be more receptive to the Gospel if they knew that they would be welcomed, loved, and accepted by a group of people who have their own issues. Paul, a persecutor of the church, was welcomed, loved, and accepted by those who he had been directly against. May we have the same type of love in our hearts for those who might not come from the greatest of past.

If you have been around the church for a long enough time then you have more than likely seen all these different types of new Disciples. You have seen some who were already really good people with good morals and just needed to make that commitment to Jesus Christ. You have probably seen others who continued to struggle with past temptations and sins. And you have probably even seen others who had a hard time escaping their past. They have cleaned themselves up, but unfortunately that past just wants to continue to weigh them down. If you are in one of those last 2 groups, recognize that you don't have to face this new life and transition on your own. You have a church full of loving brothers and sisters and you have shepherds who are ready and willing to assist. You just need ask. May God help us all to show love, patience, and care for one another and do whatever we can to make sure that we all make it to that beautiful home of heaven for evermore.