

DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON SIX: A NEW PERSPECTIVE – TAKING UP OUR CROSS

INTRODUCTION: There are many Christians who are very unhappy because they try to live a double life. They want to "belong to" or be a part of the world and "belong to" Jesus at the same time. *This type of life is impossible.* Therefore, whoever tries to live this way will find confusion instead of happiness.

The only way you can find happiness and satisfaction is by becoming a true disciple, because you have been called for that reason. When you became a Christian, Jesus freed you from the world so that you could be His disciple. Being a disciple of Christ is no easy task. Our Master told us in MATTHEW 16:24-25 that being a disciple would involve self denial, the "taking up of one's cross", and following in His footsteps.

At first glance, this might not sound very positive. But Jesus did not finish the thought with a negative theme. He said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." In other words, if you turn your life over to Jesus, you will find an eternal life of happiness and satisfaction. Why? Because you were created for the purpose of bringing honor and glory to God.

I. DENYING YOURSELF

The most difficult thing for the new believer is to "deny himself." Your flesh nature is always going to be attracted to the world, and it will fight you all the way to your grave. But GALATIANS 5:16 teaches us to give in to the Holy Spirit so that we will not satisfy the desires of our flesh. You will achieve this only when you learn to say "NO" to what your flesh nature wants to do. There will be times when you will need for other Christian brothers and sisters help you overcome the temptations that will come your way. You must remember that the need to ask your brothers and sisters in Christ to help you is not something to be ashamed of. If you are to be successful in denying yourself, then asking for the help of others is the intelligent thing to do.

The influence that Satan can have on your flesh nature is incredible. Most of us can watch hours of television, but when we start to read the Bible, our eyes mysteriously get tired. We can stand in line for hours at the theater or at an amusement park to ride the roller coaster, but our feet suddenly become tired when it is time to deliver the gospel to others. We can spend hours gossiping about our friends on the telephone, but cannot talk about spiritual things for more than a few minutes.

In 1 CORINTHIANS 9:27, the apostle Paul said that *he* sometimes had to "beat" his body and make it subject to the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that

you have to physically hurt yourself, but it does indicate that you need to make a strong effort to not let yourself be controlled by your fleshly desires.

So the question that might come to mind is this: "Why should I deny myself?" The answer is really quite simple. You do not necessarily know what is best for your life. God, being your creator, knows what is best for you. Satan, being God's enemy, would like to destroy you. He will constantly lie to you and try to get you to follow your flesh nature so that he can influence you to do things that will cause you much pain, and eventually destroy you.

By denying yourself, you will be following the example set by our Savior. Jesus denied himself and was obedient to the Father, even unto death on the cross. Because of His obedience, PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 tells us that His name is above all others, and that one day, everyone will bow before Him and confess that he is Lord.

God knows what is best for you, and for that reason, you need to be obedient to Him, even though you might not understand everything that is going on in your life. You need to learn to *deny yourself*.

II. TAKING UP YOUR CROSS

One of the ways you can learn to deny yourself, is by "taking up your cross" each and every day. When you think of a cross, you think of someone dying a painful death. The images that a cross brings are never pleasant.

Some Christians might think that when the Bible says to "take up our cross," it is talking about giving up or doing without something, having to endure a physical defect or illness, or having some other situation to tolerate. But when Jesus talked about "taking up one's cross," He was using symbolism to describe how that we are to "crucify" or kill the desires of our flesh, moment by moment. Taking up your cross means that when you are tempted to sin, you must remember that you accepted Christ as our Savior and that your sins were crucified. You now live for Jesus Christ and not for yourself. This is what the apostle Paul told us in GALATIANS 2:20.

This talk about "taking up your cross" is not a very pleasant subject. But you must understand that it is the only way that you are going to defeat Satan's desire to destroy you with sin. and fulfill the will of the Father, which will bring you true happiness and make you a true disciple of our Lord.

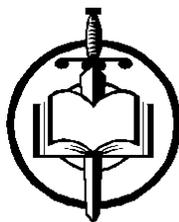
III. FOLLOWING CHRIST

The third action that Jesus said was necessary to be His disciple was the need to "follow Him." The only way you can follow Him is by knowing and understanding how He lived while He was here on earth. And the only way you can understand this is by studying His life as it was described in the Bible.

You must be a student of the Scriptures and be very obedient to what you learn. In JOHN 15:10, Jesus said that if we want to remain "in His love," we must obey his commandments. The *only* place you can find His commandments is in the Bible. There is no other source for obtaining instructions for discipleship. You must study the Word and practice what you learn.

CONCLUSION: These three actions of discipleship are easy to understand, but are not easy to practice. Satan will always be around to oppose you and to place obstacles in your way. For the rich man in Mark 10:19-22 the obstacle was money. He wanted to follow Jesus, but he did not want to give up His wealth. What is keeping *you* from following Jesus?

Eternal life and a home in heaven should be reason enough to follow Jesus. These two things alone should motivate you to serve Him with everything you have for the rest of your life. However, they are not the only things Jesus promised to those who follow Him. He told us that if we follow Him, that we will also be blessed here on earth. He promised us that we cannot out-give Him, and that anyone who gives up things to be His disciple will receive more in this life, in addition to all that awaits him in heaven. MARK 10:29-30 says that no one can serve Jesus without being rewarded for his service. It really is worth it!



SPIRITUAL NOTEBOOK

BIBLE STUDY: (One verse per day)

1. Luke 9:57-62...What did Jesus say to the man who said he would follow him wherever he went? What did Jesus say to the man who wanted to bury his father first?

2. Matthew 10:37-38...Does Jesus really want us to hate our families? What does He mean by these words. What does Jesus say about those who don't want to carry their cross.

3. Matthew 16:24-25...What does it mean to "follow Jesus"? What do we have to do to be like Jesus? What does "losing your life to find it" mean?

4. Galatians 5:24...What do disciples of Jesus crucify? How does one go about crucifying his fleshly desires?

5. REVIEW: Go over your Scripture studies this week and write down what you learned from them.

PRAYER: Write down the person or things for which you prayed for today.

FELLOWSHIP: Write down the name of the believer you had fellowship with and what you did.

WITNESSING: Write down the name of the non-believer you witnessed to and how you did it.

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