



DISCIPLESHIP IN CHRIST TODAY (2)

Having completed the course you may have wished that more time was spent on the practical outworking of the “new life in Christ” in this 21st century. One could ask—“How does the genuine follower of Jesus Christ convert the lessons of the Bible which were written so long ago into daily life today?” That certainly is a very logical and sensible question. We all have to give serious thought to this if we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let us commence with a very simple touchstone quotation

—“**Be not Conformed to this World**”

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, the capital of the great Roman Empire and the hub of all that was fashionable and corrupt, he said to them: “*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 12:1-3).

What did Paul mean by this?

- They were to present their bodies as a live sacrifice to God
- Their whole being was to be given to God *in holiness* so that it was *acceptable* to Him.
- They were not to be “*conformed to this world*”—that is, their way of life/ behaviour was to be totally different from the way the world about them lived.
- They were to be “*transformed by the renewing of their mind*”. The Bible had opened up an entirely new way of thinking, which changed their whole outlook on life. By having their minds enlightened by the will of God and now having a great desire to follow His way they would strive to be like Jesus—and “*follow his steps*” (1 Peter 2:21).

This idea of living a life that is different from the ways of the world is summarised by Jesus himself in that wonderful prayer he uttered just before his death. He said: “*I have given them [the disciples] thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*” (John 17:14-17). Jesus saw a great gulf between the ways God wanted His children to walk and the ways of the world. Like Paul he knew that it was only by reading and meditating on the word of God that his disciples would be changed. Thus he said, “*I have given them thy word*”, and again, “*Sanctify them [or make them holy] through thy truth*”. It is the power of the word of God understood and believed that will strengthen our faith to overcome the ways of the world. “*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*” (1 John 5:4). The greatest example in this overcoming is the Lord himself who said just before he died: “*Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33)—and we are called to follow him. To befriend the world and its ways has a very serious consequence: “*Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

What is this “world” that we must not be conformed to as disciples of Jesus Christ?

The answer is given clearly by John: “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*” (1 John 2:15-17).

“*The world*”, in Bible terms, covers all those evil things that come from the lusts or desires of men’s hearts—“*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*”. It was summarised in these words just prior to the judgment of the flood in Noah’s day: “*GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5).



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 27

So John put the matter very pointedly when, in effect, he said that if we love *“the world”* then we don't love God. It is little wonder that Paul urged the Roman believers: *“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”*. To do this he told them to **“present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”** (Romans 12:1-2).

How can the disciple of Christ today present his body “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”?

Just as in the days of the apostles, our time is divided into two fundamental areas. One portion we can call **“our work time”** which is spent to provide those necessary things for ourselves and our families to be fed and clothed. The other portion of our time we will call **“our free time”**. By this we mean that portion of time we spend following activities we choose for ourselves.

We will first look at “our work time” as followers of Christ.

Our Daily Employment

The disciple of Christ should work to provide for himself and, if he has a family, for the members of that family. There was a difficulty that arose in Thessalonica where some believers thought that they did not need to work. Paul's instructions are clear:

*“When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness **they work, and eat their own bread.**”* (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). Paul obviously expected the brethren and sisters to be committed to their daily employment. Being members of the family of God did not entitle them to free meals or monetary support.

Paul reminds the believers of his own example in this, saying: *“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that **these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.** I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:33-35). Paul was a tent-maker by trade (Acts 18:3), and was prepared to work with his hands to provide not only for himself but also for others who may have been unable to obtain work. This is the spirit that each of us should follow. He said he did not covet other people's gold or silver—he did not want their money.

Again Paul puts the matter very clearly: *“If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel [or unbeliever]”* (1 Timothy 5:8).

Having seen that we are to be responsible for providing those necessary daily needs of life, we are also told that we should do this with diligence, as if we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Again consider the instructions Paul gave to the believers in the first century.

*“Be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, **as unto Christ**; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; **but as the servants of Christ**, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, **as to the Lord**, and not to men”* (Ephesians 6:5-7; see also Colossians 3:22-25 and Titus 2:9-10). We must give of our best in our daily work as if we are serving Christ.

In the work place today there is often unrest that leads to strikes, but the servant of the Lord will not partake in such activities where men are demanding more privileges for themselves. We are called upon to do our work faithfully, trusting in God to overshadow our lives. The thoughtful disciple can live by these guidelines as he goes about his daily work, and lifts his mind to view his daily duties as service to Christ.

However there are times when one may be unable to obtain employment or through illness cannot work. What is the responsibility of brethren towards each other in this situation? Paul urges that the brother who is employed should be *“working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”* (Ephesians 4:28). We need to be observant and endeavour to help those in such need—and those in genuine need must be able to ask for help.



Unwise Employment for the Disciple of Christ

When seeking employment the disciple of Christ should not place himself in any position that would conflict with the ways of Christ. He must remember at all times that the Master he serves is in heaven—*“for ye serve the Lord Christ”* (Colossians 3:24). There are some jobs therefore that he would immediately avoid. It would be wrong, for example, to join the army, airforce or navy for the obvious reason that he could be called upon to kill people should war or disturbance break out. Jesus has given the answer on this matter: *“All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”* (Matthew 26:52; John 18:36).

Some positions are clearly unacceptable, such as the armed forces, as mentioned above, but there are others also that fall into the same area where conflict could arise. These include being a police officer, security guard, prison officer, bouncer or any occupation that requires placing physical restraint upon people. Christ told his disciples: *“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:17-21).

There are other areas that would not be suitable to work in because of the ungodly environment. These would include such places as bars or nightclubs—no true disciple who is seeking to lead a holy way of life would frequent such places. Nor would it be seemly for the disciple of Christ to be employed in the entertainment industry, such as in picture theatres or gambling places and the like.

Finally, any business venture that is not honest or avoids the legal responsibilities of the country is no place for the disciple of Christ to seek employment. Related to this is the matter of being in partnership with an unbeliever because, unfortunately, a conflict of interests is bound to arise due to the disciple’s different perspective on life. Paul puts it this way: *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14).

The disciple who comes to a knowledge of God’s truth while employed in an unsuitable position will seek means to be freed from that position if possible.

Responsibilities to the Laws of the Land

Although the disciple lives as “a stranger and pilgrim” in his country (Hebrews 11:13-14), looking for the day when the Kingdom will be established, he does have a duty to abide by the laws of the land with a willing spirit. In fact, this is the exact guidance given in the Scriptures.

Paul gives Titus the following advice for the believers in Crete: *“Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work”* (Titus 3:1 ASV)

Peter’s advice is: *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (1 Peter 2:13-15).

Not only are we to obey the laws of the land, but we should be thankful for the liberty we have to worship God freely, if we are blessed with this—we do realise that this is not so in all countries. Paul asked Timothy to encourage the believers at Ephesus with these words: *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”* (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

From these quotations we see that our responsibility is to live honestly and dutifully under the laws of the land with a willing spirit, as serving God in heaven. For this reason we pay our taxes and abide by all the laws of the land, and this, of course, includes minor by-laws and traffic laws that have been imposed to regulate our life. When Jesus was asked about paying certain taxes he replied: *“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”* (Matthew 22:17-21). Paul repeats this injunction in Romans 13:1-7, concluding with these



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 27

words: *“For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”*.

Having stated our responsibilities to obey the laws of the land, we add that should these laws conflict with our duty to God, then the disciple must always see obedience to God of greater importance than obeying man’s laws. We find an example of this in the New Testament, when the rulers of the Jewish nation forbade the apostles to preach about Jesus and the gospel. Peter and John’s answer was: *“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:18-20). On another occasion, when again Peter and the other apostles were before the court accused of preaching, they answered, *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

One such significant area where the disciple must stand for his faith against the law of the land is where there is compulsory military service. He will advise the authorities that his conscience before God will not allow him to be involved in any form of military service.

“Let him have thy cloke also”

What does the disciple do if he is owed money by a person who will not meet his obligations? This can be a real problem a disciple may face—or it may be that he is sued at law to meet some supposed obligation. We need to follow the direction of our Lord in this too. He wrote, *“If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain”* (Matthew 5:40-41). The disciple should always be prepared to meet his obligation and not wait until he is pressed into paying what he owes. If money is owed to him, and he has asked for it and been refused, the disciple will not take legal proceedings against the person, but will patiently suffer wrong, trusting in God to oversee his life. Paul reproved disciples for doing this, saying: *“Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?”* (1 Corinthians 6:7).

The supreme example of one who suffered wrong against himself but took no action against his adversaries is our Lord. He has left us the example to follow. *“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: **who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously**”* (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Friendships

We will have contact with many people throughout the day, particularly if we live in an urban environment. First there are our neighbours, and then there are those we meet as we go about our daily routine—at work, school, university or our domestic tasks. With some of these we will become quite familiar because of the regular association we have with them. Our contact with them gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our discipleship and to tell them of the great hope of salvation we have in Christ.

However there will also be challenges put before us. These people may invite us to activities that they enjoy. They may ask us to go to pictures, sporting events, entertainment and parties—places where we know God’s ways are not upheld. This is where the disciple must be prepared to stand aside. The warning of the apostle James must be ever in his mind: *“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:4). Paul warned the Corinthians: *“What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Paul teaches that there is no way the disciple can become closely associated in friendship with those who are ignorant of God’s ways. He will of course be polite, showing kindness, and offering help to those he must be associated with, but will not become involved with them in their social life.



The *close* friends of the disciple of Christ will be fellow disciples. He will seek their company, knowing that they have a similar love for the things of God and a keen desire to please Him. Such friendships that develop between disciples will continue throughout their life and be a constant source of pleasure and comfort. Likewise the disciple who seeks to marry will choose for his or her life companion a fellow disciple, knowing that they will be united in their desire to serve God.

To those who are unmarried God's teaching is clear—if they are to marry, then it must be to one who holds the same belief and desire to serve God. Paul's words are to marry "*only in the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 7:39). What a disaster it is when a disciple forsakes this principle and befriends a person who is ignorant of the truth of the Gospel or has not obeyed it. Unless a person has accepted and obeyed the gospel in baptism, then a close friendship leading to marriage cannot please God. Wise parents will guide their children to uphold this principle and ensure that they do not make close friendships in the world.

Marriage in the Lord

As you have gone through the *Exploring the Bible* course you will remember that the basis of marriage was established in the beginning when God brought Eve to Adam. God said: "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24) This was restated by Jesus when he was asked if a man could put his wife away (that is, divorce her) for any reason. Jesus said: "*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Matthew 19:4-6). When disciples marry they do so, understanding that they are married for life.

When disciples of Christ prepare to marry they will carefully plan their life together as "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7). They should realise at the outset that their happiness is based on a mutual love of God's word and see the need to read the Bible together every day. They will pray together too, learning to appreciate daily that God is working in their marriage. If blessed with children, they will plan to bring them up in the ways of God and work together to that end. Altogether their home will be a place of refuge from the world, where God is honoured. They will open their home, where possible, for fellow disciples to come and discuss the word of God and be refreshed. There will be many practical ways, too, in which they can demonstrate the love of Christ to their brethren. The apostles give advice on how we should extend ourselves for others (for example, Romans 12:9-21, James 1:22-27, 2:14-17).

Paul in Ephesians 5:22-29 sets forth the highest example of marriage when he compares it with the love that Christ has shown for us and the response that his love should engender in us.

Paul's guidance for wives who are disciples of Christ is: "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church [ecclesia]: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church [ecclesia] is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing*". The motivating principle in marriage should teach us all, both male and female, that Christ is our head and we must be subject to him in all things.

Paul's guidance for husbands is: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church [ecclesia], and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church [ecclesia], not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself*". Where the husband shows this selfless love for his wife after the example of Christ for us, and she responds in love to him, there will be a truly harmonious and happy marriage. However, where these principles in marriage are not followed, anger, domestic violence and tension are often found in the home, which soon destroy a marriage and bring sadness to both parties, and untold distress and damage to any children involved.

Other guidance for marriage is to be found in Colossians 3:18-21 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.

However some may come to a knowledge of the gospel after they have married. What are they to do? This also happened in the days of the apostles and their guidance was that these disciples



must remain faithful to their partners and endeavour to show them, both by their example and word, the wonderful hope of the gospel. Paul gives guidance on this in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, where he concludes: “*For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?*”. What great joy there will be if the partner also comes to accept the gospel through the quiet example of the disciple of Christ.

Immorality and the Disciple of Christ

We live in a very immoral age. We should not be surprised that this is so, as the Lord himself has told us that the days just prior to his return will be like the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-33). In both Noah’s and Lot’s days the world was morally corrupt and utterly perverse—and the tragedy was that most people did not believe it was evil but were enjoying it. For example, Lot went to his family with the message: “*Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked [joked] unto his sons in law*” (Genesis 19:14). They did not believe that God would do such a thing and so perished in the inferno. God destroyed the wicked in the days of Noah and Lot and has said He will do this again. Sadly one of the problems today is that we can become so accustomed to the ways of wickedness that are now accepted in this evil age that we may not see the seriousness of God’s warning of coming judgment.

Let us list some of the things that should form no part of the life of the disciple, but which are so often accepted in the world about us. In doing this we will let Paul give the list from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. We will tabulate them and make comments but note that Paul says that those who do these things **will not** inherit the Kingdom of God. It is a serious matter.

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived:

neither fornicators—Indulgence in a sexual relationship outside of marriage or before marriage is not permitted for the disciple of Christ. The world today condones this immoral behaviour but it is wrong—it is sin.

nor idolaters—Idolatry can take many forms other than the pagan worship of idols. The disciple of Christ knows that there is one God whom he will love with all his heart. Anything else that takes the place of God as a priority in his life is an idol, whether a possession, job, sport or hobby. Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

nor adulterers—To have sexual relations with another person’s wife or husband is a serious sin. The disciple should not even look on another woman to lust after her, Christ said (Matthew 5:28).

nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind—This is referring to immoral behaviour, including homosexual acts. Such behaviour has become widely accepted in the world today, but the disciple will have nothing to do with such evil practice (Romans 1:26-32).

Nor thieves, nor covetous—Stealing is wrong, and to desire or covet other people’s possessions is also a sin. Paul gives good advice to those who have had a problem with theft: “*Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*” (Ephesians 4:28).

nor drunkards—See note below on drinking, smoking and drugs.

nor revilers, nor extortioners—This includes people who speak evil against others and those who take from others, usually by force.

shall inherit the kingdom of God. Here is the power of Paul’s comment—if we do these things he has listed we **will not** inherit the Kingdom of God. God will not want people who indulge in such practices to share the blessing and joy of His Kingdom.

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Note what Paul is saying in this last comment. Some of the Corinthian disciples had been involved in these things before they believed and obeyed the Gospel. The same is true today. When a person comes to hear the Gospel he or she may have been involved in some of this wrong behaviour. However when they believe, repent of this way of life and are baptised into Christ their past sins are washed away—they are completely forgiven. What a relief to realise that we can be



freed from our past sinful ways through Christ. But Paul warns that we must not return to those evil ways again.

Fashion In Dress

The disciple of Christ should also be aware of the world's influence in this area. Fashion designers have no interest in God's way; they focus on appealing to those three basic desires inherent in each one of us—*“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life”* (1 John 2:16)—and their advertising is all based upon this principle. The scriptures clearly indicate that anything that is immodest or provocative is not fit apparel for the disciple of Christ. This particularly applies to women's clothing. Paul gives guidance on this: *“In like manner also that the women in decent deportment and dress adorn themselves with modesty and discretion, not with plaited hair and gold, or pearls, or costly clothing, but, what becomes women making profession of the fear of God, by good works”* (1 Timothy 2:9-10, Darby Translation).

Drinking, Smoking and Mind-Altering Drugs

The greatest faculty we have to serve God is our mind. Any substance which deliberately dulls the senses in any way hinders the disciple's ability to follow Christ. We need to have a clear mind at all times to devote to meditation on His word, prayer and praise to Him. We need *our full mental faculties* to ward off temptation. It is a well established fact that drinking alcohol or taking drugs can alter our mental judgment very readily. In those countries that have “drink-driving laws” the penalties are very severe if a person drives while under the influence of alcohol. The reason is that their judgment is not sharp—they are a danger to the lives of others as well as to themselves. The disciple of Christ will always want to keep his mind sharp and clear. Peter puts it this way: *“Wherefore **gird up the loins of your mind**, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy”*** (1 Peter 1:13-16).

Peter says that we need to have our minds under complete control because we must be striving to be holy as God is holy. To be involved in drug-taking or smoking certainly does not help the disciple to present his body *“a living sacrifice, **holy**, acceptable unto God”*. Likewise the disciple will not allow alcohol to be his master, and be thoughtful of the fact that if he drinks he may cause another disciple to stumble in his walk in Christ.

Many will be aware of the medical problems associated with these different substances. Most western countries now have clear warnings stating the dangerous effects that smoking can have on the life of those who smoke—for example, one of those statements is “Smoking Kills”. As disciples of Christ we need to examine very thoughtfully and prayerfully why we would smoke if it could shorten the life God has given us to serve Him. To say that we enjoy the feeling we get from it is certainly not a valid answer, as there is no consideration of service or self-sacrifice in that.

Wise and faithful disciples will address these problems if they have been involved in them prior to coming to a knowledge of God's ways of holiness.

We are not, of course, referring to the use of drugs for medical reasons, but to the recreational use, initially indulged in for pleasure.

Entertainment and Free Time

How does the disciple relax and spend free time? This needs to be given serious consideration as the world has prepared endless ways to entertain people. The disciple needs to take control of the way he uses the time he has been given by God—to spend it wisely and not in a way that will be detrimental to his service to Christ. The warning is: *“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15-16).

There are many positive ways to spend such time profitably, which still allow the relaxation which we all need in this busy and often stressful life. If possible it is good to visit others who share the same hope of the Gospel and enjoy time together. The sick and lonely need to be visited, and letters written to fellow disciples to encourage and comfort them. Physical activities can include walks, gardening, sports or hobbies with others of like mind, and then there is reading of uplifting



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 27

books. Times spent with our family, playing with our children or helping those in need are very enjoyable and profitable. Indeed there are many activities that give good stimulation to the mind and body in which the disciple can be involved in his free time.

However, as we have said, the world is endeavouring to fill our free time. But the world's idea of what is a 'good time' is far from the disciple of Christ's ideal. The world will fill our minds with the most ungodly thoughts and pictures. It will offer the most ungodly activities. Invitations to nightclubs and dances, pubs and clubs or gambling places should be refused—these places are not a wholesome environment for the disciple of Christ. Would we choose to be there if Jesus were with us?

Then there is the entertainment offered in film and video. Movie producers are well aware of how to capture our interest, and play upon arousing those very "lusts" which the apostle John says are "not of the Father, but of the world". So much of what they offer is based upon those activities that Paul warned would prevent the disciple of Christ from inheriting the Kingdom of God. The disciple then would be foolish indeed to see a film that placards those evils before his eyes, leaving a lasting impression on his mind. Instead, he is "to gird up the loins of his mind" that he might be holy. The entertainment of this age being "of the world" and "not of the Father", is "enmity against God". If we extend this a little further, the disciple of Christ would need to seriously weigh up his use of television, knowing it can bring such evil things into the very heart of his home.

Whilst on this topic we caution regarding the use of the internet on a computer. The computer is an electronic tool that can be very helpful in many areas. But it can also very easily be the means of allowing the disciple to view things that he ought not to allow his mind to dwell on—shameful things that are contrary to the holiness he is striving to maintain in thought and action. If there is any likelihood of that, the disciple must take drastic action to remove such temptation. Christ warns: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Mark 9:47). Note the uncompromising tone—he counsels us to be severe with ourselves, taking stern measures to remove anything that will hinder our whole-hearted and pure service to Him.

Facing Trials and Adversities

As we have read through the Bible we have seen that all the servants of God have had trials and adversities come upon them in different ways throughout their lives. God uses the circumstances of our lives to test our faith and love for Him. Our trials may not be as dramatic as those that came upon Joseph, when he was sold into Egypt, or David as he was pursued by Saul, or Daniel who was cast to the lions, or his three friends who were cast into the fiery furnace, but all the servants of God **will** have trials of different kinds. Do we confidently believe that God is always watching over us to help us, or will we forsake God when we feel under stress and take some easy option? Paul who suffered much persecution as he went forth preaching the Gospel, spoke to the believers "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation [Greek *thlipsis*—pressure, trouble, affliction] enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Our faith may be put to the test through having to make a conscientious stand against laws that seem to compel us to forsake the ways of God. It may be that we have personal problems that seem to overwhelm us, or serious illness that debilitates us, or perhaps members of our family have problems which weigh heavily upon us. Trials may come at work because of our faith or at home from those who do not believe as we do. It may be we are isolated from other believers and feel dreadfully alone in the world. There are many ways in which our faith and love of God is seriously tested. However in every situation we must always remember that God Himself knows our problems and will hear our prayers as we struggle to cope and to act in a Christ-like way.

Trials are an opportunity to demonstrate *our faith in God*. James wrote: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [or trials]; knowing this, that **the trying of your faith** worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). Peter saw the trial of faith as the purifying of gold and showed that our characters are being refined by what we endure: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

Here are some encouraging quotations that can help whenever we feel burdened or afflicted:



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 27

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Peter wrote these words because the disciples were suffering extreme persecution and even death from the pagan Roman rulers, because of their belief in Jesus Christ. He adds, “Yet if any man **suffer as a Christian**, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (v16).

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, **I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee**. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

What a consolation it is to know that God will **never** leave us, no matter what the trial, while we trust in Him.

There are times when we may feel unable to cope with what we have to bear, but we have this assurance from Paul: “*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Here are some words from the Psalms that may help at such times:

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust” (Psalm 56:3-4)

“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8)

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psalm 46:1-2)

“The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee” (Psalm 9:9-10).

These psalms are prayers showing us how the faithful in past times turned to God as they faced sometimes overwhelming problems. When we are suffering trials we need to constantly take our cares to God in prayer. We must follow Peter's advice, when he said, “*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:7).

Whatever we suffer for our faith, whether persecution or distress or loneliness or trouble of any kind, we soon find that others have suffered too. We learn to understand their needs and find that we are able to offer them help and encouragement too. In one of the parables Jesus gave he showed that those who were rewarded with a place in the Kingdom were those who visited and cared for their brethren who were suffering: “*Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*” (Matthew 25:37-40).

Since it is part of the disciple's lot to suffer hardship or difficulties of one kind or another, let us be strengthened by the words of Paul: “*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*”, knowing “*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*”, for there is nothing that “*shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:18,28,38-39). We have the assurance that if we remain faithful, then God will be with us and never forsake us, no matter what difficulties may arise.



Conclusion

We hope that the above comments may have provided some practical guidance and encouragement as we follow the example that our Lord set for us. In summary, when temptation arises or we are faced with making a decision, if we are really trying to follow Jesus Christ, one of the simple questions we can ask ourselves is: "If Jesus Christ were with me now, would I do this? Or, would I go where they have asked me to go? Would I expect Jesus to be at a place like this? Would I be happy to sit and watch this film or read this book, if Jesus were with me?" Discipleship has to be as practical as that.

Paul puts it this way: *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:1-2). The disciple has died to the old ways of the flesh in baptism, and is now risen with Christ. Our mind, Paul says, should be in that most holy atmosphere where Jesus is at the right hand of God.

As we stated at the beginning, Paul says:

"Present your bodies

—a living sacrifice

—holy, acceptable unto God

—not conformed to this world:

—but transformed

—by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1-2).

We need to have our mind centred on wholesome and profitable things that are pleasing to God.

In conclusion let us take Paul's advice:

"Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. **Finally, brethren**, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things**" (Philippians 4:5-8 ASV).

May God bless you in your study of His word and may it be that you will appreciate the wonder of the salvation that God has offered to you through baptism into Jesus Christ, and gladly respond in obedience to Him.



The Commandments of Christ

1. Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you (Matthew 5:44)
2. Resist not evil: if a man smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39,40)
3. Avenge not yourselves; rather give place unto wrath; and suffer yourselves to be defrauded (Romans 12:18-19; 1 Corinthians 6:7)
4. If a man take away thy goods, ask them not again (Luke 6:29-30)
5. Agree with your adversary quickly, submitting even to wrong for the sake of peace (Matthew 5:25; 1 Corinthians 6:7)
6. Labour not to be rich; be ready to every good work, give to those who ask; relieve the afflicted (1 Timothy 6:8; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27)
7. Do not your alms before men: let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth (Matthew 6:1-4)
8. Recompense to no man evil for evil: overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17)
9. Bless them that curse you: let no cursing come out of your mouth (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14)
10. Render not evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing (1 Peter 3:9)
11. Pray for them that despitefully use you and afflict you (Matthew 5:44)
12. Grudge not; judge not; complain not; condemn not (James 5:9; Matthew 7:1)
13. Put away anger, wrath, bitterness, and all evil speaking (Ephesians 4:31; 1 Peter 2:1)
14. Confess your faults one to another (James 5:16)
15. Be not conformed to this world: love not the world (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15)
16. Deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12; Matthew 5:30)
17. Servants, be faithful, even to bad masters (Ephesians 6:5-8).
18. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate (Romans 12:16)
19. Owe no man anything (Romans 13:7-8)
20. In case of sin (known or heard of), speak not of it to others, but tell the offending brother of the matter between thee and him alone, with a view to recovery (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1)
21. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart (Matthew 22:37)
22. Pray always; pray with brevity and simplicity; pray secretly (Luke 18:1; Matthew 6:7)
23. In everything give thanks to God and recognise Him in all your ways (Ephesians 5:20; Proverbs 3:6).
24. As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them (Matthew 7:12)
25. Take Christ for an example and follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21)
26. Let Christ dwell in your heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17)
27. Esteem Christ more highly than all earthly things: yea, than your own life (Luke 14:26)
28. Confess Christ freely before men (Luke 12:8).
29. Beware lest the care of life or the allurements of pleasure weaken his hold on your heart (Luke 21:34-36; Matthew 24:44)
30. Love thy neighbour as thyself (Matthew 22:39)
31. Exercise lordship over no one (Matthew 23:10-12)



CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Lesson 27

32. Seek not your own welfare only, nor bear your own burdens merely, but have regard to those of others (Philippians 2:4; Galatians 6:2)
33. Let your light shine before men: hold forth the word of life. Do good to all men as ye have opportunity (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:16; Galatians 6:10)
34. Be blameless and harmless, as the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:15)
35. Be gentle, meek, kind-hearted, compassionate, merciful, forgiving (2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 2:2; Ephesians 4:32)
36. Be sober, grave, sincere, temperate (Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 1:13; 5:8)
37. Speak the truth every man with his neighbour: put away all lying (Ephesians 4:25)
38. Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men (Colossians 3:23)
39. Be watchful, vigilant, brave, joyful, courteous, and manly (1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-10)
40. Be clothed with humility: be patient toward all (Colossians 3:12; Romans 12:12)
41. Follow peace with all men (Hebrews 12:14)
42. Sympathise in the joys and sorrows of others (Romans 12:15)
43. Follow after whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseful (Philippians 4:8)
44. Refrain utterly from adultery, fornication, uncleanness, drunkenness, covetousness, wrath, strife, sedition, hatred, emulation, boasting, vainglory, envy, jesting, and foolish talking (Ephesians 5:3-4)
45. Whatever you do, consider the effect of your action on the honour of God's Name among men. Do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31; 3:17)
46. Reckon yourselves dead to all manner of sin. Henceforth live not to yourselves, but to him who died for you, and rose again (Romans 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:15)
47. Be zealous of good works, always abounding in the work of the Lord, wearying not in well-doing (Titus 2:14; Galatians 6:9)
48. Speak evil of no man (Titus 3:2)
49. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16)
50. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt (Colossians 3:8; 4:6)
51. Obey rulers; submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (Titus 3:1)
52. Be holy in all manner of conversation (1 Peter 1:15-16)
53. Give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully (1 Timothy 5:14)