

Home Bible Study Series

Maturing In Christ

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Prepared by:
Paul E. Cantrell
277 Deitch Lane
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

pecantrell@juno.com

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Lesson One

"From Doubt to Faith"

In every congregation, God's people have to deal with "doubt" and "faith." Young people go through a period of doubt or questioning of about everything. They are inquisitive! They want to know why! Whether expressed or not, it is a period of *"Prove it to me!"* It is a period where they try to make "implanted beliefs" their own beliefs—or reject them! But adults have some of the same problems with doubt and faith. They want to know what life is all about. They ask themselves—*"Can life have any real meaning?"* A lot of this kind of questioning comes from bad experiences in life that tends to shake their faith in God. Some actually come out and say—*"I just don't know what to believe any more!"*

A fact of life is that we all survive on faith! Most of our lives we depend upon our faith in others. We go to sleep with a belief that we will awaken in the morning. We eat all kinds of food, usually provided by others, that we put our trust in. We drink water that we believe is safe. We ride in cars, planes, buses, trains with faith that they are reliable. Etc. It should be obvious that all of these people that we put our trust in are subject to human frailties. Maybe, just maybe, we should put our faith in the ONE who never makes a mistake!

What is Faith?

Christianity is peculiarly a religion of faith! Upon this fundamental principle rests our promise of Salvation. Faith is used to encompass the whole. It includes:

1. **"the faith once for all delivered to the saints."** Jude 3
2. **"the word of faith"** Rom. 10:8
3. Disciples are called **"believers."** Acts 5:14
4. Christ is the Savior of them that **"believe."** Acts 10:43 (Etc.)

Great stress is placed in the Scriptures on believing!

Faith involves more than sight!

Jn. 6:36 _____

Jn. 6:40 _____

A person can see and not believe, or they can see and believe. Faith was expected based on what they had seen. Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord but still had to believe. Sight or evidences make faith possible.

These people saw by sight what we must come to see by historic evidences. We may have evidences that Jesus lived, performed miracles, died and was buried and arose from the dead—but, we can still have doubt in our hearts. Our mind still has to give consent to what it sees by sight or by evidences. Our minds can refuse to accept the most obvious conclusions if we so choose. Faith accepts the factuality of Jesus and the things connected with his life as being true. And once a person has verified the facts as being true—then, he is in a position to exercise a faith or trust that will lead to his salvation. We have 27 books called the New Testament that attest to the fact that Jesus Christ lived, taught, performed miracles, died, and was raised again (Jn. 20:30-31). But a person can do the following:

1. Completely deny that such evidence exists;
2. Accept the fact of their existence, but deny their truthfulness;
3. Accept the facts as true, but not put his faith in Him who it portrays (Jn. 12:42).
4. Accept the facts as true and put his faith in Him who said, ***"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father but by me."*** (Jn. 14:6).

Today, a saving faith is a "giant leap" beyond sight—but it is not a leap in the dark. And those willing to make the leap will find that they will land on solid, secure ground. To admit that Jesus lived, performed miracles, died, and was raised is not enough! To stop there is doing nothing more than saying that George Washington lived and became the first President of the United States. Saving faith requires a trust in Christ as the One who is able to save us. It is the trusting of one's being to another—that we will be kept, guided, molded, governed and possessed by HIM eternally (Heb. 11:6).

Why do People Doubt?

1. A lack of not going to the source of faith! We spend our time on everything but the very thing that will build our faith—the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith is not given mysteriously, but it comes from immersing one's self in the study of the Word of Faith!

2. A distorted or Skeptical View of the Bible! We cannot look upon the Bible as a mere collection of fine literature and not have doubts. We cannot accept only what appeals to our fancy and reject the rest and not have grave doubts (Matt. 15:7-9; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). God has deliberately shut Himself up in His Word as far as communicating to man the conditions of our Salvation. This is not enough for some—they want more! They are skeptical of the Bible being sufficient. When they have

trouble with believing in God, they refuse to go to the only One that can give them the answers—God's Word! If something goes wrong with a person's car and he can't fix it himself, to whom does he go? He goes to a mechanic to fix it. When we have trouble with our faith in God, we need to go to the only source that has the answers—the Word of God!

3. Some have feelings of unworthiness! We feel inadequate because we are not accepted by others, or we are criticized, or neglected by those nearest to us. So, we don't feel that God will accept us. We need to realize that none of us are "worthy" of Salvation; but in spite of this, God bids us come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30; Isa. 1:18). Jesus even points out—***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matt. 5:3).

4. Discouragement or Depression! Depression is an emotional mood that tends to infect other areas of our being or activities. God may even seem unreal or the way to God will seem cloudy and confused. Also a lack of success in an important undertaking can cause a person to blame himself and conclude that all is hopeless. There are certain Scriptures that need to be read constantly that serve as a reassurance of God's love and care for His people.

2 Cor. 1:4 _____

Lam. 3:33 _____

Rom. 8:28 _____

Concluding Thoughts

In our journey to "Maturity in Christ" we have to learn how to deal with our doubts and how to strengthen our faith. Doubts can bring torture and turmoil to our hearts and can eventually lead to our destruction. Faith in God can bring stability and assurance that will lead to our victory in Christ (1 Cor. 15:57-58). This faith can be built by experiencing the joys of the Christian life and by the new evidences that come through Christ living in us. And may we never forget the words of the Apostle Peter when Jesus asked the Apostles would they also leave Him. He stated clearly: ***"Lord, to whom else can we go; you have the words of eternal life!"*** Jn. 6:68)

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. Everyone has problems with doubt at times in their lives.
- _____ 2. Man can only survive on faith.
- _____ 3. Christianity is the only religion that requires faith.
- _____ 4. Faith can be based on sight as well as other evidences.
- _____ 5. "Seeing is not necessarily believing!"
- _____ 6. Today, faith is a giant leap beyond sight.
- _____ 7. People doubt because they fail to spend time in the reading, studying, and meditating on the Word of God.
- _____ 8. Some people doubt because they have too much pride in themselves.
- _____ 9. Depression can cause a person to doubt that God cares.
- _____ 10. There can be no "maturing in Christ" without dealing properly with doubts.

Lesson Two

"From Pride to Humility"

"What is man, that you are mindful of him? and the son of man, that you visit him?"(Psalms 8:4). When reading this passage of Scripture, man can be: (1) Lifted up with pride and declare to himself, "*See what I am and what I can do!*" (2) or, He can be humbled—realizing how much his Creator has loved him and trusted him and see the need to give glory to His Name. Pride caused Nebuchadnezzar to be thrust out of the society of men; Saul from his kingdom; Adam from paradise; Haman out of the king's court; and Satan from the presence of God. Pride is one of, if not the greatest, of man's sins! It is an effort to exalt one's self and to displace God. F. D. Srygley said: "*Much, if not most, of the strife and animosity in the church and in the world comes from unholy love of high places and great honors.*" Sadly, the twelve disciples of Jesus constantly had to be rebuked because of pride. The purpose of Christianity is to destroy the love of high places and to make men great by making them humble.

THE RESULTS OF PRIDE

To overcome pride, we must see its results! The following five things would seem to be obvious:

1. It enslaves us to its desires (Psalm 73:6). Pride compasses us about like a chain! Once a man yields, he thinks he has too much to lose to give pride up. Thus, pride keeps many in UNBELIEF and out of the kingdom because they do not want to be criticized by their colleagues. This was a basic problem with the Pharisees—they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God! (John 12:42-43). Jesus saw their pride and tried to awaken them to their true condition (Matthew 23).

2. Pride deceives us (Obadiah 3). This deception keeps us from learning truth. The proud find it hard to say, "*I don't know.*" But even worse, they are too proud to admit they are wrong—not wanting to lose face! Pride protects our ego, but leads us to destruction!

3. Pride keeps us from becoming mature men and women (Phil. 2:3). The person who has selfish ambition and conceit will not develop as a spiritually mature person. He is hindered by his own pride and haughtiness. Grace calls for repentance, contrition, forgiveness. Pride doesn't want rebuke, to be shown he is wrong, or that he is a sinner

before God. He is quite able to see his neighbor's faults, but not his own (Matthew 7:1-5). What a terrible price to pay for our pride.

4. Pride brings eventual shame into our lives (Proverbs 11:2). Others may see our shame before we do; but eventually, we will come to a state of shame in our own eyes. The Lord resists such people (James 4:6).

5. Pride will bring a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their pride (Ezekiel 16:48-50). Jesus stated it very clearly that **"everyone that exalts himself, shall be abased."**

FROM PRIDE TO HUMILITY

Men need to turn from pride if they are to travel God's way! Nothing separates us more quickly from God and our fellowman than pride! James reminds us that **"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble!"** (James 4:6). When we humble ourselves before God, He has promised to lift us up.

What helps me to be humble before God? Bigness and littleness depends upon the standard we use. For instance, a 12-year-old is certainly larger than a 4-year-old. But, when the 12-year-old is compared to an adult, he is the small one. The value of Silver is precious until compared to Gold. And Gold is precious until compared to Diamonds. When men compare themselves with those less fortunate, he tends to grow proud. He looks at others and sees that he is stronger, quicker, wittier, and better looking. Such a person will then find it hard to be humble. Each man is supreme in his own little world—until God comes into the picture! When compared to God, he is humbled! The walls of pride are broken down. Now, it is small man in the midst of greatness—and he pays homage!

But, comparison to God should not bring humiliation. It would be fearful if God was only seen in His greatness and righteousness! **"Cleanse your hands, you sinners—purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be afflicted and mourn, and weep; Let your laughter be turned to mourning, Your joy to heaviness; Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord."**(James 4:8-9) To stop here—man is completely crushed! Humiliated! No hope! Our complete LITTLENESS can be vividly seen. But God didn't stop there! **"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you....humble yourselves before God, and he will lift you up."**(James 4:8, 10) Our exaltation and dignity as a human being lies in our proper recognition of our relationship to our Maker. True humility is not stooping lower than we are, but recognizing who we are before God! God's love

and mercy brings about our exaltation. We now have hope, happiness, and a sense of well-being before God. I am now a child of the King (1 John 3:1); An heir of God (Romans 8:17); and have the promise of eternal life with God (John 14:1-3).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All men have a choice between pride and humility! If our choice is to turn from pride to humility, God has promised to lift us up. But if we continue in our pride, we will some day be brought down by God in humiliation to our everlasting shame. May we choose humility AND choose life!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. Pride is the greatest of man's sins!
- ___ 2. When we exalt ourselves, we have a tendency to take the place of God.
- ___ 3. Pride can only enslave those who go to extremes in haughtiness.
- ___ 4. The prideful are perfectly willing to admit any faults they have.
- ___ 5. Spiritual maturity and pridefulness go hand-in-hand.
- ___ 6. The Scriptures state that Sodom and Gomorrha were destroyed because of their pride.
- ___ 7. The Scriptures infer that God resists those who are prideful.
- ___ 8. Humility comes to man when he compares himself to God.
- ___ 9. God has to humiliate us so that we can be humbled.
- ___ 10. Sooner or later man's pride will bring him down everlasting shame.

Lesson Three

"From Hypocrisy to Sincerity"

To grow spiritually is not only a command (2 Pet. 3:18) but a challenge as well. Continued growth can prepare us to deal with the problems of suffering, how to know a false teacher, and how to guard against falling away from the truth. The Hebrew writer rebuked those to whom he was writing because they were not growing (Heb. 5:11-14). Growth is not only desirable but necessary as well.

One of the strongest arguments against Christianity is not from the Philosophic or Scientific realms, but from the realm of the **behavior** of those who claim to be "Christians." The word that describes it so well is **"Hypocrisy!"** The maturing Christian will either deal with this grievous sin or this sin will destroy him spiritually and possibly those who come under his influence.

Jesus had the ability to know men's hearts (Lk. 9:47) and as a results could deal with such sins as hypocrisy with keen insight. Some of the strongest language that He used was directed toward the hypocritical actions and attitudes of the religious leaders of the Jewish nation. Some examples are as follows:

Matt. 6:2 _____

Matt. 6:5 _____

Matt. 6:16 _____

Matt. 23:3-4 _____

Matt. 23:13-15 _____

One specific reference is made about the effect of their hypocrisy upon those who were watching their lives:

Matt. 23:13 _____

It is critical that God's people exemplify correct attitudes and actions that identify them as being sincere and not hypocritical.

Jn. 13:35 _____

We are suppose to be the **light** of the world (Matt. 5:14), the **Salt** of the earth (Matt. 5:13), and a transformed people (Rom. 12:1-2) who show or exemplify the love of God to all around us.

1 Jn. 2:4-5 _____

It is one thing to have people who admire the founder and teacher of Christianity, but quite another thing to have these same people to reject the so-called followers of Christ because of their hypocrisy. Jesus' prayer that is recorded in Jn. 17:15-21 shows the great concern that Jesus had concerning the lives of His followers. I wonder how many people have been turned away from Christ because of the hypocritical actions and attitudes of professed Christians!

The Call for Sincerity!

Faithful genuineness as a Christian needs to be seen in every one who professes the Name of Christ! This should be true of the newest converts to the oldest follower of Christ among us. We should not be willing to accept just anything, but place a high premium on sincere living of the Truth of God.

This sincerity is called for in the Scriptures:

- Josh. 24:14** _____
- Judg. 9:19** _____
- 1 Cor. 5:8** _____
- 2 Cor. 8:8** _____
- 2 Cor. 1:12** _____
- 2 Cor. 2:17** _____
- Eph. 6:24** _____
- Phil. 1:10** _____
- Phil. 1:16** _____
- Tit. 2:7** _____

This is not a requirement to be perfect; but, a requirement to have an attitude of wanting to strive to be perfect. We are called upon to live a holy life (1 Pet. 1:15-16)—one that is set apart from the sins of the world. We are also called upon to add these things:

1. The Christian virtues (2 Pet. 1:5-11);
2. The Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24);
3. The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12).

These are not idle things thought up to entertain people, but challenges to the greater life of following after Christ.

We are not only called upon to follow godly examples set before us, but to also be godly examples for others to follow:

1 Cor. 11:1 _____

Heb. 13:7 _____

1 Tim. 4:12 _____

Concluding Thoughts

The challenge to live a sincere godly life is great, but the fruit of such a life is also great! The world is looking for sincere people who live the life of Christianity to the best of their ability. We should not want to fail them, nor to bring shame or reproach on the Name of Christ because of our hypocrisy. We should make every effort to live as the "chaste" bride of Christ in sincerity and in truth!

The journey from hypocrisy to sincerity is one of drastic changes, the denying of self, and taking up our cross and following Christ (Matt. 16:24).

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- ___ 1. Hypocrisy can be found in the lives of everyone.
- ___ 2. Jesus strongly condemned hypocrisy, even in the lives of religious people.
- ___ 3. Hypocritical praying is one of the specific things Jesus condemned.
- ___ 4. Jesus specifically showed how hypocritical people can keep people out of the Kingdom.
- ___ 5. The Scriptures calls hypocrites liars!
- ___ 6. Jesus showed in His prayer recorded in Jn. 17 that He was not only concerned about His disciples, but also for those who would come to believe in Him.
- ___ 7. The Scriptures have very little to say about Christians being sincere.
- ___ 8. Jesus calls for perfection in His followers.
- ___ 9. Christians are expected to follow godly examples as well as to be godly examples themselves.
- ___ 10. The journey from hypocrisy to sincerity is one of drastic changes.

Lesson Four

"From Guilt to Forgiveness"

Someone has observed that there is no worse suffering than a guilty conscience and nothing more needed than forgiveness of sins. The sense of guilt can literally wreak havoc in a man's soul. It can endanger his health; destroy his happiness and peace, and cause him to be lost eternally. There will occur in every human heart a sense of guilt which serves as evidence of our being the offspring of God. But where does this guilt come from? The answer should be obvious—**SIN!** Changing the name does not remove the fact nor lessen its destructiveness spiritually. Also, man's reluctance to admit sin in his life does not solve the problem that he has with guilt. When men turn from God, sin multiplies and can bring terrible consequences here and hereafter. Man's refusal to properly deal with sin has brought on most of his problems in life. It is obvious that something is here—something that fills our life with tragic consequences; and that something is sin that brings on our guilt. When the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) fretted at home wanting to be away—we call that desire for "independence!" When he went into a far country to indulge, men call that "pleasure!" When he lost all his money—that was called "bad luck!" When he got down into the pig pen to feed the pigs—he was a "fool!" But when he thought straight about the whole series of events—HE called it "I HAVE SINNED!"

The Bible is filled with the sense of guilt!

Ps. 51:7-9 _____

Isa. 6:5-7 _____

Jn. 13:6-10 _____

1 Jn. 1:8 _____

Ps. 25:7 _____

Sin and Guilt is self-evident! We have missed opportunities; neglected duties; waster life's closest relationships; not fully loyal to those who have trusted and loved us; gone astray in the face of warnings from on High; and we have sinned against the light and love of God.

Ways People try to rid their Lives of Guilt!

1. **Rationalize it away!** *"I can't be so bad because there are others who are worse than me."*
2. **Shift the blame!** *"It really wasn't my fault" or "He caused me to do it."*
3. **By being overcritical of others.** If we can find fault in others, then our faults do not seem to be so bad.
4. **Try to forget the wrong.** People staying so busy, don't have time to think about their situation. Or, in their mad search for pleasure, they don't have time to think about themselves.
5. **Self-imposed penance.** It may be through giving to a worthy cause or doing good deeds to others that seems to atone for my sin.

These and possible other ways are used but none of them will bring the forgiveness. A sense of guilt is good because it can confirm that we have a sense of sin or disobedience and hopefully help us to see our need of forgiveness. It can cause us to turn to Him who offers forgiveness!

Forgiveness is emphasized in Scripture!

This was the constant message of the Old Testament Prophets (Isa. 1:16-18; Ps. 32:1-2). The purpose of the coming of the Messiah was to deliver mankind from the penalty of sin (death) (Isa. 53:11). Jesus said that came to call sinners to repentance so that they could be forgiven (Matt. 1:21; Lk. 5:32). He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin so that we could be forgiven (Eph. 4:32; 2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus did not belittle sin and realized the terribleness of it, as well as the misery that it has and continues to cause mankind. This forgiveness must be wanted by men for God will not force it upon us. We must see our sinfulness, our need to be forgiven or suffer the penalty of our sins (Rom. 6:23).

What is involved in Forgiveness?

1. **Pardon!** A sense of sin and guilt brings on a dread of punishment. But forgiveness means that I will not have to fear the punishment decreed for sin. God is ever ready to forgive, but we have responsibilities that we need to fulfill in order to receive this forgiveness. What is involved in this Pardon?

1. It is a lifting of a burden. (Matt. 11:28-29)
2. It is a canceling of a debt. (Matt. 6:12)
3. It brings release to our guilty soul. (Acts 8:39; Eph. 1:7)
4. It puts away fear. (1 Jn. 3:21; 1 Jn. 4:18)
5. It brings a happy heart. (Matt. 9:2)

2. It means Another Chance! It involves a fresh start, a new beginning, and a newness of life (Rom. 6:4-5). But it also means a determination to turn from sin (Rom. 6:1-2). Without such, forgiveness would only encourage us to sin. It would make grace a means of encouraging us to continue in the way of sin. The Apostle Peter offered forgiveness to the very people that brought about the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23, 38). But he also told them to **"Repent....and be baptized."** Change your mind about sin and change your life towards righteousness.

3. It means a renewed trust. In spite of our frailties, our unworthiness, our guilt, and our bad attitudes before, God is willing to renew His trust in us. It means that God believes in us (has faith in us) and holds out hope for us. He is willing to work with us and in us again. It also means that God will entrust to us the responsibilities of His kingdom. Isaiah illustrates this concept in (6:7-8). Upon being cleansed, purified, and forgiven, he was then willing to answer the call of God to go to work in His kingdom—**"Here as I, send me."** Peter also illustrates this concept. Jesus said to him after he would sin grievously—**"When you are converted strengthen your brethren."** The Lord knew he would deny Him, but He also had confidence in Peter that he would do better. (Lk. 22:32). This trust gives us a new sense of honor to do our best and bravest. It is a means of motivation to glorify our Maker.

Conditions of Forgiveness!

1. We must develop a forgiving spirit ourselves toward others. (Matt. 6:12-15). We cannot receive what we are unwilling to give. Those who love receive love. Those who are merciful receive mercy. God cannot enter a person's heart that harbors a bitter and an unforgiving spirit. We need to have the same spirit of mercy and compassion that Jesus has.

2. Obedience to God's Will. We need to believe in God and in His Son who died for us. We then need to repent of our disobedient ways. And then upon a confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, I am to be baptized into Christ. (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38). For the Christian who sins, he is to repent, confess, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn. 1:7-9).

Concluding Thoughts

Man has no greater problem than sin and guilt. God offers no greater gift to mankind than the gift of forgiveness. We all need it, but we must want it and conform to God's Will if we expect to receive it.

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- ___ 1. Proof of our origin comes from the sense of guilt for wrong doing.
- ___ 2. The Prodigal Son wanted his independence and traveled into a far country to find pleasure; but, wound up making a fool of himself and almost starved to death.
- ___ 3. The Bible is filled with a references to man's sense of guilt.
- ___ 4. Sin and Guilt is self-evident.
- ___ 5. Rationalization about guilt and sin is an escape effort.
- ___ 6. People often punish themselves because of their guilt.
- ___ 7. Forgiveness involves pardon, another chance, and trust from God.
- ___ 8. The Apostle Peter illustrates this trust that comes in forgiveness.
- ___ 9. There are three requirements to be met before a person can be forgiven.
- ___ 10. Prayer for forgiveness is only extended to the Christian.

Lesson Five

"Through Discipline to Freedom"

Every person needs to be disciplined. However, while many realize this; there are not as many that actually have a disciplined life. What is a disciplined life? While some may look upon it as punishment or a penalty to be paid; others may think that it involves restriction, hard work, and austerity. The following is given by a Dictionary:

1. Instruction, teaching, education;
2. The training effect of experience;
3. Subjection to rules of conduct or behavior;
4. State of order maintained by order and control;
5. To bring to a state of order and obedience by training and control.

Basically, it is to hold in check, to rigidly control oneself, or to bring into subjection. Notice the following Scriptures:

Lk. 13:24 _____

Matt. 7:13-14 _____

Matt. 16:24-25 _____

Matt. 18:8 _____

The above Scriptures emphasize the need to learn discipline and to train ourselves in doing what is rightfully expected of us. But Christianity is more than observing laws and regulations. It is a way of life—the way of love (1 Jn. 5:3).

Experience, itself, teaches us that we need to be discipline. When our society does not discipline itself, it comes to chaos! Then, the need to be disciplined by others becomes a necessity for survival. If we fail to "govern" or "discipline" ourselves, it will come by Law from others. The less self-discipline people are, the more laws are necessary. It is obvious that very few people measure up to what they ought to be and what they want to be. We indicate it by such statements as the following:

1. *"I know I ought to study harder."*
2. *"I wish I could control my temper more."*
3. *"I guess I am just lazy."*
4. *"God knows I don't want to be this way."*

5. *"I intend to be in church every Sunday, but....."*
6. *"I wish I could live up to my good intentions."*
7. *"I just don't have any discipline."*

All of us can easily identify with the above thoughts. It is obvious that we all need more self-discipline.

Self-Denial!

A distinction needs to be made between "self-denial" and "asceticism." Jesus was no ascetic. He was accused of being "gluttonous and a wine-bibber." He rebuked Martha for overly concern about food, but he ate and enjoyed food but was no slave to it. Asceticism regards the body and its satisfactions as evil. It exalts self-denial into a virtue in itself. It can be a form of self-martyrdom. Pride lies at the center of such and destroys any claim to virtue. (Col. 2:20-23).

Jesus taught men to control his basic drives and instincts. Without control we wind up in bondage to these things. However, there will be possible times when there is a need to go beyond self-control of drives, to a self-denial altogether. But, it is not as an end in itself, but a means to an end. To do God's purpose at times will require such. When these drives are in control, we will add greater mental and spiritual force to our lives.

Satisfaction from Self-Denial!

Satisfaction can come from a disciplined life. In order to help others we may have to give up time, money, and mental effort. That which we could have used for self is given to serve others. Jesus reminds us: **"Whosoever will save his life will lose it."** (Matt. 16:25). Self, at times, will have to be set aside in order to help others. Self-discipline is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. True satisfaction can only come when our abilities are used as a means of serving Christ's cause or our fellowman. The very thing we don't like to do often needs to be done for our own good.

Self-discipline is narrow! Think about how many things demand narrowness of us.

1. All great musicians, speakers, artists, etc., attained such only through disciplined effort. They practice constantly which narrows down their activities.
2. Attention is narrow. Concentration requires singleness. An unfocused mind does not accomplish anything.

3. Decisiveness is narrow. Vague and general decisions are not good enough. We must decide in particular. Such will define and exclude all things that are not pertinent.
4. Loyalty is narrow. It binds me to a definite purpose, person or thing. The unloyal travels a broad road.

Self-discipline is valuable. Notice the following:

1. The horse becomes more useful when he is bridled.
2. Steam or gas drives only when confined.
3. Power is generated only when water is channeled.

No life is ever great until it is focused, dedicated, and disciplined. The challenge lies in whether we will listen to what we say we would like to be and the willingness to discipline ourselves to get there.

True Freedom?

"The truth will set you free!" (Jn. 8:32). True freedom comes only through conforming to God's Laws, not disregarding them! It does not come from doing only what we like. Our fullest freedom will come when love becomes our motivation (Jn. 14:15). Until our Religion helps and guides us to discipline our lives:

1. It is still only an outward conforming to society's wishes;
2. It is only then that Christ is truly our Lord and Master.
3. It is only then that we are Christians in the true sense of the word.

Concluding Thoughts

It would seem obvious that "self-reverence," "self-knowledge," and "self-control" are three things that lead our lives to greater power! A loose life can mean ruin. Jesus wants each of His followers to dedicate and discipline their lives under His Lordship. It is a narrow way, but it is the only way that leads to eternal life.

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- ___ 1. Self-disciplined requires rigid control
- ___ 2. Experience can help us to see the need of asceticism.
- ___ 3. No one is as self-discipline as he would like to be.
- ___ 4. Self-denial and asceticism are similar, but not the same.
- ___ 5. Jesus taught self-denial by saying that we need to lose our lives.
- ___ 6. Self-discipline is a goal towards which all should strive.
- ___ 7. People who are generally the most effective in their life's work are self-disciplined people.
- ___ 8. No life is ever great until it is focused.
- ___ 9. True freedom is what Jesus gives to the self-discipline.
- ___ 10. Self-Discipline, self-reverence, and self-knowledge are three necessities to a greater and more powerful life.

Lesson Six

"Through Serving to Greatness"

Not too many years ago a well-known man ran for the office of the President of this country. He selected a statement to serve as the theme of his campaign—"Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." Man's greatest happiness and contentment does not lie in being helped or being served, but to help others—to serve others. This great principle was the basis of all of Jesus' teachings.

People need to learn to serve, rather than to be served. We need to be challenged more than we need psycho-therapy. We need to forget self and find interest in others outside of ourselves. We need a vision of service that will cause us to:

1. Dedicate our time, strength and ability to Christian service;
2. To turn and give greater effort to the furtherance of Christ's Cause and Kingdom;
3. To be enriched by such a life.

Jesus' Teaching Exemplified!

Jesus not only taught the need for His followers to be servants, but He also set the example of such.

Heb. 5:8-9 _____

Matt. 20:28 _____

We have the freedom to accept or reject Jesus' teachings. But we cannot accept Him and reject His demand for serving others.

Matt. 16:24 _____

The Cross is more than a symbol of Jesus' death; it is a way of life, love, and service. The choice has to be made one way or another—and our eternal destiny is at stake in this matter. Notice the story of the Good Samaritan (LK. 10:30-37). The Priest and the Levite were obviously condemned for not being willing to serve.

Gal. 6:10**Gal. 5:13**

Notice again the condemnation pronounced upon those who are unwilling to serve (Matt. 25:31-46). Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those who were willing to serve: **"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."** (verse 34).

Serving is an individual Responsibility!

We cannot hire someone to do our serving for us. A follower of Jesus was called unprofitable because he did not use his talent to serve (Matt. 25:30). Yes, we must believe the right doctrines. Yes, we must obey the fundamentals of the Gospel to be saved. Yes, we must worship correctly on the first Day of the Week. But, unless we practice pure and undefiled religion, our Religion is vain (Jas. 1:27). A Poem states the thought this way:

"No one could tell me where my soul might be;
"I searched for God, and He eluded me;
"I sought my brother out, and found all three."

A True Picture of Serving!

1. Serving is a matter of showing gratitude. We are Christians and blessed because of others who cared enough to help teach us. This feeling of gratitude will help us to be a servant to others.

2. Serving in Christ's Name has dignity and meaning. We are doing it because the greatest being of this universe commanded it. We serve because we want to be acceptable and great before God (Mk. 10:43-44). Even obscure service is valued by Jesus (Matt. 10:42). He also placed the ability to serve in reach for all. It is not just for the brilliant, nor those of high position among men, nor just for the educated—it is designed so that all can serve.

3. Serving is a Test of our Discipleship. It is our way of showing our devotion to God (Jn. 14:15). Serving (obeying, works) is a way of showing our faith (Jas. 2:18). If we are willing to serve, we are then worthy of the Name of Christ! If not, we disgrace His Name and bring shame to it.

4. Serving is life's highest sense of self-fulfillment. In helping others, we help ourselves. **"If you lose your life for my sake and the gospel's**

You shall gain it." (Mk. 8:35). Servants of humanity have found an inner satisfaction which the pleasure-seekers cannot know.

5. Service is not the easiest route to travel. It makes great demands at times. It talks about denying self, taking up our cross, and losing one's life. While such may be discouraging to some, it is rewarding to others.

Gal. 6:9 _____

1 Cor. 15:58 _____

Jn. 12:26 _____

Serving may not be the easiest route, but it is the blessed route!

6. Serving can be a mark of maturity. It tells us we have grown out of our selfish and self-centeredness. It shows that we are able to live a life of self-forgetfulness.

Jn. 12:26 _____

Gal. 5:13-14 _____

Concluding Thoughts

A little boy in Bible Class was learning the story of the Good Samaritan. At the end, the teacher asks him what the lesson from the story was. The little boy answered: *"Everybody ought to help me when I get into trouble."* We would expect a child to say this, but not a mature adult. Unfortunately, too many adults want to be served rather than serving. Until we can rid our hearts of selfishness, we can never be true servants of Jesus.

Have we found true satisfaction in living for self? Can we be challenged to give our life to a higher Cause—serving? Would you like to travel the road to true Greatness? ***"He that would be great or chief, let him be servant of all."***

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- ___ 1. Man's greatest happiness is found in being served by others.
- ___ 2. To teach men to be servants is needed, but it must be accompanied by a life of serving others.
- ___ 3. A person cannot accept the Salvation Jesus offers and refuse to become a servant to others.
- ___ 4. The Cross is more than a symbol of death.
- ___ 5. Jesus actually condemns those who are unwilling to serve others.
- ___ 6. We cannot hire someone to serve for us.
- ___ 7. Serving is a matter of showing gratitude.
- ___ 8. Being a servant has been given dignity by Jesus.
- ___ 9. Serving may not be the easiest route, but it is the blessed route.
- ___ 10. True satisfaction can be found in living for self.

