

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 9, February, 2000

“Follow Jesus - the One the Scriptures Speak About”

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Luke 16:16 (KJV) - *“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached...”*

John 5:36-40 (NIV) - *“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”*

Before Jesus started preaching about the Kingdom of God, the law and the prophets had been the final Word of God (Luke 16:16). To the Jews the scriptures were everything. They believed that anyone who achieved the words of the law acquired eternal life. They studied the law but failed to recognize Christ when he came.

In the fifth chapter of the Book of John, Jesus was talking to the Jews who had condemned him not only for doing the works that he did, but for doing them on the wrong day of the week. What in the world had Jesus done that they thought was so wrong? He had healed a man on the Sabbath. To the Jewish leadership (Pharisees) this was horrible, because they thought Jesus was not keeping the Sabbath holy. They made it their duty to point out what the law said (Exodus 20:8), “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” To keep the Sabbath holy no work was to be done.

Did the Pharisees really believe that healing someone on the Sabbath was a work that was unholy? In their twisted thinking - yes!

Jesus told them the Father himself had sent him and bore witness of him, but they did not even know him, because they did not have his Word abiding in them. These words of Jesus must have shocked the self-righteous Pharisees. They spent a lot of time studying the Scriptures and felt very confident in their own understanding. Jesus continued to talk sternly to these men, because he loved them so much. Jesus never said anything to anyone that wasn't said out of his deep and abiding love for them. In the sternness of his voice was his yearning love of wanting to bring salvation to their heart and soul.

“You diligently study the scriptures searching for eternal life,” Jesus said, “yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Life was standing right in front of them and they turned him away. The best Bible students in the world, people who meticulously and continuously read scripture, rejected Jesus? How could this happen? Jesus was offering the Pharisees “life” and they were more interested in quoting what the scriptures said? Go figure!

Could it be that we are not so different from the Pharisees? What would our reaction be if Jesus, unannounced, walked into our Bible class one day and said, “I have come to give you life - Follow Me?” Would we be so engrossed in our class that we would answer, “Don't bother us, we need to finish our Bible study?”

Or, what would our reaction be if the Holy Spirit (the one Jesus sent to lead us into all truth), came to our Bible class witnessing of the living Jesus? Would we be so caught up in our

Bible study that we would brush aside the Spirit's testimony of Jesus Christ?

As I was preparing this lesson the Holy Spirit brought to my remembrance a scene from my past. He took me back to a particular Bible class I had attended. As I walked into the room that day, several people were sitting around a long table getting ready to study the Bible. They all had their various Bible versions sitting on the table in front of them and they were heavily engaged in small talk while waiting for the class to begin.

I walked over to a vacant chair at the end of the table. As I sat down, my eyes were drawn to a Bible sitting on the table next to me. In large bold print the letters read, "THE LIVING BIBLE." This translation of the Bible was not new to me. But on this day the words took on new meaning. All of a sudden the voices in the room faded into the background until all I could hear was the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, "If that Bible is really alive, you should expect it to get up and walk across the room!"

Whoa! The thought of an inanimate object walking across the room made me chuckle to myself. At the time I thought the Lord was just joking with me, so I didn't give it much more thought. But the truth was still there and it went into my heart.

It was not until I was preparing *this* lesson that the Lord showed me the depth of his pain and the truth he was revealing to me on that day. Jesus hurts anytime we put the written Word above the Living Word - or in other words, when we put the "revelation" of Jesus above Jesus Himself. We are no different then the Pharisees of Jesus day, if we spend all of our time studying the scriptures from every angle, referencing all the Bible versions, nit picking over the law. No wonder the Jews did not recognize the "Living" Christ when he was standing in their midst. They were not reading the scriptures to search for God, but to find

arguments to support their own positions. It wasn't God that they loved. They loved their own ideas about God. Their own ideas about the law became the God they worshipped.

Just as Jesus challenged the Pharisees, there is a big difference between diligently studying the Word of God and diligently following Jesus (the living Word). We must not let studying of the Word become an end, in itself. If we are not careful the same thing that held the Pharisees back, could hold us back from coming to Jesus to experience the living Word.

Galatians 3:23-25 (NIV) - Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Before faith comes, we are like plants in pots that are too small. We become root bound. When a plant isn't given the room it needs to grow, it will develop a tangled, bound-up root system. With Jesus, the time for fulfilling the law comes. It is time to put into action what the law can not accomplish - the experience of Jesus, the living Word.



Questions for personal or group study:

1. What does it mean to you when Christ says you are, "no longer under the supervision of the law" (Galatians 3:25)?
2. Does this mean you don't need to obey the laws of the land, or those recorded in the scriptures? Explain. (Galatians 5:13-15)
3. What is the primary purpose of the scriptures? How do the scriptures help us in pursuing that purpose?