

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 15, August, 2001

“Testing Your Faith - Part 3”

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John 8:28-30 (NIV) - *So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.*

Jesus, our perfect role model always did what was pleasing to the Heavenly Father. He didn't have a hot and cold, start and stop type of relationship with Him. Because the Father was with him, Jesus successfully lived His life on earth as a SINGLE-MINDED man. He didn't waver, he didn't hesitate to speak the truth and live the truth that the Heavenly Father taught Him. He was in fact, the perfect expression of God's character.

John 1:14 (NIV) - *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Heavenly Father taught Jesus, from the time he was a little boy, to take his concerns to Him, to seek His wisdom. Jesus diligently sought Him out, then waited patiently for the answers.

Luke 2:52 (NIV) - *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

As born-again children of God, we do not get out of the responsibility to grow in wisdom [spiritual understanding] and to conduct ourselves as Jesus taught us. We must not continue to live our life any old way we please. We must live to please the Lord.

Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV) - *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.*

There is no way we are going to PLEASE the Lord, unless our attitude is the same as his. Our thoughts must line up with his thoughts, if we hope to live free in this world. We need to find out what pleases Jesus, and then make an ATTITUDE adjustment! I like how Peter said it.

I Peter 1:14-16 (NIV) - *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in igno-*

rance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Holiness pleases God! Are your thoughts on holiness? Or, are your thoughts on evil desires? Are you acting like a son or daughter of God? Or, are you acting like mere men and women? (See: **I Corinthians 3:3**)

In this lesson, “Testing Your Faith - Part 3”, we will be talking about the contrast in conduct, between two men who were released from prison on parole and given similar opportunities to make it out in society. Upon release, both men had a job, a place to live and family support. Before leaving prison, both men said they planned to live their life on the streets as a Christian.

Within six months after his release date, parolee *number one*, found himself in trouble with the law again, in jail, and on his way back to prison to finish out his sentence. Parolee *number two*, continued to make steady progress in all areas of his life, finished his parole requirements with flying colors, and three years later is a solid, productive member of society, who owns and manages his own business.

Why the sharp contrast in outcome between these two parolees? With similar opportunities given to each, why did one become successful, while the other one failed? Jesus spells it out for us in the following parable of “The Wise and Foolish Builders”.

Matthew 7:24-29 (NIV) - *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

Using the parable as our model, Jesus said both men heard His words. So, hearing the word wasn't the problem. While both men were in prison, they went to church and they studied their Bibles. Both men heard about

God's plan for them, His plan to prosper them, to give them hope and a future. (**Jeremiah 29:11**).

The parolee who acted like a wise man, not only heard God's plan, but he followed God's plan! Being led by the Word of God, he went off and developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. His life has steadily risen higher and higher ever since.

The parolee who acted like a foolish man, heard God's plan, but when he got out of prison, he went off and followed his OWN plan. All of his Bible reading and church going didn't set him free. Why not? He didn't make an ATTITUDE adjustment. He didn't line up his thoughts with God's thoughts. He neglected to develop the most important relationship in his life, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, he didn't put into practice the Word of God.

The parolee who built his house on SAND, is finding out just what SAND looks like to Jesus. Not a pretty picture! However, he graciously agreed to share with you, his fellow inmates, the lessons he learned from the mistakes he made. By sharing, he hopes to encourage others not to make the same mistakes he did:

"Now that I have this time in prison, I've been thinking what my mistake was. I was doing good until I met this girl and that's where it all started. It's weird how Satan works to mess up your mind, to confuse you. I messed up in trying to impress this girl. She lived three towns away from me. I spent a lot of my pay check going to see her. In order to have the money to see her more, I started selling some of my father's things. At first I used the money to buy her gifts, then I started using the money to buy drugs. In a matter of weeks I had sold most of the things my father had in storage.

All of this happened, while I was living in a house my father owned. He was trying to help me out, by giving me a place to stay when I got out of prison. He was testing me to see if I could handle that responsibility over a period of time. If I could handle it, then he was going to help me start my own business. But, I couldn't wait! I was too impatient! I wasn't thinking about pleasing Jesus, all I could think about was impressing this girl! Now as I look back, I see myself as that servant in the Bible that was trusted with little. I didn't know how to act with a little responsibility, so how could I be trusted with a lot? All because of my foolishness, I lost the girl, I lost my father, and now I'm facing 3 years in a Federal Penitentiary."

As this parolee found out the hard way...living in the material world, lifted up in pride, trying to impress his girlfriend, getting caught up in riches and evil desires... did not bring about the righteous life God desired for him. As he ponders over his outright disobedience to God, his pain reminds him what he should have done. He should have built a solid relationship with Jesus Christ! Then when he was faced with the trials of life, he would have had the faith and patience to persevere, to learn what it means to grow up, to truly experience the joy of becoming a child of God.

The door to God's Kingdom is still open. There is room for more sons and daughters to come in. If you haven't made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, don't put it off any longer. Come in while you still can!

Romans 8:19 (NIV) - *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*

What is your decision? Are you ready to rise up in FAITH, to be counted among God's children?



Questions for personal or group study:

1. How was Jesus always able to do what pleased the Father? (**See: John 8:28-30**)
2. God's children live as light in the world.. What does the fruit of light consist of? (**See: Ephesians 5:8-10**)
3. Describe the difference between how a son of God acts, and how a mere man (woman) acts. (**See: I Corinthians 3:3**)
4. What does Jesus call a man who builds his life (house) on sand? (**See: Matthew 7:26**)
5. How does someone go about making an "attitude adjustment"? (**See: Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:5, Ephesians 4:23-24**)
6. What is the reward for patience? (**See: Hebrews 6:15, Hebrews 10:36**)