

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 19, August, 2002

Take Up Your Cross Daily

by Sharon K. Griffiee

Luke 9:23-26 (NIV) - Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

It is not easy to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, especially if we become worried about our own reputation. The daily choices we make will not set well with our friends or associates. Taking into consideration the sinful period of time we live in and its commitment to many things that are opposed to God and godliness, society will try to make us feel shame and embarrassment when we disclose our intent to follow Jesus Christ. People may call us weak and accuse us of hiding behind our Bibles. If we are searching for man's approval, their remarks will bother us. We have to make a choice and deal with the consequences. Do we fear man's opinions more than we fear God?

Proverbs 29:25 (KJV) - *The fear of man bringeth a snare [trap]: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*

What exactly are we safe from, if we decide to put our trust in the Lord? We are safe from the **fear** of man and his opinion of us. This verse from Proverbs, along with the following verse of scripture from Hebrews, gives us sound reason to put all our trust in the Lord's help, consequently avoiding the deceptions of man.

Hebrews 13:5b-6 (KJV) - "... 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."

If you choose to follow Jesus Christ, whether it be from inside the walls of prison or out on the streets, you will have to make decisions that will affect your relationship with others around you. So don't make your decision casually. There is a price to pay in following Jesus. Are you **ready** to pay the price?

Luke 14:27-30 (KJV) - *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

In the natural world if the foundation of a building is not properly laid the whole structure can collapse. The same is true in the spiritual world. A faulty foundation can result in spiritual disaster. There are people who are hurting themselves spiritually, because they are not **prepared** to carry the cross of Christ. They are trying to live like Christians when they have never been born again. They have not come to an understanding of the basic principles of the doctrine of Jesus Christ (**Hebrews 6:1-2, KJV**). Neither have they understood the steps they must put into practice daily, in order to build a good spiritual foundation. Describing these steps in simple terms, one must -- **come** to Jesus, **hear** His sayings, and **do** them! All three steps are required! (**Luke 6:47-48, KJV**)

In **Luke 6:46 (NIV)**, Jesus asks the question, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Jesus is not truly **Lord** of our life until we respond to His teachings in word and deed! Many people **begin** to build a relationship with Jesus then abandon that relationship as soon as the going gets tough, then back into the world they go. By building on unstable ground they had not prepared themselves spiritually to continue the relationship. They were not steadfast in reading and meditating on God's Word and seeking personal direction from the Holy Spirit **before** they attempted to act. When people make false claims about Christ's Lordship in their lives, they are placing themselves on wobbly ground, because they are walking in their own strength, not the Lord's strength.

Without the Holy Spirit's daily involvement, such works of the flesh are guaranteed to fail. Such was the case with a prison inmate, whom I'll call Pat, who wrote and described to me in detail what happened when she decided to step out to follow Jesus. Her ex-

perience parallels the parable Jesus taught about the necessity of counting the cost before building a tower. Jesus knows His business, for the outcome was just the way He said it would be!

Pat wrote, "Sharon, I'm so *ready* to move on now and leave my past life of sin behind me. But, you know, there is one thing that makes it seem so hard for me to do. I keep telling my friends (associates) here in prison, that I'm turning my life around for the Lord Jesus, but when I start to follow Jesus, I keep falling back and doing things with them like cussing, gossiping, speaking on immoral things, and stuff like that. Then I start feeling guilty, so I tell them, 'Look I'm changing again. I'm going to be spending more time alone in my cell studying the Bible.' Sharon, this has happened so often, it has gotten to the place where they don't want to believe me anymore, because I keep falling back into my old ways. So, this is what they say to me, 'Pat, you're just playing with God! You're only making up excuses, saying you're following Jesus, just to keep from talking to us.'"

Jesus is not looking for lip service nor our patronage. He will not play games with those who are double-minded; who make commitments to Him they never intend to keep. Those who constantly waver back and forth between the world and Jesus must wake up to the realization that they are living for *themselves*. They may confess Christ, but they do not possess Christ. The people who genuinely confess from the heart that Jesus Christ is Lord of their life, will sincerely turn away from sin and *turn toward righteousness*.

II Corinthians 3:16-18 (NIV) - "...Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

God is looking for people who will not drop the cross and go "backwards" at the first sign of trouble. God is looking for people who will go "forward" making a commitment to Him and standing with it! In these last days, the barrage of bad news has people frightened and disturbed about the future. Preoccupation with end time events has people concerned about when Jesus will return and whether or not they will be here during the Great Tribulation. People who only play games with God (trying to follow Jesus when their

heart isn't in it), seem far more interested in avoiding hell and the tribulation which will come upon the earth, than they are in developing a true spiritual relationship with Him. These people are missing the point. The truth is, people who are willing to *deny themselves* and pick up their cross daily, are people in hot pursuit of God and His kingdom. They are not trying to *avoid* the suffering that comes with following Christ, but rather will gladly enter into it.

Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV) - *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* [emphasis mine]

Acts 14:22 (KJV) - *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* [emphasis mine]

There are no free rides into the kingdom of God. If we are true to Jesus in this space of time here on earth, He will be true to us in eternity.

Luke 17:32-33 (KJV) - *Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.*

Questions for personal or group study:

1. Why is our relationship with Jesus *incomplete* if we only receive Him as our Savior? What else must we do to continue our relationship with Him? (John 8:31-32)
2. Why does Jesus tell us that we must be born again before we can see the kingdom of God? What does it mean to be born again?
3. If we confess Jesus as Lord does that mean we are saved into His kingdom? (Matthew 7:21)
4. When you make the choice to follow Jesus, you must be willing to stand. If you continually waver, what does James 1:8 call that person?
5. What was it that Lot's wife couldn't let go of? What did her choice cost her?