

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 40

Our Destiny – To Be Like Jesus

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Genesis 1:26a-27 (KJV) - *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

From the very beginning of creation it was God's intention and man's destiny (male and female) to bear the image and the likeness of God. We have only to look around us to see how far man has fallen short of that destiny. Yet, despite failures, the call of Jesus is still there for those who are willing to prepare, sacrifice, struggle, and make the determination to reach their destiny (**Matthew 5:48**).

It is only through the finished work of Jesus at the cross, and our acceptance of it, that man will attain and bear the image and likeness of God. Paul wrote:

I Corinthians 6:19b-20 (KJV) - *"Ye are not your own...For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Because God placed such a high value on us, it is our responsibility as Christians, to shine for Him with His own likeness, in our bodies and in our spirit. Every day our heart's concern should be, *"Am I becoming more valuable to God with the passing of time, or am I still making excuses for not being like Jesus?"*

If we want to grow up in Christ, rather than remain as spiritual infants, tossed to and fro and easily deceived (**Ephesians 4:14-15**); we should get rid of the phrase, *"I'm only human!"* So many people use that phrase as a cover-up for not growing up. *"Just pat me on the back, tell me I'm human and it's okay, because we all make mistakes."* Such excuses reveal that a person does not want to work toward being like the Master. They are not willing to put in the effort it takes to endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 (KJV) – *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

MOVING BEYOND OUR INSECURITIES

In **I John 2:28-3:1-3** (see below), we find John writing to ordinary people who had become Christians and were looking forward to a new life. Yet, they still had some insecurity. Their old habits and sins didn't suddenly disappear. They needed reassurance, that in spite of their shortcomings they could actually achieve this new life; that they could truly be *like Jesus*.

Experiences like these are widespread, because the Christian life involves *growth*. It is helpful to understand, that before the *born-again* experience, man walks in His own way, which is exactly opposite of the will of God. When he is born again, he is born into a brand new world through faith in Jesus Christ. As a baby Christian, just starting out, he is the most vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Why? He is excited and his expectations are high! Expecting to follow God's will exactly, he becomes greatly discouraged when he makes mistakes and misses God's will. Sometimes he hears God's voice and does His will, at other times he blows it! However, if he doesn't give up, he learns that the old habits and sins will be replaced with righteousness. It doesn't happen suddenly, as he might like, but *gradually* through continual growth and reliance upon the Grace of God.

John set out to teach these new Christians about the real pattern of a person's life. He wanted them to know there will be "ups" and "downs" in the Christian life. Through failures, as well as successes, he learns to hear God's voice. They just needed to look within.

I John 2:28-3:1-3 (NIV) – *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God; and what we will be has not yet*

been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

DEAR CHILDREN - CONTINUE IN HIM!

First and foremost, John made a special point to address these Christians as *dear children*. The first thing we must establish is that anyone who is born of God is a child of God. *That is what we are!* Unless that truth is firmly established in our heart, we will never have the confidence to continue *in him* and fulfill our destiny to be like Jesus. If we don't believe we truly are children of God, what happens to our thinking when we stumble and fall and then fall again? Doubt will set in. We start to wonder if we've made a mistake about our relationship with God. Maybe we were not born again after all. Maybe we only *thought* we believed, or else we wouldn't be stumbling into sin and failure all over again. These negative thoughts play on us, opening the door to Satan, who will kill our own heart for God if he can.

John wrote to these Christians with an important lesson. He wanted to release them from the tormenting, negative thoughts about themselves. He encouraged them to take their place as God's child, close the door to Satan, and stop expecting to be *instantly* grown up and mature. But what about our failures and sin?

"Dear children," John simply wrote,
"continue in Him!" (1 John 2:28 - NIV)

That is the message God wants to get across to His children. God doesn't disown us when we mess up. As long as our heart is in the right place, *desiring to do what is right*, He continues to pour out His Grace so that we will come to the place of victory over our sin.

TRAINING UNDER JESUS - THE MASTER!

Luke 6:40 (KJV) - The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

When believers first come across this scripture, the typical reaction is to express discouragement, *"But nobody is perfect!"* No one can be perfect like Jesus. No, that is not true. Jesus would never ask us to do something we couldn't do. The first thing we need to do then is to understand what Jesus meant by the word "perfect". Once we understand what He really

meant, we can change negative thoughts into positive ones and begin our training with confidence.

The word, translated as "perfect" (perfection) in the Bible, means to bring to an end by completing or perfecting (complete, finished, and mature). The Bible uses the word "perfection", rather than "maturity", to describe a *spiritually mature* believer. When Jesus tells us to be perfect, He is telling us to *continue growing up*, so we will reach maturity!

Don't let Satan stunt your growth. You were bought with a price. Glorify God in your body and in your spirit. Start off every day by saying;

"Jesus is my Master, I'm training under Him. I'm growing up! When He appears I shall be like Him. That is my destiny and I'm going after it!" Amen.

Questions for personal or group study:

1. Because God placed such a high value on us, what if any responsibility do we have toward Him? See: I Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 14:7-8; Philippians 1:20
2. If we want to "grow up" in Christ, rather than remain as spiritual infants, what phrase do we need to get rid of?
3. John set out to teach new Christians about the *real pattern* of a person's life. What did he want them to know about it?
4. John addressed the Christians in I John 2:28 as *"dear children"*. What damage does it do to our thinking if we don't believe we are truly God's children?
5. How should God's children respond to their failures and sin? See: I John 2:28
6. In Luke 6:40 Jesus said, *"every one that is perfect shall be as his master"*. Why is the word "perfect" so offensive to people?
7. What did Jesus really mean when He asked us to be perfect? See: Genesis 6:9
8. What is the destiny of every child of God? I John 3:2; Psalm 17:15; 2 Corinthians 3:18