

Jesus Our Example

Lesson 2 in "More Like Jesus"

Lesson Aim: To recognize that God has given us an example to follow and that He expects us to pattern our life after His Son Jesus.

Key Verse: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Romans 8:29

A Plan

When we want to reproduce something, we follow a pattern. A carpenter has a set of plans when building a house. A seamstress uses a pattern for making a dress. A machinist follows a blueprint when fabricating a piece from metal.

So it is with the Christian life. Romans 8:29 (above) says it is God's plan that we be conformed to the likeness (pattern, example) of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Christians are not free to shape their life as they wish. Rather, God expects us to deliberately conform ourselves to His predetermined pattern, as demonstrated in Jesus. It is His expectation, even His requirement, for authentic Christianity.

Scriptures to Consider

Read the following scriptures and note the direct connection between the life of Jesus, and what He expects of us! Identify the ways in which we are to emulate Him. Ask yourself; "How different would I and my church be if we were more like Jesus in *this* way?"

Matthew 20:25-28 - We are to follow Him in serving others rather than lording it over them. Read it all!

John 15:12 - "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (Eph. 5:2)

John 17:14-23

- Vv14 & 16, "they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."
- V18, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."
- VV 21 & 22 "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (also v11)

John 20:21 - "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Romans 15:7 - "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you"

Ephesians 4:13-15

- "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."
- "we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

Ephesians 4:32 - "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Col. 3:13)

Philippians 2:3-7 - "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." Read it all!

II Thessalonians 2:14 - "He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Did you know it said that?

I Peter 2:18-23 - "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Did you know it said *that* too?

I John 2:3-6 - "This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."

I John 3:16 - "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

It is clear that we are to take Jesus as our example or pattern for life! We can never say we don't know how we're supposed to live. There are however, some other options!

Making a Comparison

Do we sometimes compare ourselves with others to get a sense of how well we're doing? In II Cor. 10:12b Paul says; "but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding." Not flattering!

Might we do this because it helps us excuse some ungodly habit or attitude in our own life? Really, can't we often justify ourselves, and overlook our own needs, when we compare ourselves with others?

Here are some reasons why it's important that we compare ourselves to Jesus:

- He is our God-given example
- He is the only trustworthy example
- He is the only one who will never disappoint us

A Likely Complication

A carpenter will tell you that it can be more difficult to renovate an old house, than to build a new one. Often the new design is complicated by the existing structure.

So it is with our becoming conformed to the image of Jesus. It's not just a matter of building according to His example. In the process we must constantly deal with the patterns that are there from our former nature.

That complicates things! The old attitudes, values and affections have been important structures in our lives. We may have ungodly patterns in relationships, possibly between man and woman; or in manipulating others; or in how we express leadership. Some Christians have practiced patterns of deception. Others are not fully trustworthy with money. Still others don't do what they say they'll do.

Our old patterns had become a way of life, helping us deal with the challenges of life and get what we wanted. They have offered us security, comfort and identity, but they represent the old nature and their presence will hinder the formation of Christ in us.

Many Christians are not willing to honestly face the ungodliness in their lives. They pretend, and go about with an artificial piety that is meant to convince others they are deeply spiritual.

If Christ is truly to be built in us, we must be willing to recognize the structures of the old nature in us, and boldly deal with them. Humbly comparing ourselves with Jesus will help us see them!

Tough Words

When Jesus said "Follow me" to His disciples, He called them to follow His manner of life. They were not to only be about His *work*. They were to see people as He saw them; to love as He loved; to seek after what He sought after, and so forth.

Christians need to focus on both "being" and "doing". "Being" speaks of our heart, or what we are on the inside, while "doing" represents our works. "Being" is so important because it predetermines the quality of our "doing." If we are sincere about following Jesus we will humbly give ourselves to both, but we will refuse to be satisfied with our works if our heart is not like that of Jesus.

In Mark 8:34 Jesus said, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me." Those are tough words! If we are truly to be His disciples; if He is truly our example and pattern for life; then we must chose to die to the rule of the flesh, as He did. As we do, the fruit of the Spirit will progressively replace the works of the flesh and we will more clearly reflect His image!

Closing Thoughts

God has not left us without a pattern. In the scriptures He has *told us* how to live; through Jesus He has *shown us*; and by His Spirit He has *empowered us*.

But the way of Jesus is not the popular way. Sometimes it's not the easy way either. The reality of "taking up our cross," in the face of the voice of the flesh and the beckoning of the world, discourages many. They focus on the costs rather than the rewards of such a life. They want to go to heaven when they die but they have little interest in a serious pursuit of Christlikeness in this life.

Christians who truly walk as Christ walked will bear His image in a way that marks them. It distances them from the "world." They are "strangers and pilgrims," as Hebrews 11:13 says;

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

This is an unhappy prospect that many are unwilling to accept. They have joined the throngs on the broad way. They may be in church every Sunday, or even "every time the church doors are open," but for them Christianity is more a religion and a culture than a relationship of Master and servant. The world continues to be their pattern for life. What about you?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for being my Perfect Example.

I will listen carefully as you speak to me about the ways that I am not like you. Please encourage me in the ways in which I have already grown into your image, and help me to press on.

Jesus, please give me courage to walk in the path that will help me become more like you. I want to please you more often; I want to serve you more effectively; and I want to have more and more of the joy and peace of your rule, in my life. I want the world to look at me, and know that I have been with you.

Thank you, Jesus

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- 1) Which scriptures on our first and second pages were most instructive to you?

- 2) Which are the most challenging?

- 3) Why is it so important that we compare ourselves to the example of Jesus?
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- 4) How relevant is the author's use of the word "renovate" as part of the Christian growth process?
- 5) Can you think of some ways in which God is now "renovating" you?
- 6) Why are the ways of the old nature so hard to deal with sometimes?
- 7) What did Jesus mean when He said "Follow me?"
- 8) What is the difference between "being" and "doing," as we have used the terms?
- 9) Why is it so important to have a proper focus on "being?"
- 10) What did Jesus mean when He said we need to "take up our cross?"
- 11) What do you think of this statement?
"The growing Christian will walk with a consciousness of how his life compares to Christ. He will search his heart and life, and judge himself by that example, inviting God to speak both affirmation and challenge to him."
- 12) Overall I think that this lesson:
 - a) Is "pie in the sky" stuff. Jesus is Jesus and we're just human and it's unrealistic to suggest that we should compare ourselves to Him.
 - b) Probably has some good points but I feel that as long as I believe what my church believes and keep myself on the same par as others in our church, I'll be okay in the end.
 - c) Is "right on" and really gives me something to think about and to apply to my life.

Note: If we have any hope at all of becoming more like Jesus, we need to be "born again" in a way that brings change to the deepest part of our being. The "new birth," in which God actually imparts a new nature to us, is foundational to the new life.

Our next lesson, "Born Again," is taken from the book "The True Worshipers," which may be read and/or downloaded at www.john2031.com.

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