



CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 16

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP (2)

The true believer must be loyal to Jesus Christ. Jesus must come first in all things: in our thought, our speech and our behaviour. This may be difficult for newly baptised disciples. Their lives before baptism often have been centred mainly on their own desires and ambitions.

All kinds of thoughts and ideas constantly come into our minds, and a Christian must learn to reject those which are not pleasing to God. Even thoughts connected with the ordinary affairs of daily life, with the family, with neighbours, with work and with rest and relaxation, should be directed by the commandments of Christ.

Thoughts lead to words and to actions. The first step in controlling our words and actions is to control our thoughts, and this is what Jesus asks us to do. Paul writes: *“We take every thought captive to obey Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Elsewhere we read:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

Love of God and neighbour

A Jewish lawyer came to Jesus and asked him what was the greatest commandment. He replied:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

We respond to God because of the love He has shown to us in His Son Jesus Christ and in the wonderful message of hope we see in the gospel. We begin to do things because we want to please God, and our whole character begins to change. We want to live a life which will be pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

We will also try to behave towards other people as we would like them to behave towards us.

The apostle Peter exhorts us all:

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:8-11).

The influence of our words and actions

Speech is very powerful. What we say, the way we say it, and the tone of our voices can make a great difference. Disciples of the Lord Jesus do not listen to or encourage unkind talk about their friends, neighbours or colleagues; they always try gently but firmly to restrain any such behaviour in others. Salt prevents food from going bad and good, kind, sensible words to our friends are based on enduring values. How we behave and what we say will help to keep them in the right way. This is what Jesus meant when he said to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Matthew 5: 13)

Paul wrote: *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt . . .”* (Colossians 4:6)

The disciple should be an influence for good in every situation. We must not become angry when we are opposed; we must not hold a grudge in our hearts against people. By showing them love we may win them round. We must try to exercise control of our emotions and our natural desires. Any form of uncontrolled behaviour is wrong—getting drunk, for instance. Such behaviour brings shame to the name of Jesus, the name we bear.

Being content with what we have

A true Christian is not jealous or envious of other people. Envy can so easily grow in our hearts so that we can become bitter, when we see others enjoying what we cannot have. It can be hard to see godless people doing well while we are struggling. David struggled with this. In Psalm 37 he tells us not to get upset about bad people, for, in the end, those who serve God faithfully will have their reward (Psalm 37:1-11)

The Bible warns us against envy. Wishing to have something which belongs to someone else can make us very unhappy: *“Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have”* (Hebrews 13:5).

We may have innocent thoughts about something attractive which belongs to someone else. But the thought may grow and grow until it take over our lives! This is why, in the 10 Commandments God warns Israel about ‘coveting’ – desiring what other people have: *“You shall not covet . . . anything that is your neighbour’s”* (Exodus 20:17).

The things that belong to our neighbour are the things that are constantly in our view and within our easy reach. We should never think of taking things that do not belong to us—not even borrowing things and then “forgetting” to return them!

Honesty

When we are in some difficult situation, we may be tempted to do something illegal or dishonest which we think might help us. This temptation must be resisted. A Christian must always be completely honest, and act in a straightforward manner. We must obey the laws of our country, unless they are in conflict with the higher laws of God (Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1,2).

If we have a job, we must work honestly, even though others may not: *“Obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man”* (Ephesians 6:5-7).

It may not be easy to act in this way, if we live in a corrupt society, but this must be our aim (Philippians 2:15,16). Remember, true believers should always be trying to please God, who is offering us eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. We must live our lives in the light of that hope. Any kind of bad behaviour will grow if we allow it to do so and do not correct it. It may be such a danger to our life in Christ that we become the kind of people that God does not want in His Kingdom, and we shall find ourselves rejected.

We must try to choose the right way at all times, to do good in our lives, and watch our characters change daily as we become more like Christ our Master. The word of God should be in our hearts, so that we can be transformed by its wisdom and produce the fruit of the Spirit: *“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5:22).

Questions

R1. Why is it important to control our thoughts?

R2. How should the hope of eternal life in the Kingdom of God affect the way we live?