



Walking in Newness of Life – Part 1

READINGS FOR THIS LESSON:– Romans 12, 13.

Jesus said to his followers, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”* (John 14:15).



You will remember how God, through Moses, gave the children of Israel a law, which we call the *“Law of Moses”*.

In the Law of Moses there were rules to tell the people what they must do, and what they must not do. These laws were to guide them in their daily life. This law could not bring life to the people because, as you will remember, they were unable to keep it. So God gave to them a better way. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us by his example how we should live.

Jesus did not give his followers a complete list of rules, to tell them what they must do in every circumstance of life. He told them the most important thing was to love God, and to show love to each other. But both Jesus and the apostles gave some definite commandments, which we must understand and obey.

We must obey our rulers

In Romans 13:1, we read,

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.”

Whoever our rulers may be, they hold that position because God allows them to do so. Read 1 Peter 2:13-15.

This is also true of the people who are over us in our employment.

So we must obey those who have authority over us, even when they are unkind and unreasonable. Therefore Peter tells us,

“Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.” (1 Peter 2:18).

The only time this does not apply is when a ruler tells us to disobey God. At one time, when the Jews told Peter and John not to preach Jesus and his resurrection, they answered,

“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in the God’s sight to obey you rather than unto God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20).

In Luke 23:34, Jesus himself prayed to God to forgive those who put him to death. If we remember his example, we shall find it easier to return good for evil. We must leave it to God to punish the wicked. So the apostle Paul says,

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay’; saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19).

The disciple of Christ does not fight

We must obey our rulers in all things – except when their rules go against the law of God.

For example, today in many countries, there are laws commanding all young men to serve for a period in the Army, Navy, or Air Force. But God has commanded that His children must not fight. Jesus said,

*"..for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."
(Matthew 26:52).*

Jesus taught his followers to pray for their enemies, and so show them love, no matter what they do against us!

*"But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."
(Matthew 5:39).*

So, although it may mean trouble, and even imprisonment, the followers of Christ must always refuse to fight or to join the armed forces.



Wars are always wrong, but when God orders His servants to fight, then it is right to do so. Christ's commandment for us in this age is that we "*do not resist an evil person.*" (Matthew 5:39) – knowing that the day will come, when God Himself will bring judgment on the wicked.

Voting

Like the children of God in all ages, the true believers of these days are,

"..aliens and strangers on earth." (Hebrews 11:13).

They are waiting for God's Kingdom to come and praying that they may have a place in that Kingdom.

They know that present-day governments will all pass away when God's Kingdom comes. They take no part in the politics of this world. They do not vote, because their views of life are such that no politician could ever act as their representative to the government.

*"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."
(Philippians 3:20).*

Marriage as a partnership in Christ

There are two classes of people in the world – those called in the Bible as being "*in Adam*", and those being "*in Christ*" through baptism. The difference between these two classes is very great. Those classed as being in Adam think of **themselves** and are ungodly; whilst those in Christ are the **servants of God**.

Naturally, those in Christ will feel a great sense of unity, and will help each other to serve God faithfully. They will not mix closely with the people of the world, because their interests are so different.

Above all, they will show their separation from the world in their attitude to marriage. They will choose their marriage partners from the servants of God, and not from the world. The apostle Paul emphasises the importance of this separation in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, where he writes,

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there

between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people' "

We can never be truly happy if we break God's laws; and many have found that it is a tragic mistake to marry an unbeliever.

God hates divorce



Marriage is a union between an man and a woman for life. When God created Eve as a companion for Adam, the principle was given in the words,

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24).

Jesus confirmed that marriage is for a lifetime, by saying,

"Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:6).

So he therefore forbids divorce. Even if a marriage is not going smoothly for the moment, a follower of Christ must show patience and love. In Malachi 2:16, we read that,

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel,"

Remember, we can never be truly happy if we break God's laws.

But

We have shown the importance of marrying only a believer. But it sometimes happens that a man or woman who becomes a disciple is already married. In this case, the believing partner is not to leave the other.

Of course, it would be difficult to stop the unbeliever from leaving, if he or she did not want to stay. But the believer is expected to fulfil his or her part of the marriage faithfully in trying to make it work properly.

Many people have believed in Christ through the faithful example of their believing partners – just as Paul suggested they might be in 1 Corinthians 7:16, where he writes,

"How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"

A word about polygamy (having more than one wife)

In some countries, a man is permitted to have two (or more) wives at the same time. Like marriage to an unbeliever, and like divorce, having more than one wife is a great mistake. It creates unhappiness, and encourages unfaithfulness. It destroys the Bible's teaching of one husband and one wife, united in love:-

"For this reason a man be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24).

All one in Christ

The believers are all joined together as **one body**, with Christ as their Head. It is their duty to see that the truth revealed in the Bible is kept pure; and that no one changes it, adds to it, or takes away from it.

It is their duty, too, to strive to keep the commandments of Christ.

If anyone of the members of Christ's family deliberately breaks any of these commandments, then the others must do all they can to help them to see their mistake, and return to the right way. If they still persist in acting wrongly, then their fellow-disciples have no choice but to separate themselves from them.

Fellowship in Christ

The disciples of Christ are scattered all over the world, but they serve the **same Master**, and share the **same hope**. They are joined together in the bonds of love and fellowship and united together in the work of preaching the gospel.

So Paul commands us,

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God, without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life – in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing." (Philippians 2:14-16).



Summary

1. We must obey our rulers, except when they tell us to disobey God.
2. We must not take an active part in politics or (worse still) in war.
3. A man must have only one wife, and stay with her for life.
4. It is a tragic mistake to marry an unbeliever.