



Me First?

STUDIES ON DISCIPLESHIP

David Boyd Long

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Revised and enlarged edition 1979
ISBN 0-919586-09-0

Third Impression 1990
This edition reset 2005
revised 2013

Cover design: EPI
Cover Photo:
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Mr. David Boyd Long has given many messages on Jesus Christ as LORD.

For this book, Mr. W. A. Munnings has rewritten nine of these messages in Today's English.

We hope God will bless you as you read it.

Everyday Publications

FIRST His Example

We will look at the Lord Jesus Christ as our example because we must not compare ourselves with other Christians. It is not right to compare our own spiritual life and our work for God with the spiritual life and work of others. Christ is the One whom the Christian must follow. God gives us no other example or measure for our Christian life. We should be like Christ. It will make us humble when we compare our life with His life.

The devil attacked the Lord Jesus Christ in three parts of His life. A man has three parts—body, soul, and spirit. A man's soul is his life of likes and dislikes, love or hatred, his desires and hopes. Paul speaks about men who live in their desires as men of this world, living by this world's standards, 1 Corinthians 3:3. They think of themselves. They are different from the men who have the Holy Spirit which he talks about in the same chapter, 1 Corinthians 3:1. The body is the physical part of us. We can tell people through our bodies what we want them to know. The spirit is the part of us by which we can know God and talk to Him. The Lord Jesus Christ was tested and tried in these three parts of His life.

The devil will attack us in the same way. He tries to turn us away from following God's plan for our life.

1. The devil first tempted the Lord Jesus by saying, Order these stones to turn into bread, Matthew 4:3. The body needs food

and the devil tried to use this need of the body to turn Christ away from God's plan for Him.

2. The devil next said, Throw yourself down to the ground. He meant, "Do something great and wonderful. Make men look at You. Let them think great things about You, then they will believe on You. You will not succeed if You do ordinary things. You must do great things, wonderful things." This is what we like to do. It makes us feel big and important. It tempts us in our souls.

3. The devil then said, I will give you the glory of all the kingdoms of the world if you kneel down and worship me, Matthew 4:9. This is a temptation to the spirit. It concerns our worship and service to God, for Jesus told him what the Scripture says, Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him, Matthew 4:10. We serve God when we worship Him. We cannot separate these two things, they always go together. We do not truly serve God unless we worship Him also.

Now we will look at these things more carefully. Man has a body, soul, and spirit, and God's servants are tested in each of these three parts. This testing will show what is in a servant's heart. The test to the body is this: "Order these stones to turn into bread." This test will show if he can control his body's desires. The test to the soul will show whether he is humble or proud. The test to the spirit shows if he will give his will to God. Are we willing to worship and serve Him? These three things are very important for each of us because the devil uses these three things to defeat us and to spoil God's plan for our lives.

Let us look again at the way the devil tempted Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ was alone in the desert with the devil. God usually works in the souls of men and women when they are alone with Him. Elijah heard God's voice in 1 Kings 19:11-13. He did not hear it in the fire nor in the strong wind; but he heard a quiet voice. God usually speaks to us when we are alone with Him, and it is usually when we are in the desert that God speaks. Every child of God has some desert in his life, a time of great trouble. It may be a desert of uncertainty, a time when we do not know what to do or how to do it. We may be sad because we failed in something, or we may be wishing for

God's plan in our lives but not really be willing to follow it. This is not a good thing. We will be full of good thoughts and plans without going forward or making progress. We may be cold in our soul. This is where the devil meets us.

The devil said, "Order these stones to turn into bread." That seemed to be a proper thing to do. The Lord could have done it if He wished. John had baptized Jesus just before this happened. God had said, "This is My own dear Son," as He came out of the water. Now the devil said, "If you are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread." The Lord Jesus used Deuteronomy 8:3 to guard Himself. He said, Man cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that God speaks.

Moses was talking about the manna in the desert when he wrote these words in Deuteronomy. God's people, Israel, were in a desert at that time—they had to trust God for everything. They had no harvest of grain, no place to buy food. They were helpless and had to trust God to give them everything. God gave them their food from heaven, the manna. He said, I gave you that food from heaven, not only to feed you, but also to humble you. God gave them food in this way to see if they would really trust Him. It also showed that God would always care for them. God was saying, "You are My people. You are in the desert. You are here for My purpose. You have a work to do for Me; I will feed you. I will not only feed your bodies with manna, but I will also feed and teach you spiritually while you trust Me for food for your bodies. You must trust Me for everything. I will care for you."

Now the devil says, "Order these stones to turn into bread. Do it without God telling You to do it." The devil was trying to turn the Son of God, the Servant of God, away from His trust in God. The devil did not want Him to fully trust and obey God. He tempted the Lord Jesus Christ in this way and he still tempts every servant and son of God in the same way. We have desires for many things. Some are sinful desires which we are ashamed of; some are desires for good things. We have been thinking about the hunger for food. The devil uses desires like this one to tempt us to disobey God.

Let us think of a man who works for God. God has chosen him and given him his work. But the man thinks, "I would like to earn more money and have nice things." It is quite right to want a nice home, to have a good wife and a fine family. This is natural. So he plans for himself. It is a desire, a hunger. If he had these nice things it would prove that he was a clever man, would it not? It is like the devil saying to Christ, "If You are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread." So we try very hard to do something for ourselves to show that we are great or important or clever. We must stop trying to be somebody important. The Lord Jesus was not anxious to prove who He was. He did not want to become famous so all the people would come to Him for bread. We too must be careful. Satan is our enemy—his name means enemy—and he is trying to make us fall or take us away from God.

If we have no bread, we think it is because God does not want us to have it. God is not feeding us, so we will feed ourselves. We are sure we can take care of ourselves and we want to prove it to ourselves and to others. This is a temptation and a danger. Perhaps we know that God has a plan for our lives and we want to do God's plan. But we also have this desire for praise or comfort, or some other desire which the devil uses to draw us away from God. The devil says, "God doesn't give it to you, you must get it for yourself; prove that you can get it. You can do what God wants you to do after you get what you want for yourself."

God fed the children of Israel in the desert, but they disobeyed Him and He punished them. God did not feed His Son in the desert, but Christ obeyed God, even while He was hungry. He loved God perfectly. Do we love God perfectly? He sent the manna to feed His people, to make them humble, and to teach them His ways. Do we want God only to feed us, or do we want Him to teach us His ways, too? Can we trust Him even when He holds back the good things which we desire? God will give us everything that is best for us. He can give a husband or wife; He will give the money for our needs. He will give friends and helpers. The devil will say, "No, God isn't going to do it, so you must do it yourself." Your trust in God and peace of mind

will be lost as soon as you listen to the devil and begin to get the things you desire for yourself. Then everything is different. You are not trusting God but trying to do something for yourself.

The devil tempted Christ the second time by taking Him to Jerusalem and placing Him on a high place on the top of the temple. He said, "You are the Son of God." Then he repeated a verse from the Old Testament, God will give orders to His angels about you. They will hold you up with their hands, so that you will not hit your feet on the stones, Psalm 91:11,12. Then He said, Throw yourself down to the ground. The devil will often try to win us away from God. He will tell us to do something or get something to satisfy our own desires. If he fails in this, he will tempt us to do something big so others will think we are great people. It is like a man walking through the fire to show that it does not burn him. It is great; it is wonderful; people want to see it. People always want to see unusual, wonderful things. We like to have people watching and admiring us, so we are tempted. The devil says, "You must make people notice you; show them how great you are; show them that you can do miracles."

Our feelings or emotions can be a danger to us. We are excited and say something or promise to do something, but soon afterwards we lose interest. The reason is this: we did things or said things just because we were happy or excited. Do not think that all emotions are bad. Love is an emotion and God wants our love. He wants our love for Him to be strong and deep. But emotion by itself is not enough. We must understand God's plan and God's will.

God wants us to learn lessons from Him in the common things of our daily life. God does not want to teach us to do great, exciting things. He wants us to learn that He is with us and we should do what He says. The devil did not use the verse from the Bible correctly. He did not show its real meaning by reading the whole psalm. In this psalm we see the Lord Jesus Christ putting His foot on the devil, Psalm 91:13. At the end of the psalm the devil is defeated. The Lord Jesus knew this and He agreed, but He quoted another verse: You must not put the

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Lord your God to the test. We should not do things because a few words in the Bible seem to prove that they are right. We must learn to see what the whole Bible teaches about them and see the whole truth. We must not take a few words from a verse and say, "These words from the Bible prove that I am right." We may find that the Bible proves that we are wrong, if we read the whole chapter or book. That is why the Lord Jesus said, You must not put the Lord your God to the test. You do not leave some article on the table and think, "I will see if my friend, or my brother, or my servant is honest." Do you really trust him if you test him like that? If we really trust a person we do not test him like that. We are testing God in the same way when we say, "I will do something great and unusual to see if God will do what He has promised." People will watch and wonder at you, but it is not right for you to put God to the test.

The devil tempted Christ to spare Himself. This was the third temptation and has a very important lesson for us. It is a lesson about obeying God and doing His will. The devil said to Jesus, "You see all these kingdoms of the world? God will give them to you. It is His plan, it is His purpose. In His Book He said, 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance. You will rule over them with an iron rod,' Psalm 2:8,9. The devil took these verses, turned them around and said very cleverly, "Ask me for them, I will give them to you now. This means that you do not have to go to the cross. You will have everything without any pain. You will do God's work and God will be pleased with you, but you will not have to suffer. Kneel down and worship me."

What does this mean to us? We would never kneel down and worship the devil, but we sometimes do what he wants, and serving Satan is worshiping Satan. Christians may do things which God does not want them to do. God has a plan for our lives, but we want to find an easier way than God's way. The devil says, "You do not need to suffer for Christ's sake." But the Lord said, If anyone wants to come with Me, he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow Me, Matthew 16:24.

The devil tempted the Lord in these three ways, through His body, His soul, and His spirit, but Christ was victorious. He completely defeated the devil. He was tempted, but He depended on God, He trusted in God, and He obeyed God. The devil was defeated. We will be tempted in these same ways. May God give us the victory which He gave to the Lord Jesus Christ through the Scriptures!

great as He is. There is no one who rules with Him as His helper. He is Lord alone. God is going to build everything He has planned on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His death and His rising from death. Christ was not one of the anointed ones or an anointed Person, but THE Anointed One.

Three kinds of people were anointed in Old Testament days. The prophet was anointed: the prophet gave God's Word to the people and God's message came through him. The Lord Jesus was God's anointed Prophet; He gives us God's Word. The priest was anointed in Old Testament times. The priest offered animals as sacrifices to cover the sins of the people and to bring them near to God. But first the prophet showed the people their sins and made them ashamed so they would leave their sins and get right with God. The king was also anointed. The king ruled over the people who repented of their sins, for whose sins the sacrifices were offered, and who were now ready to obey God. The prophet, the priest, and the king were the people who were anointed in the Old Testament and Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King.

Christ is God's Prophet; He gives us the Word of God with all the authority of God. Paul wrote to Timothy and to the Thessalonians and to others and said, Remember the commands which I gave you. Paul wrote by the Holy Spirit, so his commands were given with God's authority. We do not like others to command us, to tell us we must do something. We like to choose what we want to do. The Word of God does not speak like that. We know God's Word to us is a command when we see that the Eternal God has spoken to us through His anointed Prophet—His Son. We may disobey God's commands and say No to God. The Bible tells us that we were once spiritually dead because of our disobedience and sins and that we followed the world's evil way; we obeyed the spirit who still controls the people who disobey God, Ephesians 2:1,2. Satan may gain control over me if I refuse God's control and do not obey Him. We should understand this matter clearly. We must obey God and yield to His Word which comes to us through Christ or evil will control us and Satan will lead us. We can be sure that Satan does not control us only when we obey God. Then we are safe and Satan cannot control us.

Let us remember what happened in the Garden of Eden. Satan said, Has God said? He asked a question about God's authority. Do we too ask questions about God's authority? If we do, Satan comes into our lives and brings sorrow and death with him. The Bible says that death ruled over all men from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, Romans 5:14. Why did death rule? Because men did not obey the Word of God. We cannot escape Satan's authority and his rule over us if we disobey God. This is the reason why the Apostle Paul often tells us to do what God says we should do. The Lord Jesus said that we would know the truth and the truth would make us free, John 8:32, and that if the Son makes us free we would really be free, John 8:36. What is the truth? It is the truth of the Word of God. The truth of God's Word sets us free from the authority of evil which is all around us. The Word of God protects us. There is a question in Psalm 119:9, How shall a young man live a clean life? and the answer is, By reading and obeying the Word of God. How can we be clean from sin? By the Word of God, by obeying the Word of God.

The Pharisees did not want to obey God's Word. They argued about it and talked about it and reasoned about it, but they were really saying, "We do not want Him to rule over us; we do not want Him at all," Luke 19:14. They were willing to talk about it and argue about it. That is what Nicodemus wanted to do when he came and met the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, We know that You are a teacher come from God. He meant, "You are a teacher and I am a teacher, let's talk for a while." The Lord Jesus stopped him and said, "Listen, you need to be born again." We read about the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4. The Lord did not stop her when she was talking as He had stopped Nicodemus. Jesus stopped Nicodemus very quickly.

The Lord Jesus asked, Who do you say I am? Peter answered, You are the Christ. He meant, "You are the Prophet of God, anointed by Him, the One Who speaks God's Word with all authority and tells us all that God wants us to know." The prophets said, The Lord says and then gave the message of the Lord. The Lord Jesus was different from the prophets. He Himself was the Word of God. He showed us what God is like

in everything He did and in all the things He said, in the way He looked, and in the way He took the children in His arms and touched the man with leprosy and stilled the storm on the lake. He showed us what God is like by the light in His eyes and in the way He walked. Peter meant something like this, "You are the One whom God has anointed. You are the Prophet and men must be quiet when You speak." In the Old Testament, Nathan the prophet said to King David, You are the man, and David stopped talking immediately, 2 Samuel 12:7. That is the authority of God's Word.

The priest and the king also had their place in the Old Testament. Peter said, "You are God's anointed Prophet, Priest, and King." Then the Lord Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, you did not get this truth by clever reasoning. No man told you this. You did not learn it by thinking and reasoning like the Pharisees. My Father revealed it to you. Wise men did not teach you the right answer, but God showed it to you." Peter said, "To me You are the One who speaks with authority from God," because God had taught him this important truth. Do we accept the Lord's words? Do we obey Him?

Peter said, You are the Son of the living God. Then the Lord said, "That is the answer I wanted, but I will tell you something more. I am going to build My work in the coming age; I am going to build My Church on the truth that you have just spoken. I will build My Church on the truth about Me in the way you have received it and in the way you have told it."

It is time that we should reason less and argue less and kneel down more in the presence of God. We should ask ourselves, "Who is Christ to me? What do I think about Him? Is He the most important Person in my life? Is He God's anointed One, God's Prophet?" Do we say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears," when He talks to us? 1 Samuel 3.9. God may point His finger at us and say, "You are the man." Do we stop talking and say as Job did, I have spoken once, but I will not answer again. I have heard of You; now I see You and despise myself, Job 40:5; 42:5,6. Do we say like Isaiah, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, Isaiah 6:5? Are we like John who fell down at Jesus' feet like a dead man? Revelation 1:17. We must be

humble before Him. We need to know just what Jesus Christ is to us personally. It is not important what we have read about Him or heard about Him in meetings or in a church, but it is very important to know what He is to us personally. Is He our Master? Do we obey His word more than what anyone else says? Do we want to know what God says more than anything else? When we know what He says, do we do it?

Perhaps God has spoken to us through these words and perhaps we will want to learn more about the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. He says to us, "What am I to YOU?" and we might say, "He is everything to me." It is easy, so easy to say this, but it is very hard to live like that every day. Let us remember that He is Christ, God's Anointed One, who has authority over us. This is the foundation for His work in our lives during this age of the Church. He is our King and rules over us. We are His servants and must obey Him.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 2 The Christ of Israel

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. The Pharisees thought that they were
 - a. sinful men.
 - b. righteous men.
 - c. unworthy men.
2. The Sadducees cared about
 - a. spiritual things.
 - b. the teachings of Jesus.
 - c. the things of this world.
3. The Sadducees told a story of a woman who had
 - a. one husband.
 - b. three husbands.
 - c. seven husbands.
4. Herod said that Jesus was
 - a. John the Baptist.
 - b. Isaiah.
 - c. the Messiah.
5. The title *Messiah* meant the One whom God
 - a. loved.
 - b. blessed.
 - c. anointed.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. Christ is Prophet, Priest and King.
7. As Prophet Christ gives us God's Word.
8. The Lord said that the truth would make us free.
9. The Pharisees wanted to obey God's Word.
10. John fell down at Jesus' feet like a dead man.

What Do You Say?

THE MASTER OF SLAVES

Paul called himself a servant of Jesus Christ in Romans 1:1. He called himself a servant of Jesus Christ in nearly all the letters he wrote. The meaning of this word servant is slave, a person who is sold to a master and must serve him. This person cannot offer to help someone else. A slave is completely under the authority of his master. This is important and we should understand it well. A slave has been bought by his master and his master owns him. He does not belong to himself and cannot do as he pleases. A slave cannot leave his work; he cannot say, "I won't work for this master." The law holds him under the authority of his master.

The New Testament teaches us very clearly how and why Paul became a slave of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus bought Paul: He bought him when He died on the cross. Let us remember this fact. Paul called himself a slave of Christ Jesus in Romans 1:1 and in 6:14 he said, Sin must not be your master. This verse means that the believers in Rome had been the servants of sin. They had been slaves of Satan, but now they were slaves of Jesus Christ. This is why Paul could write to the believers in Corinth, You do not belong to yourselves, you belong to God. He paid a price to buy you, so you should use your bodies for the glory of God, 1 Corinthians 6:19,20.

The believer in Christ belongs to God and therefore he should serve Him. We do not serve God just because we are excited and feel good in a meeting. It is good to have happy feelings and love in our hearts. God wants all the love of our hearts. He wants us to give our love freely to Him. We do not

need to be ashamed of these feelings. Christ also had human feelings. He loved; He cried; He was angry; He was sad. But we do not serve Christ just because of these feelings in our hearts.

We do not serve God because He shows us where people need our help. Some may feel that they are servants of God and others would feel they are not. Some person might say, "India is a country where some of the people are very poor. I would not like to go there. I don't feel that I should go there, so I will not go." We serve Christ because He sends us. He chooses us and sends us where He wants us to serve Him.

We might say to Christ, "Who gave You the authority to send me?" He would answer, "My Father gave you to Me." The Lord Jesus Christ said to His Father, I pray for the men You gave Me, John 17.9. We are a gift of God the Father to God the Son! This is a wonderful thought. It means that we are very important; every believer is very important to God. We are His slaves; we serve Him because we belong to Him. We were slaves of sin; we were lost in the world and away from God. We were sinful, unclean, mistaken; we deserved to be punished forever, but God loves us and saved us from punishment. He made us clean and changed us and filled us with His Spirit; then He gave us to His Son. So we are His own property because He bought us and because the Father gave us to Him.

God has given us a sign to show that we belong to His Son; He has given us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives within us and tells us and shows us that we belong to Him, Romans 8:16. We are sure that God's Spirit lives in us and this is a wonderful blessing. We know that we are Christ's servants or slaves also, because His Spirit lives in us. The Holy Spirit helps us to say Father when we talk to God and the word Father shows that we are under His authority. The child must do what the father says.

The Lord Jesus Christ told the story of a son who did not love his father. One day the son said to his father, "Give me the money that would come to me when you die. I am going away. I won't do as you tell me. I will gladly use your money, but I won't stay at home with you and obey you. I do not want you to tell me what to do; I do not want you to control me." So the

son went away, Luke 15:11-24. When the son came back again, he said to his father, "I did many wrong things. I have no right to come back to you, but take me and make me your servant. I want to be under your authority again." The father put his arms around his son and kissed him and said to the servants, "Bring the best clothing and put it on him."

The father had prepared the best clothing for his son. It was ready for him when he came home. The father did not say, "See if there is any clean clothing, or clothing that fits him, and put it on him," but he said, "Bring the best clothing" because he had already prepared it for his son. At the end of the story the son was back, sitting at his father's table and happy to do whatever his father told him to do. The son showed that he was willing to obey when he said Father, and soon he was happy in his father's home.

God wants us to be like the son in this story. The Holy Spirit wants us to say Father to God. He wants us to know that we belong to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ and that we are His slaves. We do not belong to ourselves. He bought us. Then He sends us to live for Him in this world. We are strangers in the world because many people do not know God's love and do not serve Him. We love Him and live for Him in this world.

In Genesis 37:8 we read of Joseph and his brothers. In a dream Joseph saw his brothers bow down to him. His brothers said to Joseph, "You will never rule over us. This could never happen; we will never bow down to you." But another day came when Joseph's brothers bowed down to him. They were hungry and sad and sorry for their sins. Judah spoke for all the brothers when he said, O my lord, please do not be angry with us; we are your servants, Genesis 44:16. The brothers said that Joseph would never rule over them, but now Judah said to Joseph, My lord. He meant, "You are my master; I am your servant." Then Joseph told them that he was their brother, Joseph, and after that Joseph blessed them and fed them. He was not like a younger brother now, but their lord.

Joseph wore the clothes of a king; he had the gold chain of a king around his neck and had authority over men's lives in Egypt.

If Joseph let a man out of prison, he lived. If Joseph said he must die, he died. He had great authority in Egypt. Joseph's brothers did not think that he was their young brother when they bowed to him. They had thrown him, their young brother, into a hole in the ground and then sold him as a slave. Now they said to Joseph, "You are like the king of Egypt," Genesis 44:18, and Joseph said, "That is true; I have authority like the king of Egypt."

Joseph's brothers bowed to Joseph and agreed that he had authority; then Joseph told them to do something. In the same way Christ tells us what we must do when we understand that He is our Master. Joseph said to his brothers, Go back to your own country and tell my father about my glory which you have seen, Genesis 45:13. We too should tell about the glories which we see in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we say very little about His glories. We do not see His glories and cannot talk about them, so we talk about other things.

Joseph said, "Go to my father and tell him about my glory." His brothers obeyed and went back to their home in Canaan. We can think of Joseph's brothers as they came to their own country. Joseph had given them large supplies of food to take to their families. They could have sold that food to the hungry people of the land. They could have gathered a lot of money and become very rich. They could have bought houses and land in Canaan and become rich and powerful people and even become rulers in Canaan because they could get food in Egypt and sell it in Canaan.

Joseph did not send his brothers back to Canaan to become rich or powerful. He did not tell them to sell food or buy land. Joseph's brothers could say, "We did not come back to stay. We do not belong here. We did belong here, but we don't belong here now. We went to Egypt and we saw Joseph as the ruler of the land and we bowed before him and we are going back to him because he has given us a new country. We will not live in Canaan any more. We don't want to buy or sell in Canaan and we don't want to become rich or great here. We want to do only what Joseph told us to do." The Lord wants us to tell others of His glories so that they will leave their own things and come to Christ and receive His things.

We are servants of Christ because He bought us and sent us to live for Him in this world. All God's sons are His servants. Some of His servants do great things and some do things which we may think are not so important, but Christ's servants all became His servants in the same way. We are Christ's servants because He bought us for Himself and He has the right to send us into the world. Joseph sent his brothers back to the land of Canaan, not to stay there, not to become rich and important, but to live for him and talk about him. The Lord Jesus has left us in this world to serve Him.

The Lord Jesus met Saul on the road to Damascus and Saul said to Him, Who are You, Lord? Acts 9:1-19. The Lord Jesus answered, I am Jesus. Then Saul said, What do You want me to do? Jesus told him to go into the city where someone would tell him what he should do. Paul went into the city and thought about the Lord Jesus and what he had been doing to the people of God. The Lord then spoke to a man called Ananias and sent him to Saul with God's message. Ananias was an ordinary person who was not well known, but he was serving God. He did not seem great or important, but he was a servant of God, just as Paul became a servant of God. All servants are the same in God's house. One servant is not greater than another — all are His servants doing what He tells them to do.

The Lord said to Ananias, "I want you to take a message to Saul." Ananias said, "I am afraid of Saul," but the Lord said, "Saul has changed; I want you to give him My message because I have chosen him to make My name known." God's name means all that He is — His power, His love, His holiness, and all the other things which God tells us and shows us about Himself. I have chosen him, the Lord Jesus said, to tell the people of the nations about Me. And I will show him that he must suffer very much for Me. It is not easy to tell most people about God and to show them what He is like. Most people are like the ones who killed God's Son, and they do not want to hear about Him. Some people may tell us that we can be so pleasant that everybody will think we are wonderful even when we tell them about God and the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is not so. Most people will not like us, they will hate us. They hated our

Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will hate us. The Lord Jesus said that the servant is not greater than his Master, John 15:20. Many people will not like us and will work against us because we are Christ's servants. May the Lord help us to be faithful to Him.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 3 The Master of Slaves.

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. Christians should be servants of
 - a. sin.
 - b. the world.
 - c. Jesus.

2. We serve Christ because
 - a. we want to.
 - b. He sends us.
 - c. others say we should.

3. God gave us a sign to show that we belong to His Son. He gave us
 - a. money.
 - b. good health.
 - c. His Holy Spirit.

4. The prodigal son showed that he was willing to obey when he
 - a. said “Father”.
 - b. cried.
 - c. knelt down.

5. The Holy Spirit wants us to know that we belong to
 - a. ourselves.
 - b. God.
 - c. other people.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. Joseph’s brothers never bowed down to him.
7. Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan to live there.
8. The Lord wants us to tell others of His glories.
9. Not all of God’s sons are His servants.
10. The Lord met Saul on the road to Jerusalem.

What Do You Say?

The Lord Jesus brings His people very near to Himself and teaches them about Himself before He uses them to help others. They are His disciples and learn from Him. Their lives become like His life. Christians cannot bring other people to God just by the words they say. Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians, We brought the good news of salvation to you, not with words only, but also with power and with the Holy Spirit and with full confidence that the message was true. You know how we lived when we were with you, 1 Thessalonians 1:5,6. Paul preached the good news of salvation with power and authority because he was a sincere man and was living a life which pleased God. Paul could even say to other believers, Live as I live because I try to live as Christ did, 1 Corinthians 11:1. We are really following Christ when we live like Him.

Paul preached the good news of salvation in Christ and many were saved because Paul lived a life like Christ's life. The believers at Thessalonica became followers or imitators of Paul because they lived as Paul lived and they told God's message to many more people. Paul copied the Lord and the believers copied Paul, so Paul could say, The good news about the Lord has gone out from you through all Macedonia and Greece, 1 Thessalonians 1:8. The believers preached the Good News and many believed it because the lives of the preachers were like Christ's life. Then Paul said, We do not need to say anything. God's work is being done. All the people can see how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son to come from heaven, 1 Thessalonians 1:8,9. So the believers were doing what

Paul did; they were copying him and copying the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were preaching God's message and living a life like Christ so people received their message and believed it.

The Lord Jesus said, If anyone wants to follow Me, he must forget himself and carry his cross every day and follow Me. For the person who wants to live his own life will lose it, but the person who gives up his own life for My sake will save it, Luke 9:23. The Lord Jesus spoke about a man's own personal life. A man is truly happy if he gives up his own personal life for Christ's sake. His life is then controlled by God and this is real life. A person really loses his life if he lives just as he wishes and plans for himself. God says so. We need to accept what God says and to believe that He really means it. What God says is true. God says that our lives are lost if we live for ourselves. Our lives are good and useful only if we give them over to God and let Him control them and use us as He desires.

We say, "Yes, that is true. Our lives are good and useful only if we give them over to God." But do we really follow Jesus Christ and truly give our lives to Him? Do we really live like that? We are in danger. We can easily become Christian hypocrites because we know the truth but do not practice it. We know the truth and talk about the truth and like to think about it. The truth is written in our books and we know the truth in our minds and mark the truth in our Bibles, but we do not live it. We control our own lives. We do not understand that we must die to our own wishes and plans when we carry our cross. But the Lord Jesus said that this is true.

The men that we read about in Luke 9:23-26 wanted to follow Jesus. He must be Master; He was their Teacher. He was the One who told them what to do. He was their Lord. Real Christian living is just obeying Christ; we obey Him because He is our Lord. He told the men, "Your life will be a total loss if you control your own life and live to please yourself." We lose all that is good if we live for ourselves. He cannot control our lives if we live for ourselves and do not obey Him.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that they must obey Him; then He took three of them up to the top of a mountain, Luke 9:28-31.

He talked to them on the mountain about His death. He had talked to them earlier about their death: that they must forget themselves and follow and obey Him. Now He talked about His own death which would make His life a success. He was going to give His own life. The Lord Jesus has eternal life in Himself, but He was going to give up His own personal life, not His eternal life. We should understand this very well. He said, I will give up My life. No one takes it from Me, but I give it up of My own free will, John 10:17,18. The Lord Jesus did not speak of giving up His eternal life. Eternal life came from Him for others. He did not give up that eternal life, but His own personal life. He gave up His own personal life with all that He might have wished for or chosen for Himself. After He had died, He took His life again. That was what He was talking about to the disciples when they were on the mountain.

Now let us see what happened. He was teaching them that He was their Lord and they must obey Him. He was showing them that it was important to give up the control of their own lives and to do what God wanted them to do. But Peter and the others became very sleepy. When they woke up they saw His glory and two men with Him. Then Peter started talking; he often talked more than he should have done. We read in Mark 9:6 that Peter did not know what to say. In Luke 9:33 it says that Peter did not know what he had said. Peter was foolish to talk like this. We make many foolish mistakes if we do not know what to say before we start speaking and when we finish speaking, we do not know what we have said!

Peter's mind was dull and mixed up, so he said, Let us make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, Luke 9:33. But God said, This is My dear Son, listen to Him. God was teaching Peter and the other disciples that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is our Master. No other person can be our master together with the Lord Jesus. Peter wanted to talk about Moses and Elijah. Perhaps he wanted to say that Elijah could teach them something and Moses could teach them something and they would be very happy to listen to them. But God said, "No, you must listen to My Son, and to My Son alone." Peter had not understood the lesson which the Lord Jesus had been teaching them.

The disciples did not understand that they must obey the Lord Jesus alone. They came down from the mountain and found the other disciples helpless and defeated. A man had brought his son to the disciples and asked them to drive out the unclean spirit which was in him, but they could not drive it out. So the man called to the Lord Jesus and asked Him to drive the evil spirit out of his son, Mark 9:17-27. The Lord Jesus immediately used His authority over the evil one; He told the unclean spirit to go. He healed the boy and gave him back to his father. The people all wondered at the great power of Jesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ has all power, all authority. He has authority over the waves of the sea, over sickness, death, blindness. The Lord Jesus could stop the wind and the waves because He has power and authority over all the things which He has made. The disciples had not yet learned and did not know that His authority was so great, so they wondered at His authority and did not understand that He was really Lord.

We read about Philip in Acts 8:26-40. Philip was preaching the Word of God in Samaria when the Lord said to him, I want you to leave this place and go to Gaza, which is in the desert, where everything is hot and dry. And Philip went. Just then there was a man leaving Jerusalem and going back to his home in Ethiopia in Africa. This important man was crossing the hot, dry desert when God sent Philip out to meet him. God wanted those two men to meet. Philip must not wait for a day — or a week — before he started to go. Perhaps he thought, "The Lord is blessing these meetings. I can stay here for another week." But Philip would not meet the Ethiopian man if he stayed in Samaria for another week. God had His plan, so He sent Philip to Gaza just at the right time.

The man from Ethiopia was going across the desert. God saw him and knew that he would read the book of Isaiah. God wanted His servant Philip to meet him so that he would not go back to his home in Ethiopia without hearing the Good News. God wanted Philip to meet that Ethiopian man while he was reading the book of Isaiah. So He made Philip meet that man just when he was reading, His life on the earth came to an end, and then

God's servant asked him, Do you understand what you are reading? And the man answered, How can I understand? I do not know whom these words speak about. His life came to an end—I do not understand. God had His servant meet that man just at that minute.

God sets the time for things in our lives. He makes us meet certain people just at the right time. It would be too late if we met them ten minutes afterwards. It would be too early if we met them a week earlier. They would not be ready for God's message to them. If Philip had not met him at the right time, the man from Ethiopia might have been back at his home two weeks later and he might have put the book of Isaiah away somewhere and said, "I bought this book and read it, but I don't understand it at all." God might say to us, "You go, I want you there NOW." We should live very close to God so that we will know where to go and how to go when He tells us to go. We should obey if He says, "Go quickly"; and we should do as He tells us if He says, "Don't hurry, I want you to learn more lessons."

We read that the eleven disciples of Jesus went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go after He rose from death, Matthew 28:16. His disciples could have said, "Why should we go to Galilee? Why can't we meet Him in Jerusalem? Why can't we meet Him in some other place?" The Lord Jesus had told them to meet Him in Galilee, so they must meet Him in Galilee. Why did the Lord tell them to meet Him in Galilee and not in Jerusalem? Perhaps He wanted to get them away from the evil, the bad old things in Jerusalem. It may be that He wanted to talk to them where it was quiet in the hills of Galilee. Perhaps He wanted to show His disciples that He was not going to do His work with the help or authority of the important men of Jerusalem. He has His own plans and He does His work in His own way, so He took His disciples away from the educated, religious people in Jerusalem and met with them on a hill in Galilee where the people were plain country people. He chose the place to meet; He told them to go to that hill in Galilee.

They got down at His feet when they saw Him. They worshiped Him. We acknowledge Him as our Lord when we worship Him. We sometimes live through the week without mak-

ing Jesus Christ the Master in our work, or in our homes, or in our families. We plan what we will do and when we will buy or sell, but we do not ask Him to control us. On Sunday morning we go to a meeting room or a building and take up our hymn book and think we are worshiping Him by singing a song or hymn. We say that we finish the worship when we sing the last hymn. We cannot worship in that way. We must worship with our heart and spirit. We worship when we give the highest place of honor to Christ. The elders and living creatures worshiped Christ when they said to Him, You are worthy because You were killed and You bought men for God by Your death, Revelation 5.9. Christ must have the highest place, the place of authority. We really worship Him when we put Him in the highest place of honor and authority.

Can we say that Christ is the highest and greatest One for one hour, or even an hour and a half on Sunday morning and then stop giving Him the honor and glory when we leave that building? Can we go and plan our own lives for the other days of the week and refuse to obey Him? No, we cannot do that. I really worship Him when I call Him Lord in my heart and give myself to Him every day of the week. We should give our lives, our hearts, our children, our homes, our time, our money—all that we are and all that we have — to Him. We should say to Him, “You are worthy of it all and I give all I have to You, not just for an hour and then take it back, but I give all I have to You to belong to You all the time.” This is real worship.

Judas was angry with Mary when she poured the perfume on Jesus’ feet. Judas said, “You shouldn’t pour it on Him; you are wasting it. You should sell the perfume and use the money to feed poor people. That would be much better,” John 12:5,6. Judas made a great mistake. He did not love Christ. He made this mistake because he loved the wrong thing. He carried the money bag for Jesus and the disciples and he took some of the money for himself. He did not worship Jesus for he was not a true believer.

The disciples worshiped the Lord Jesus on that hill in Galilee, Matthew 28:16-20. They were ready to obey Him, so the

Lord told them to go and teach all the people in every country. He told them to teach the people the same things that He had taught them. Christ taught the disciples that they must obey Him, and the disciples must teach the people to obey Christ. They witnessed about Him. In another chapter of this book we will study the things which Christ taught His disciples after He was alive again. He taught them about God's kingdom, God ruling in their hearts and ordering their lives. God's kingdom is His rule, His authority. God has freed us from the authority of darkness and has moved us over into the kingdom of His Son. The kingdom of God's Son means the place where His Son has authority and where He rules. We should obey Him in all that we do. Christ talked about His kingdom and His authority during those forty days after He came back to life and before He went back to heaven.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 4 The Lord of His People

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. We really follow Christ when we
 - a. give lots of money.
 - b. go to church.
 - c. live like Him.
2. Paul preached the good news and many were saved because he
 - a. was very eloquent.
 - b. lived like Christ.
 - c. had a strong voice.
3. Our lives are good and useful only if we
 - a. live for ourselves.
 - b. are successful in this world.
 - c. give them over to God.
4. We are hypocrites if we
 - a. don't know the truth.
 - b. know the truth but don't practice it.
 - c. know the truth and practice it.
5. On a mountain the disciples saw two men with Jesus. They were
 - a. Moses and Elijah.
 - b. Abraham and Moses.
 - c. Elijah and Abraham. .

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. Philip met a man from Ethiopia who was reading the book of Jeremiah.
7. After His resurrection the Lord told His disciples to meet Him in Galilee.
8. We acknowledge Jesus as Lord when we worship Him.
9. We must give ourselves to the Lord every day of the week.
10. Judas was a true believer and worshiped Jesus.

What Do You Say?

THE OVERSEER OF CHURCHES

The Lord Jesus told His disciples what He wanted them to do after He had gone back to heaven. Did the early church live and act right from the day of Pentecost, just as the Lord Jesus Christ had told them? We find the answer to this question when we read chapter 1 in the book of Revelation. The early church did do as Jesus Christ told them to in their daily work and in every part of their life for Him.

The first three chapters of Revelation show us the Church in the times of the apostles and through the whole age of the Church right to the present time. This picture teaches us some lessons in a very plain and interesting way. The Lord Jesus says, I am coming soon. Hold tightly what you have so no one will take your crown or reward, Revelation 3:11. This verse makes us believe that the Lord Jesus is speaking to the whole Church, all who are a part of the Church, right to the time when the Church will be taken out of the world. The Lord Jesus is always watching the Church very carefully because He is the Church's Lord and Master.

We do not mean that the verses in Revelation chapters 1–3 show us what it will be like when we come before Christ and He judges our lives, 2 Corinthians 5:10. At that time the Lord will gather His people around Him and will judge the value or worth of their service for Him. He will say to some, You are a good and faithful servant, you have done well, and will give a reward to those who have served Him faithfully.

Sometimes a person is tested in a way he does not expect. Students in school are sometimes asked about things they did

not expect to be questioned on, and they fail on the test because they do not know the right answer. They might say, "I would have studied about that thing if I had known he would ask me about it. I didn't know my teacher would ask that question. I didn't know that this subject was so important, so I didn't study it and I have failed." Will we think like that when we stand before Christ? Will we think, "I didn't know what He would ask me; I didn't know what was important to Him"?

In His messages to the churches the Lord Jesus has shown very clearly what things are important to Him, Revelation 2 and 3. He has told us the things which He wants and the things which He does not want. He has told us which things He likes and which things He hates. He spoke very plainly when He said, I have something against you, something which I do not like. He also praised the churches. He said, You are patient and have suffered for my sake and did not give up, Revelation 2:3. As we read these chapters we see that the Lord is pleased with some things which believers do and does not like others. God has graciously told us what things He wants and what things He does not want in the church, so we should read these chapters very carefully.

In Revelation 1.9 we see what kind of person Christ is. He is Lord of the Church. The Apostle John wrote, I am John, your brother, and I share with you in suffering and in His kingdom and in patience because we are one in Christ. The time in which we live today is the time for suffering and patience. We will go into the kingdom with Christ when He comes again and will rule with Him, but now we must wait with patience for that time to come. Most people in this world do not want Christ's kingdom; they do not want Christ, so we must wait patiently for His kingdom to come and suffer patiently until it comes. This is what the age of the Church is like.

John said that he was put on the island called Patmos because he had preached God's Word and the truth about Jesus, Revelation 1.9. We still suffer because we do what God tells us to do in His Word. People laugh at us or say cruel things because we obey God. We find it hard to suffer even such small

things. Sometimes we would like to change the teaching of the Bible so people would not think we are simple people who know nothing.

John said he was put on the island called Patmos because he had preached God's Word and the truth about Jesus. Then he said that the Spirit was controlling him on the Lord's day and he heard a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet. The voice was coming from behind him and said to him, I am the beginning and the ending. Write down the things that you see and send the book to the seven churches which are in Asia. Those seven churches were groups of Christians who were living at that time and who needed the lessons which the Lord told John to write to them in this chapter. They needed these lessons in those days and today we need these lessons even more than they did.

The voice which spoke to John did not tell him to keep these things as a secret. Long before this an angel told Daniel to seal the book which he had written so it would be a secret for a long time, Daniel 12:4. In Revelation 10:4 a voice from heaven told John not to tell others what the seven thunders had said, but these messages to the churches were not to be kept as a secret. The voice said, "Write these messages down and send them to the churches." The Lord wanted these messages to be written in the Bible for all the churches to read. All the churches right to the end of the church age should read them. He said, "Send the messages to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and the others." He meant that each church should have the message which the Lord wanted it to have. The Lord did not send one letter for all the churches to read, but He sent each one a separate letter. Each church was to have its own letter.

John told us that he turned around to see who was talking to him and he saw seven gold lamp-stands. Among the lamp-stands, he saw a Person like a man, Revelation 1:12,13. Then John described that Person in verses 13-16. These verses show us that Christ rules in the Church. No one can question His authority. Everyone must obey Christ. He is Lord in His churches, among His people. Each church or group of believers in each place is like a lamp-stand before Him. The lamp burns

and the light shines out into the darkness around it. The light shines for Him. John was like a prisoner in the island of Patmos because he witnessed for Christ. Each church witnesses for Christ, that is, the believers together witness for Him. Each church is like a lamp, and in the middle of the churches, this Person who is like a man is standing. He moves among the lamps and looks at them carefully. This Person is the Lord who showed Himself to His disciples for forty days after His death and proved that He was alive, Acts 1:3. He is the same Lord who was taken from them into heaven and will come back in the same way that they saw Him go to heaven, Acts 1:11. He is alive. He is among His churches. He is no less alive now than He was then. He is the living Lord who moves among His people.

John saw the Lord Jesus Christ as He moved around in this world during His life on earth. He saw Him moving among His churches in Revelation chapter 1. John also saw Him come and put His one foot on the land and the other foot on the sea, Revelation 10:2. He saw the Lord Jesus doing all these different things. One thing was not more important than another; they were all important. The Lord moves among the churches; this is just as important as His life on earth or as His coming back to earth.

Let us think carefully about these things. Believers in Christ live in different places and form little groups, or churches. Some of the churches in Revelation 1 were small too. Some churches may not have had men who were able to speak well or preach well. We may desire more good speakers, but we should always remember that each group of believers is important to Jesus Christ just as the churches of Ephesus and Smyrna and Thyatira were important to Him.

Each believer and every group of believers is important to Christ and He watches each one and rules them. It was important that the churches in Ephesus and Smyrna should do what He said and it is also important that the believers and the churches today obey Him. He saw small things in those churches which He did not like and He told the believers about them; He will also tell us when there are wrong things in our lives or

in our group. We may think that the churches were very pure and faithful in the early days of the Church, but this was not so. The believers in Galatia were trying to keep Moses' law and were living like worldly people. The believers in Corinth were even teaching wrong things. We sometimes think that the churches were so very good and strong in the early days. This is not true at all. The Church became bad as soon as men began to rule it; but we must remember that Christ still moves among His churches, He is still here.

There was no one between Christ and His churches in Revelation 1. There was no high church officer or ruler. He did not scold some person for allowing evil things to come into the churches. Christ moved among the churches and He told each church what was wrong in that church.

Let us look at the Person who moved among the lampstands. John said that he saw a Person like a man and then he told us what He was like. He wore a robe that reached to His feet and a gold band around His chest. Then John told what His head, His eyes, His feet, His voice, His hand, His mouth and His face were like. These seven things about Christ teach us what He is like as He shows Himself to His people. He seemed to be so different to the gentle Jesus of Nazareth whom John had known when Jesus was on earth.

Jesus wore a robe which reached to His feet. This long robe shows us that He is a King and a Judge. He has authority over every person. His robe was not an ordinary coat; it was the kind of robe which a great person with authority wears. So Christ has authority over everyone.

He had a gold band around His chest. People see different meanings in this gold band. We think it may mean this: In the Bible the only person who wore a band around his chest was the high priest, Exodus 28:4. The Lord Jesus sees our faults and failures, but He is also our High Priest who is with God and keeps us. He speaks to God for us and keeps us from going away from God. He sees our sins and failures and He is able to forgive our sins and set us right again.

We may see some failure or some weakness among God's

people and think we can set it right. We think we can clean up the spiritual failures of others as we would clean our house. But this is impossible. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can solve these troubles in the Church. We should understand that He rules in the Church and ask Him to make the wrong things right, and then we should stop trying and let Him do the work Himself.

Jesus wore a robe which reached to His feet and a gold band about His chest. His hair was as white as wool, like snow. His white hair would remind us of a very old man. Old men should be wise men, so this shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. He did not have a beginning and He is very wise. He knows everything. He knows what will happen before it happens. He knows everything just as if it were happening right now. Paul said that God has made Christ to be our wisdom, 1 Corinthians 1:30. He is the One whose hair was white like wool or like snow.

Some people think they know more than God. They have new plans and new ways to help groups of believers. They think that many things in the Bible are too old and that it would be better to do things in a new way. They say there should be a new way of ruling the church. It is true that we do need to do things in a proper and orderly way, 1 Corinthians 14:40. We may be very mixed up in our own life and in our group or church and we do not know what to do. We should remember that we ourselves are not so much wiser than other believers. We need to ask the Lord Jesus to rule and to guide the church. He is the wisest One. He has all wisdom. We cannot see very far; we are not very clever; we do not understand very clearly.

We should bring our problem to the Lord and be honest and tell our brothers in Christ that we do not know the answer to the problem. We should not say, "I don't know the answer, so let's see what most people think we should do. Let's do something; we must do all we can to find the answer among ourselves." Can we not put our problem into the Lord's hands? He has all wisdom. Can we not come to Him and say, "O Lord, You love the church much more than we do. The church is Your bride. You started this little group of believers to witness for You. We don't know what to do. One of us says we should do one thing; another says we should do another thing. We don't know which is right."

Jesus Christ moves among His churches and He has all God's wisdom. He is our Lord and Master and He can give us wisdom when we ask Him for it, James 1:5,6. Would He refuse to give us wisdom and understanding when we ask for it and we want to use it for His glory in His church? He will certainly give us the wisdom we need, or He will Himself decide the question if we bring the problem to Him and say, "We can't decide what to do; we need Your wisdom."

There were sometimes some great problems among the groups of Christians in a certain part of Africa. Someone would say that one of the believers had committed a sin. The person who did wrong said, "No, I didn't do it. You cannot prove that I did it. You must find someone who saw me commit this sin. I didn't do anything wrong." It may be difficult to find anyone who actually saw the believer do this thing, and yet the others felt sure that he did it. They did not know what to do. This may happen in your assembly. Some people say, "We cannot prove that he did wrong, but we are sure that he did do wrong. We must punish him." But this is not right. We should tell the person that we cannot prove that he did anything wrong and then tell the Lord that we put the whole case into His hands and ask Him to do what should be done.

The Christians in Africa did not know what to do about the man who had sinned, so they asked the Lord to do what was right. Many times they asked God to judge, and He did judge and show in a very short time who was right and who was wrong. God made it very clear. This happened several times. Then someone said that another man had committed sin, so they said they would ask God to judge him, but this man said, "No, no, I don't want God to judge me. I know you let God judge that other man; I don't want God to judge me," and he admitted he had done wrong.

We would be wise and strong if we would trust the Lord Jesus to rule in His church. We are so busy doing things for Him, and we think that we are the only ones who can do them and we are afraid to say that we should wait for the Lord to work. We should let the Lord act when we do not know what to do. Can God do things in His own church? Yes, He can, and

He does do things in the church. He works in His church if we truly desire that He should be honored. It would make people fear God's punishment if we let God judge and punish more often those who do wrong in the church. He is the wisest Person and we can trust Him to act wisely for us. When a man has committed sin, he must be put out of the church, for God's honor, Joshua 7:10; 1 Corinthians 5:4,11.

The Lord's eyes blazed like fire, Revelation 1:14. Fire is used in the Bible as a picture of God's judgment. It means that He could see right into a person's mind and heart. His eyes do not see only the outside of a person; they see the inside also. His eyes do not only see the clothes we wear and the smile on our face and our nice way of talking to people, but His eyes see what is in our minds and hearts. He sees things we cannot see. We may guess what is in a person's mind. We think we know what is on the inside of a person by what we see on the outside. The Lord Jesus never guesses. Everything is open and clear before His eyes, Hebrews 4:13. This is one of the wonderful truths about the Lord Jesus Christ.

His eyes blazed like fire, so no one in the church can hide anything from Him. He knows why we do things. He knows our thoughts right now. He is walking, moving among His churches and looking into the hearts of His people. Is this the gentle Jesus whom men talk about? This Person is the Lord of His Church. He rules; He wears the robe and the gold band and His eyes are like fire; He sees into the hearts of His people.

People say that it is not important or necessary to go to the meetings of believers in Christ. Is it really important that we go to these meetings if we are living for Christ? Must we go and sit in a seat in a building? We know such talk is foolish if we understand that the church is dear to the Lord of the church. We are like the members of the body of Christ. We do not make ourselves into parts of His body; we are parts of His body. A man's finger was cut off in an accident and he kept it in a box. Would his finger be of any use to him when it was separated from his body? A believer is something like that finger if he does not come to the meetings of the church. The church is a body and the Lord is near and He is watching. His eyes are like fire.

His feet shone like brass that is melted in a furnace, Revelation 1:15. This means that His feet looked like brass that is burning hot, so hot that it is white. The burning hot brass reminds us of God's judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ walks and moves among His churches and sees where they are and what they are doing and His feet are like burning hot brass. He does not send someone else to watch His churches. He Himself sees them and watches them.

Christ's voice sounded like a great waterfall, Revelation 1:15. We sometimes go close to a great waterfall and our friends speak to us, but we cannot hear them. We can only hear the sound of the falling water. His voice is like the sound of the falling water; it is greater than all other sounds. We cannot hear other sounds when He speaks. He speaks with full authority. His voice is like the roaring sound of a big waterfall which overcomes all other sounds.

He held seven stars in His right hand, Revelation 1:16. The Lord tells us in verse 20 that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. The seven stars mean the spiritual leaders of the churches. They are in His hand; He controls them. A sharp sword with two edges came out of His mouth. This sword is His Word. The Bible says that His Word is sharper than a sword with two edges, Hebrews 4:12. His Word cuts and divides; it separates between the soul and spirit. The soul refers to our own things, our own desires and thoughts and ways. The things of the soul are the things which go with our body, our natural life. The spirit refers to the things in our life which really come from God. The Word of God separates and divides between the things which go with our natural life and the things which come from God.

Sometimes we are slow to divide between the things of the soul, the human things, and the things of the spirit, the things which come from God. We think a man is a spiritual man if he is very smart, but he may not be very spiritual. The sword of the Word of God divides and separates and shows what is real and spiritual.

His face was shining like the sun shines in the middle of the day, Revelation 1:16. His voice is like the sound of a great

waterfall which is greater than other sounds so that we cannot hear anything else. His face shines like the sun so that we cannot see other lights. Every other light is too dim to see when we see His bright light.

We should read what He said to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. He said, "I see you have failed but I also see in you some things which please Me. I know your sorrow and trouble and suffering. I know all about it." The Son of God is also the Son of Man, and He has all authority over the churches. He still has the right to walk among His churches and to say what is right and what is wrong. He gives a reward for what is according to His will and He judges what is wrong and evil. Some things may seem very good and clever to us; those things may seem very important to the world, but we must not do them if they do not please Him. He is the Lord of the Church.

The apostles went to the place where Christ told them to go in Matthew chapter 28. Barnabas and Paul went where the Holy Spirit told them to go in Acts 13, and Paul went just where God wanted him to go in Acts 16. We should do just as He says. We should say to Him, "Lord, this is Your church. We will do as Your Word says. We will not do anything which You do not tell us to do." May God help us to do just what He tells us to do in His Word.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 5 The Overseer of Churches

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. The Lord will reward His servants who
 - a. have become wealthy.
 - b. have become famous.
 - c. have been faithful.

2. In Revelation 1.9 we see that Christ is
 - a. King.
 - b. Lord of the Church.
 - c. the Good Shepherd.

3. In Revelation we find letters written to
 - a. seven churches.
 - b. eight churches.
 - c. ten churches.

4. John was a prisoner in the island of
 - a. Cyprus.
 - b. Crete.
 - c. Patmos.

5. After His resurrection the Lord showed Himself to His disciples for
 - a. 30 days.
 - b. 40 days.
 - c. 50 days. .

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. The churches in the early days were very pure and faithful.
7. Only the Lord Jesus can solve problems in the church.
8. The Lord can give us wisdom when we ask Him for it.
9. Fire is used in the Bible as a picture of God's judgment.
10. It is not really important to go to the meetings of believers.

What Do You Say?

FIRST the Kingdom

We looked at the Lord Jesus Christ as our great Example, Matthew 4. He chose to obey God's will and showed this by being baptized. He was beginning His work for God when Satan came and tested Him, but He would not turn away from God's plan; He loved God and obeyed Him only.

Now we will think about which things are most important in our lives. The Word of God puts the things of God before the things of this life. The Lord Jesus taught us not to try to get rich here on earth but to gather riches in heaven, Matthew 6:19,20. These verses show that there are two sides, and we must choose which one we will put first. Will we give first place to the things of heaven, or will we give first place to the things of earth? Let us think carefully about our choice.

Then the Lord said that the eyes are like a lamp for the body; if our eyes are clear, our whole body will be full of light. The word clear really means one or single and so it means to have one purpose. The Lord is telling us that we should have one purpose—not five or six purposes, or no purpose at all. God wants us to think like Paul who said he tried to forget what was behind him and do his best to reach what was ahead. He ran straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Jesus Christ to the life in heaven, Philippians 3:14.

We must be firm. We must aim at one thing. We must have our eyes and hearts and minds set on one thing. In another place the Lord taught that no one can be a slave to two masters;

he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money, Matthew 6:24. Money in this verse does not mean only money, but it means all earthly things. Some people despise money and do not make it the most important thing in their life, but they love and serve other earthly things which are just as bad. The Lord meant that we should not love earthly things. This verse tells us we must give ourselves entirely to one thing. We must choose what we will faithfully serve. The Lord Jesus did not say it will be difficult to serve God and earthly things, He said we cannot. It is impossible.

Perhaps someone will say, "That can't be right; we have to earn money to live, don't we?" This is true. The Bible says more than that. The Bible says that a man can stay hungry if he will not work and earn money to buy the things he needs, 2 Thessalonians 3:10. We must not help anyone to be lazy. We should work to earn money for ourselves and our families. The Bible says that a man is worse than an unbeliever if he will not work and earn money for his family, 1 Timothy 5:8. A Christian has duties and he should be careful to fulfil those duties. He should not only work to earn enough money for what he needs for himself, but he should also give some money to the Lord, 1 Corinthians 16:2. What do I put first in my life? This is the important thought in Matthew 6:24. We must work to earn money, but that is not the important lesson here. The question is: What comes first in my life?

Which is more important to us—God's things or earthly things? Which come first? Which do we desire most? The Lord Jesus said that God asks you to do some things for Him. We have also our earthly duties to fulfil. Which should come first? Should God come first, or should earthly things come first? It is very important in our life to give the right answer to this question. We must think carefully and be very honest. It is a question all Christians must answer, both young and old. We should look at our own hearts. We may seem to be busy for God, but we may not be honest and we may be saying words which we do not really mean. Will we serve God first or earthly things? We must choose one or the other.

Men and women in the Bible had to make choices like this also. Ananias and Sapphira are a well-known example, Acts 5:1-11. They wanted to give something to the Lord; they also wanted to get something for themselves. They did not know what to do. They did not decide which was more important and do it. Peter said to them, "You could have kept it all for yourselves. Nobody would ask you for any of it." The early church did not practice communism. There is no communism at all in these verses. Peter said that no one would force them to give their money away. They sinned because they tried to give their money and also to keep it. They lost their lives because of it. Their sin brought death, for God punished them. We must pay a price if we do not clearly decide which things to put first in our lives. We also pay a price when we do make clear decisions, but the price we pay for refusing to decide is much greater. We may ruin our life of service for God and we may spoil all of our spiritual life.

Christ said in Matthew 6:25 that we should not be worried about the food and drink we need to stay alive, or about clothes for our bodies. These are earthly things and we might want to give first place to them. These are my needs, the things I desire and I must have. These are the things which tempt our soul. It is like the rich farmer who thought in himself, You have all you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. Jesus said some people are like this man: they pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight. The man put the wrong things first. What did God call him? You fool, Luke 12:16-21. Ananias and Sapphira did not want to decide and choose one of the two things. The rich farmer chose riches and material things. He made the wrong choice and was called a fool.

Now Jesus talked about food and drink and clothing. These are things we want money for. Here the word "clothing" means much more than just the clothes we wear. It can mean not only clothing for our body, but our house, our friends, and other things we like to have. These are earthly things. The Lord says, "These are the things which ordinary people are always looking for."

There is an important word we should notice. Everybody has to wear clothes, everybody has to eat, everybody has to drink. Most people use all their time getting these things—but He tells us to give first place to God's kingdom, Matthew 6:33. Are we willing to be honest? Are we willing to look into our own hearts? Will we look at ourselves in God's presence? What does have the first place in my life? It is better to ask, "Who has first place in my life?"

There is another important word here, the word kingdom. The kingdom of God does not mean heaven. Heaven and God's kingdom are different things. One new translation of the Bible uses the word authority instead of kingdom. This is good because Christ is not speaking of future things, but something we should desire now. We should choose the rule of God, the authority of God and of Christ in our lives now. Give first place to the authority of God. He does not mean the authority of God in heaven, but the rule of God in our life now. I should choose the thing which I want to have first place in my life. This should be the authority of God, the rule of God.

The authority of God is a part of the Gospel which we have received. Romans 10.9 is a wonderful verse. It is a strong verse; it says you must do two things to be saved: You must declare with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from death. Notice that salvation has something joined with it. Our lips say that Jesus is Lord of our life. Have we made Him Lord? We have no right to call ourselves Christians if we have not done this. The Bible says we will be saved if we do it. In verse 10 the Holy Spirit says the same thing the other way round so we will be sure to understand it. We believe in our hearts and God shows that we are right with Him; we declare with our lips and are saved. Do we declare with our lips and our acts that Jesus is our Lord? Do we do it each day—every day? This is an important part of the Gospel. You must do this if you have received Christ as your Savior. We must receive Him as Savior and as Lord. We cannot separate the two. He is Savior and Lord; He saves and He rules. When we receive salvation we really say, "He is my King, He is my Lord." Have we declared with our lips that He is our Lord?

This does not mean that we go and begin to preach on the street, but it means that we say to our friends, "I belong to Christ; He is my Master, and He controls my life." We will sometimes have to say, "I cannot do what you do because Jesus is my Lord, and He does not want me to do it. I do what He tells me to do." Are we ready to say that?

The Apostle Paul has told us the important truths of the Gospel. These important truths agree with the things we have seen in Romans 10:9. In 1 Corinthians 1:23 he said, We preach Christ who was nailed to the cross. This tells us of the end of our old sinful life. He said in 2 Corinthians 4:5, We preach Jesus Christ as Lord. This tells us of the beginning of a new life. These two truths are part of each other. Christ nailed to the cross means forgiveness of sins, but it also means death to our sinful self. I died with Christ. My sinful way of living suddenly came to an end. I died when He died on the cross for me. We preach Jesus Christ as Lord; this follows our death on the cross with Christ. The verse in 1 Corinthians 1 is the end of the old life. The verse in 2 Corinthians 4 is the beginning of the new life. We must not separate these two facts. God does not tell us that we may take forgiveness of sins and still live the old kind of life. We must be honest with God. Jesus Christ is really, truly, daily our Lord. Let us ask ourselves, "If He is not my Lord, is He really my Savior?"

We must clearly understand the meaning of following Jesus Christ. We do not want to make a mistake. Young people in these days say they are honest. They say, "We do not want only talk; we want to know the real meaning." Now we have seen what it means to follow Christ. We want others to be honest with us. Are we willing to be honest with ourselves? Let us understand this truth clearly and then look at our own life. Does Jesus Christ run my life completely? This is what the verse means, Give first place to God's kingdom, God's authority.

We see the same truth in the book of Acts. In chapter 1 we read that the Lord Jesus showed Himself to His disciples many times and proved beyond doubt that He was alive. He was often with them during a period of about 40 days. What did He talk about? He talked with them about the kingdom of God, Acts 1:3.

In Acts 28 Paul did the same thing. Paul was the great apostle whom God sent to preach to the Gentiles. He was taken to Rome as a prisoner and the first thing he did was to gather the religious leaders of the nation of Israel and explain to them the truths about the kingdom, the authority of God, Acts 28:23. We cannot say, "The kingdom of God was just for a short time; it was just for that time, it is not for our day." In Acts 28:31 Paul talked to others who were Gentiles about God's kingdom and authority; about Christ coming into their hearts and ruling their lives.

The word command is a very important word for the person who has bowed before Jesus Christ and received Him as Savior and Lord. We read in Matthew 28:20, Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Jesus Christ does not ask us to do something for Him as a favor. He is Lord. We are His slaves. He wants us to obey. Do we say that we yield to Him, just because we hope to escape from punishment for our sins in hell? Do we say that we yield to Him when we really intend to rule our own life? We are not honest if we do. He comes to us and says, "I want you to yield to Me, to obey Me." What does He command us? I command you to love each other, John 15:12. He also says, Go to all the people everywhere and make them My disciples, Matthew 28:19, and, Do this in memory of Me, 1 Corinthians 11:24.

The Apostle Paul said that God rescued us from the authority of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His dear Son, Colossians 1:13. We obeyed the authority of one kingdom, but we have been taken out of it and brought into the kingdom of His dear Son. We are in a kingdom, a place where Jesus Christ is in the highest place. God raised Him to the highest place, and gave Him the name that is greater than any other name, so that, in honor of the name of Jesus, all beings will fall on their knees, and all will openly tell that Jesus Christ is the Lord, Philippians 2.9-11. Is this true in our lives? We should not think of serving God in any way until Jesus Christ is really our Lord and Master in all that we do. Does He control our lives? Do we go where He sends us? Do we stop when He says, "Stop"? Would we be willing to say, "Yes, Lord" if He said, "Do not be such a close friend to that person; I did not tell you to make such a close friend of

that person"? Perhaps we want very much to be friends with that person. Are we willing to give it up for Him? Would we be willing to change our studies at school if He told us to change? Perhaps we like to study a certain subject. Would we be willing to study something very difficult if we knew it was His will?

Ordinary people are always looking for food and clothing and other things for themselves, but He says to us, "Give first place to God's authority in your life." This will really change our lives. Let us be sure, first of all, that we belong to Christ, that we are true Christians. Our parents may have been Christians; that is not the most important thing. We may have had some experience; we may not have had some experience; that is not important. Do we belong to Him now? Are we truly born of God, born again? God will punish us in hell forever if we are not saved when we die. That may sound hard and cruel, but that is what Jesus said and we cannot change it. Let us be very sure that we are true Christians and that we put God's authority first in our lives. Christ will never fail us. Do we make Him sad? We may enjoy His good gifts to us. Is He pleased because we obey Him?

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 6 First the Kingdom

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. The Lord Jesus chose to obey God's will and showed this by
 - a. His miracles.
 - b. His parables.
 - c. being baptized.
2. The Lord tells us that we should have
 - a. one purpose.
 - b. five purposes.
 - c. six purposes.
3. We read in Matthew 6.24 that we cannot serve both God and
 - a. ourselves.
 - b. money.
 - c. others.
4. A man who will not work is
 - a. a wise man.
 - b. a righteous man.
 - c. worse than an unbeliever.
5. God called the rich farmer
 - a. a fool.
 - b. a faithful man.
 - c. a wise man.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. The kingdom of God means heaven.
7. We should give first place to the authority of God.
8. We may receive Jesus as Savior but not as Lord.
9. We may take forgiveness of sins and still live the old kind of life.
10. After His resurrection Jesus talked with His disciples about the kingdom of God.

What Do You Say?

FIRST the Log

The Lord Jesus called a man a hypocrite or impostor because he wanted people to think he was very holy, Matthew 7:5. Only God can know a man's heart and call him a hypocrite. This is a very serious thing for God to say about anyone and is very close to the subject we are going to think about. We will think about seeing our own mistakes before God, judging ourselves and seeing how small and worthless we are. We must do this from time to time.

God says, You hypocrite. I may become a hypocrite if I do not do what He tells me. You hypocrite! Take the LOG out of your own eye first, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the SPECK out of your brother's eye.

God always expects that the Christian will live in a different way from the ordinary unsaved people around him. He is completely different from unsaved people because he has a new nature; he has different aims for his life; he has a different kind of life. He is a citizen of the heavenly country, Philippians 3:20, and so he must not live like people who only live for earthly things. The Christian lives among ordinary earthly people, but he must not be like them. He should be loving and kind. He should show Christ to other people in many ways, but he must not become like them. We should let God change us inwardly by changing our minds completely. Then we will be able to know the will of God—what is good and perfect and pleasing to Him, Romans 12:2.

The Bible says that the Christian is different. He is different in his nature and in the life he has from God. He is different in his aims and in his character. He should do everything to please God and show that God controls his life.

The Christian gives first place to the will of God in his life and so follows his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, Here I am, O God, to do what You want me to do, Hebrews 10:9. He did not come so that others would serve Him; He came to serve others and to give His life for them. We follow Him and want to be able to say as He did, I have finished the work which You gave me to do, John 17:4. The Bible says plainly, You do not belong to yourselves but to God; He bought you with a price. So use your bodies for Christ's glory, 1 Corinthians 6:19,20. You do not belong to yourself. You willingly gave up the right to rule your own life when you bowed at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and received Him as your Lord. This is important and many verses in the Bible show that it is true.

The word "Lord" has become very common to us. We use it so often that we forget its real meaning. The word "Lord" in the New Testament usually means master or owner. The Lord used this word when He sent His disciples to another village to get a donkey. He said, You will find a donkey tied up. Untie it and bring it here. As they were untying the donkey, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying it?" That word owners is the same word Lord. The owners said, "This donkey is ours. Why are you taking him?" They answered, "THE Lord needs him." The Lord was greater than the owners. They owned the donkey and said where it should go and what it should do, but Christ is THE Master, THE Owner.

Let us remember that the word "Lord" means first of all owner. So we think of the verse in 1 Corinthians 6, You do not belong to yourselves. We have a Master, Jesus Christ, and so we do not have the right to live for ourselves. He redeemed us, bought us by His blood which He gave when He was on the cross, and so He can say, "You are Mine." And I bow my head and say to Him, "Yes, I am Yours. I gladly give myself to

You.” He died to redeem us many years ago. We give ourselves to Him when we believe in Him and openly say that He is our Lord.

Let us go a little farther in our study. He is our Lord; how does this work in our lives? Let us look again at His word, “You hypocrite!” We must be very honest. This word tells us to judge ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us. We must think about what we are doing and find the reason why we do it. We are not to find fault with other people and judge them. What did the Lord say? You see that your brother has something in his eye. Perhaps it is a little bit of sand or some very small thing, but he is in trouble. The Lord does not say, “Let your brother take care of his own problem; don’t try to help him.” He said to do something else first. You want to help your brother, but you must do something to yourself first; then you can help your brother. This is important. Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will be able to see clearly and take the speck out of your brother’s eye. It means we should look into the mirror of God’s Word and see our own faults and judge ourselves before God, James 1:23. We should not look at others and say, “Other people do it, so I can too.” We do not measure ourselves by other people. Our Master is Christ, not other people, not our friends, or even our church. We are part of Christ’s body and Christ is the One who shows us how we should live. Christ shows us in His Word what we should do.

The life which Christ shows to us is for all of us, not for a certain group of people, educated people or people trained in a certain way. It is a life of obedience to the Bible, the Word of God. When we read the Bible it shows us our own faults before we begin to see the faults in other people. We often find fault with others because that is our nature, but now the Spirit of God is in us and we should not live by our old nature. People of the world see the faults of others. This is true now and has always been true in the past. Peter said about John, Lord, what about this man? John 21:21. Jesus said something like this, “Listen, Peter, that is not your business. If I want him to live on until I come, that has nothing to do with you. You let

John live his life before Me. Peter, My will is most important in your life. I want you to live happily with Me and I will run John's life, but you can help him." Later we see Peter and John going together to the temple, Acts 3:1. They were helping one another, caring for each other. They did not try to order each other or find out the other's faults.

God wants us to get alone with Him and to let His Word search our hearts and to say, O God, examine me and know my thoughts; test me and watch that I do not follow any path that makes you sad, Psalm 139:23,24. This experience gives us pain. We are shocked when we read God's Word and see how Christ lived and how Christians should live and behave and treat one another. We may even say, "I have so many faults, O God, help me!" But we must see God's measure for our lives. We must not think, "I have given myself to Christ and I am going to do something big. I am able to do some great work for God." This is very wrong. We should pray, "Examine me, O God, show me from Thy Word how weak I am. Help me to be honest and to see my own faults and sins. Help me not to be a hypocrite and ask, Why don't others do this? or, Why don't our leaders help us?" We should care when others are slow or careless, but we should not find fault with them and judge them. We should examine ourselves before God first. Let us understand this well. It does not mean that we do not care about someone who is in trouble. We do not say, "Leave him alone, keep away from him", when he is in great trouble and is very sad, and perhaps the tears are running down his face. It would be a mistake to leave him alone. Peter and John went up to the temple together. They loved each other and prayed for each other and helped each other.

I might need someone to take out something that is in my eye, but I do not want someone to try to help me if he has some big thing in his own eye. Some people have found the answer to their own problems. These people can truly help others in their troubles. The Bible says, If someone is caught doing something wrong, those who are spiritual should help him to come back to God, Galatians 6:1. This person has fallen into sin;

he needs someone to help him and lift him to his feet. You should set him right; but you must do it in a gentle way. And keep an eye on yourself, so that you will not be tempted. We must not feel greater and better than others when we help a person in this way. We can truly help others when we have corrected that same failure in our own life. We can say, "Can I help you? I had the same problem yesterday as you have today. I was alone with God and He showed me my failure and helped me find the answer. Perhaps I can help you. Can we pray about it together?" We do not help others when we are proud and find fault. We can only help them when we are humble and when God has searched our own hearts.

God's Word says a great deal about looking at ourselves and examining our own lives before the Lord. The Lord shows us also what we should not do. He told about two men who went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector, Luke 18:10-13. The one said something like this, "I am so glad that I am not like other people are. I don't do this thing and I don't do the other thing. (I don't have anything in my eye.) I don't do what is wrong, but only what is right. I give God a tenth part of all the money I earn," and he goes on talking in this way. He is talking to himself; he is not really talking to God. God wanted to tell him about some things he should not be doing which he was doing, and about some of the things he should be doing, but was not doing. He was standing in the corner talking to himself. The Lord Jesus Christ said that he went home without being forgiven or cleansed or helped. He was trying to talk to God, but he couldn't touch God. He was not judging himself; he was proud of himself. He was a hypocrite. He looked down at the other man who was broken-hearted and was beating his own chest saying, "O God, have pity on me, a sinner!" He looked down on this man and said, "Thank God I am not like that man." We must never pray like that. We would be sinning against God and against ourselves, and God will not be with us if we are not honest. Let us never act as this Pharisee did.

In 1 Corinthians 4:3 Paul said, I am not worried at all about

being judged by you, or by any of man's standards; I do not even pass judgment on myself. He meant, "You Corinthians are finding fault with me; you are not really honest. You are wondering if I am an apostle and you are saying I am not." They said Paul was a small, unimportant man; his letters were wonderful; he used big words and talked so big, but when you saw him, he was nothing to look at; he had bad eyes. Paul said, "You are judging me and my reasons for serving the Lord. I do not care. I am not at all concerned about being judged by you or by men's standards." Then he said, "I do not even pass judgment on myself." Paul did not take Christ's place as the Judge and give himself a prize. He did not think of his service for Christ and say, "I have won a prize." He said, "I don't even judge myself to be great. The Lord is the One who passes judgment on me." We should not think that we have done well in our Christian life and will get a great reward. We know that Christ will give rewards and this gives us joy, but we must not start giving ourselves the prize. Christ, our Master, will give the proper reward. We should give our whole life to God and say, "The Lord is the One who passes judgment on me."

Again in Romans 14:4 Paul said, What right do you have to judge the servant of another man? That servant has a Master; his Master is Christ. Christ is your Master, too. Peter called Him the Chief Shepherd, 1 Peter 5:4. God does not tell us to judge His servants. There is more teaching for us in 1 Corinthians 4:5. Paul said, "You should not judge anyone before the time comes. Final judgment must wait until the Lord comes." That is the time when everything will be made right. It means that we should not think we are doing well and find fault with others in their service for Christ. We should leave the Master to judge them; they are His servants. We should search and know what is in our own hearts. Paul also said, If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God's judgment. That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died, 1 Corinthians 11:31. God was judging them.

We will not have time to find fault with others, or say they are holding us back from following the Lord, if we read God's

Word every morning and evening and judge ourselves and look at our own progress and examine our own spiritual condition and our life with God according to His Word. We will look at our own reasons for talking to different people and going to different places. We will not have time to find fault with others if we examine ourselves every day. We will be in God's presence learning from Him about our own faults. This will hurt us, but we must be honest. Do we do this? Do we examine ourselves in the light of God's Word? Do we find more faults in ourselves than we find in other people? Do we ask ourselves about the money we gave and about the money we did not give? Do we ask God if He was pleased with the reasons we gave the money and with the person we gave it to?

Do we think about these things and ask God about them as we read God's Word? This is important; it is the first thing we should do. The Lord said, "First take out the thing that is in your own eye." God tells us to help somebody else only after we have judged ourselves. We must search our own hearts first. 1 Corinthians 11:31 tells us what will happen if we do not judge ourselves. God will judge us if we do not judge ourselves. What will happen to us if we have wrong ideas and live wrongly, if we are proud and think we are perfect and find fault with others? We will have spiritual trouble and God will judge us. God can judge very severely. It may hurt us very much. Let us be sure of this fact—God does judge His people; He does punish His people; He does correct them. The Bible tells us this truth in both the Old and the New Testament.

Remember 1 Corinthians 11:30, That is why many of you are sick and weak and several have died. What was the reason why many were sick and weak and some had died? They were doing things that they should not have done and God could not use them any more. It is a sad thing when God can no longer use us. This does not mean that we will not go to heaven. We are as safe as Christ is, if we are God's children. But Paul said, I beat my own body; I bring my body under control, 1 Corinthians 9:27. Paul was judging himself. He also said, I

run for the finish line, 1 Corinthians 9:26. Paul meant that he was like a runner in a race who must train himself. A runner eats the right food and nothing else. He works and runs very hard to make his body strong. Paul's spiritual life was like that. He did not do the things which his body desired. He did not want to be great in this world. Paul wanted something else. He wanted it very much and so he beat his own body and ran straight for the finish line. Why did Paul think this was so important? He was the greatest of all the apostles, was he not? He said in verse 27, I completely control my body to keep from being rejected myself after having called others to the contest. Paul feared that God might say to him, "Paul, you have not seen the faults in yourself, you have not judged yourself. You are a hypocrite; you are not real. So I cannot use you. You are Mine, but I cannot use you. I must set you aside."

What would you do if someone were to come to your house and ask for a drink of water? You would try to find a nice glass and give him some water. But if you found that the glass was dirty, you would put it down and use an ordinary cup, if it was clean. We may be like cups that are spoiled or cracked or dirty. We do not clean ourselves by judging ourselves and so God sadly says, "I cannot use that person; his life is not right. He is Mine. I wanted him to go and give My message, but he isn't clean and I can't use him." We may be like old cups or cracked cups which are put on the top shelf in a back corner of the room. They are not used on the table, nor used to carry water to a thirsty person, but perhaps they are used to keep a few seeds in for next year's garden. The cup which could and should be used for great and important things is now used to store a few seeds.

A Christian may become soiled or spoiled, and God cannot use him, so God sets him aside. This is sad, but it sometimes happens. It is God's judgment and it is very painful. We may keep ourselves from being judged by God by judging ourselves. What do we do with the Bible? Do we read it, study it, practice what it teaches? Are we living close to God and allowing nothing to come between us and Him? Are we living

as close to Jesus Christ as we did last week or a year ago; or five years ago? Or are we getting farther away? We can help others only after we search ourselves. God will judge us if we do not judge ourselves.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 7 First the Log

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. Jesus called a man a hypocrite because he wanted people to think he was
 - a. generous.
 - b. intelligent.
 - c. holy.
2. The word *Lord* in the New Testament means
 - a. saviour.
 - b. master.
 - c. teacher.
3. In James 1.23 we read that God's Word is
 - a. a hammer.
 - b. a sword.
 - c. a mirror.
4. In Psalm 139.23,24 we read that we should ask the Lord to
 - a. examine us.
 - b. praise us.
 - c. reward us.
5. As Christians we should first examine
 - a. other Christians.
 - b. ourselves.
 - c. unbelievers.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. Carnal Christians should help others who fall into sin.
7. In the Lord's parable the Pharisee was proud and the tax collector was broken-hearted.
8. Christ will judge us and give us the proper reward.
9. We must examine ourselves in the light of God's Word.
10. Paul wanted to be great in this world.

What Do You Say?

Clean the inside of the cup first, and then the outside will be clean too, Matthew 23:26.

We would like to think again of two things which we have noticed in earlier chapters. Is it possible for a person to know Jesus Christ as his Savior, but not to serve Him as his Lord? Is a person a true Christian if he does not serve Jesus as Lord? It is possible, but we should carefully tell people that Jesus is Lord as well as Savior. A young boy was led to Christ, but those who led him to Christ did not explain to him that he should also obey the Lord Jesus. He accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, and God saved him, but he had no peace in his heart until he learned to obey Christ as his Lord a long time afterwards. Those who led him to Christ should have told him about this when he was saved. Paul knew this when Jesus appeared to him as he was going to Damascus, Acts 9:3-6. He said, "Who are You, Lord?"

We do not always explain these things clearly so people understand when we tell them how they can be saved. We do not always tell people all that happens when they receive Jesus Christ into their hearts. Let us be very careful to explain to people what it really means to receive Christ when we preach God's Word and lead others to Him.

The other thing we want to think about is this: God judges His people. Does this mean that Christ did not bear all the punishment for our sins on the cross and so God must give some of

the punishment to His people afterwards? No, that is not true. The Lord Jesus came to remove sin through the sacrifice of Himself, Hebrews 9:26. But the Bible clearly teaches that God rules His house and that we need to know how to behave ourselves in God's house, 1 Timothy 3:15. The house of God does not mean a church building; it means those who are saved and are in God's family. When we say that God judges His people we mean that God teaches His children. He corrects them and when they do wrong He punishes them. God wants them to be more like Him and to know what He wants them to do, so He punishes them. He punished Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11; He punished the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 11:29,30. Let us clearly understand this matter. We do not mean the punishment for sins which Christ took for us on the cross, but we mean the punishment which God uses to correct and teach His people. The Apostle Paul warned that God will judge us unless we first examine ourselves, 1 Corinthians 11:31. God punishes us and this is very painful. God is holy and pure. Our God is a fire that destroys, Hebrews 12:29. These words were written to saved people, not to unbelievers, for it says, Our God. God is holy, and He says, You must be holy because I am holy, 1 Peter 1:16. We should remember that God is holy and pure, and try to live holy and pure lives.

We are thinking about first things in the life of a Christian. "Clean the inside of the cup first," Matthew 23:26. We do not usually do this — we usually think of the outside first. We should know that the inside of our life is wrong when we do things that are wrong; but the wrong started on the inside, not on the outside. There are two sides to every person's life. There is the inside, which is our love for God. No one knows this side of our life but God. When we spend time alone with God, our inner life is strengthened. There is also the outside part of our lives which shows what we are on the inside. Our life alone with God makes us real and true and strong. Our life in public before people shows what we really are when we are alone with God. We are in very great danger if our inner life and our outside life do not agree. A man who is selling fruit will often put nice large, ripe fruit on the top of his basket and he will hide

the small, green or rotten fruit on the bottom. He sells the basket of fruit because the fruit on top looks nice. But he is not honest. There are Christians who are like that. They are good Christians on the outside but not on the inside. They preach and pray and talk to others about Christ and it all seems very good, but it does not come from their hearts. This may happen to us and we must be very careful.

Those who are teaching and preaching must be most careful. They are in great danger because they are giving out to others what they have received from God. They will soon be empty and useless if they do not continue to learn from God and receive new strength and grace from Him. Our inner life must agree with our life before other people. If they do not agree, we are in danger of great failure and trouble.

We will be like the prophet Balaam, Numbers chapters 22-24. Even the king of Moab thought that Balaam was a great prophet. Balaam gave God's message to the king of Moab, but on the inside, in his heart, he loved money more than God. God told him to stay at home when the king of Moab called him, but he went because he wanted his money. Balaam gave God's word faithfully, but the king of Moab was angry with him and would not give him money, so Balaam told the king of Moab how he could harm the people of Israel, Revelation 2:14. Christians can fail like that. Let us be very sure that we are faithful in our life alone with God and that our life before other people is the same as our inner, unseen life. We hear many people talking about taking God's message to others. That is good if our inner life is strong and real.

There is another danger. We might be like the poor men who had leprosy in 2 Kings 7:8,9. They found food and clothing and riches. They found more money than they could use, so they started to carry it away and hide it. They were getting things for themselves, making themselves rich, and forgetting that others were hungry too. We may enjoy God's gifts to us but forget to help others. God says, "You fool, don't just wash the outside. Don't just clean the part that people see, but clean the inside too. The inside and the outside must both be clean."

We clean both the outside and the inside when we wash our dishes, but in our Christian lives there is something more. The Bible tells us that our witness for Christ is real only if it comes from a strong inner life. For from the inside, from a man's heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do wrong things, Mark 7:21. The Lord told us that many evil things begin in men's hearts. The food that a person eats does not make him sinful. The sinful things are first thoughts and ideas in our minds, but then we do them with our bodies. A man is made by his thoughts. The things we talk about do not make us good or bad. People think well of us or they think evil of us by the things we do and say. But we are good or bad on the inside before God and this will show on the outside where other people can see it.

Some African believers say that the tongue is just the end of your heart which sticks out of your mouth. You can try to hide what you feel, but this little end of your heart shows what is inside, in your heart, as soon as you start talking. This agrees with the Bible, for the Bible says, A man is just what he thinks in his heart, Proverbs 23:7. We are good or bad on the inside, and this shows itself on the outside.

We read in Matthew 5:23,24, Leave your gift in front of the altar if you come to offer your gift and remember that you have done some wrong to your brother. Go, and make peace with your brother first, and then come back and offer your gift to God. A man came to God's house with a gift and was ready to worship God. He was ready because he brought a gift. He did not come carelessly; he came ready to give his gift to God. Sometimes we are not ready to give to God, to talk with God and praise Him. Sometimes we come before God to worship Him, but we have no worship or thanks to give to Him. This man was ready, but he suddenly remembered that he had done wrong to his brother. What should he do? He was there in God's presence and he was ready to worship. Some would say, "Go on, worship God, and later you can make peace with your brother. You can make peace with your brother on Monday, or Wednesday — some other day." The Bible says, "No, you must not do that. You must make peace with your brother and set things right with him first before you worship God." This means that we must do

what is right to other people before we can be happy in God's presence. We often go with our Bible and hymnbook to worship God, but we have done many wrong things to people which we should first confess and make right. We pretend to worship God, but our life and actions are wrong. These are the two sides of our life. There is the spiritual side of our life, our life before God. He wants that spiritual life to be true and strong. Then there is the other side of our life, our life with other people. We must do what is right and make things right with other people in order to be right before God. We must be honest and kind to people if we would worship God and witness for Him.

We may say, "Lord, I want to love You truly, with all my heart; I want to give myself all to You." When we give ourselves over to God we must go and confess the things which we have done against anyone before we can go on and live for God. This is God's command. He tells us to clean the inside and then the outside too. We can make progress in our life with God when our life with other people is right.

We will look at two more verses, 2 Corinthians 5:14,15, For Christ's love for us controls us now that we see that one Man died for all men. Those who live should not live for themselves any longer, but only for Him who died and was raised to life for their sake.

Paul said that we are controlled by Christ. Luke used the same word when he said that the people were crowding the Lord from every side, Luke 8:42, and Peter said in verse 45, "Master, the people are all around you and crowding in on you." Sometimes we get caught in a great crowd of people, and then we cannot go where we want to go because the crowd carries us along. We are held by the crowd and ruled by the crowd. That is what Paul meant when he said that the love of Christ rules us. Another translation of the Bible says it in this way, "The love of Christ leaves us no choice, for when we see that one Man died for all men, we also see that His purpose was that men should not live for themselves." He died that they who live should never again live for self. Are we willing to believe that and to live accordingly? God has a purpose in the death of Christ and He says it very plainly. It is His

purpose that men should not live to please themselves. We have accepted the Savior and have accepted His cross and His death. Has it made a difference in our lives? The verse says, "Stop living for yourself."

Now look at 2 Corinthians 5:18, All this is done by God. That means our salvation, our new life in Christ, and all of God's working in us. All this is done by God, who through Christ has changed us into His friends, and gave us the task of making others His friends also." God used Christ to make us His friends, and He has told us to make others His friends. Do we understand that? It says in verse 19, Our message is that God was making all men His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins against them, and He has given us the message of how He makes them His friends. He said in verse 18 that He gave us the task of making others His friends and in verse 19 He says that He has given us the message of how He makes others His friends. So we have it twice. God used Christ to provide salvation for us. Now Christ, the One whom God used, has gone back to His Father in heaven and God uses us to tell other people about His salvation.

In verse 20 we read, Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were pleading with you through us: on Christ's behalf, we beg you, let God change you from enemies into friends. Do we understand what this means? God made a way to make men His friends and then He gave to us the work of telling them about it. Isn't that wonderful? Let us think about it very carefully. God sent His Son from heaven to do something which no angel nor any person or any other being could have done. Christ finished the work of salvation. He did it perfectly and went back to the Father; then He gave us the task of telling others. The great God took the work that His Son did by shedding His blood for us and gave us the work of telling others about it. Isn't that wonderful! Isn't that a very great task for us? Does it make us afraid when we think of what God has given us to do? God took the perfect work of His Son and asks us to show it to others. This is our duty. God will ask us what we have done about making this salvation known to others when we come before Christ in heaven. He has given us this salvation so that we might tell others about it and live it in our own lives. The

Lord Jesus gave His own blood; He gave His life to make this salvation for us. Do we understand this? What are we doing about it? We will have to confess to God what we do about this message of salvation.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 8 First the Inside

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. We should teach new believers that they must also
 - a. love the things of the world.
 - b. live for themselves.
 - c. obey the Lord.

2. Christ
 - a. did not bear the punishment for our sin.
 - b. bore the punishment for some of our sin.
 - c. bore the punishment for all our sin.

3. When we say that God judges His people we mean that He
 - a. teaches them.
 - b. condemns them.
 - c. rejects them.

4. Our God is a fire that
 - a. destroys.
 - b. blesses.
 - c. edifies.

5. Balaam was a prophet
 - a. and was faithful to God.
 - b. and helped the people of Israel.
 - c. but he loved money more than God.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. It is impossible to enjoy God's gifts and forget to help others.
7. The things we talk about make us good or bad.
8. We can make progress in our life with God even though our life with other people is not right.
9. It is God's purpose that we should not live to please ourselves.
10. God uses us to tell other people about His salvation

What Do You Say?

As we read the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 9:57-62, let us think about how much it will cost us to follow Him. Jesus spoke to three men who wanted to be His disciples. He told them that it would not be easy to follow Him. They must be willing to give up their own plans and their own comfort and some things which made them happy. They must be ready to die like a man on a cross. The cross is the cost of being a disciple of Christ. Let us think about this.

We cannot understand a verse of the Bible without looking at the verses which come before it and the verses which follow it. The men who wrote the Bible wrote it in a careful, orderly way. All the verses and parts of the Bible are connected together. The writers did not always put things down in the order that they happened. We can see this clearly when we compare Matthew with Mark, and Mark with Luke. Things which are told in the first part of one Gospel may be told near the end of another Gospel. The Spirit of God controlled the men who wrote the Gospels and He had His own reasons for telling certain things just before or just after some other thing.

The ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel is very important. It is one of the most important chapters in the Gospels. In the beginning of the chapter we read that the Lord called His twelve disciples together and gave them authority over all demons and wicked spirits. He gave them power to cure diseases and He sent them to preach about God's kingdom. People who are in the kingdom of God obey Him and do what He says. The disciples were sent to preach about God's kingdom and to cure sick people. He told His disciples not to take even necessary things like food or money or even an extra shirt. They were to depend

on God to give them all they needed. He told them not to stay in one house for a short time and then go to another. They were to stay in one house till they were ready to leave that town.

They would not like to do this if they were proud. We do not like to go to another person's home and let them care for us and give us all we need. We like to visit people in their homes and then leave whenever we are ready to leave. People may not want us to stay long. The Lord told His disciples they should not even take a supply of money.

In verse 7 we read about the ruler Herod. Herod wondered who Jesus really was. Some people said that Jesus was John the Baptist who had died but was alive again. Herod worried about this. We know that he worried because he said in verse 9, "I commanded my men to cut off John's head, but who is this person that I am hearing about? What trouble will he cause me? What is happening?" Herod was a wise man of the world but he could not understand Christ.

The apostles did not always understand Him either. We read in verse 13 that He told them to give the people some food to eat and they said, We have only five loaves and two fish. They said we have only. They were not thinking about what they had, but about what they did not have. There is a difference between a happy person and a sad person. The happy person says, "My cup is half full." The sad person says, "My cup is half empty." Yet both have the same amount in the cup. The disciples were like the sad people. They were there with the Lord Jesus Christ, but they said, "We have only five loaves" and then they talked about a small thing like money. This is what happened just before He spoke to those who wanted to be His disciples in verses 57 to 62.

Christ was praying in verse 18 and His prayer brought His disciples closer to the most important thing. Then He told them in verse 21 not to tell anyone that He, the Son of Man, would suffer many things, nor that the religious leaders would reject Him and kill Him but God would raise Him from death on the third day. He would suffer, be rejected, and die, but He would have new life. This would happen to Him, the Son of Man. He

said, "This will happen to Me. This is why I came into the world." He was God and knew everything that would happen to Him.

We do not understand just how He thought. He was a Man and He was God. We may be able to understand when we are in heaven. He was telling them what would happen to Him because He knew from the beginning everything that would happen to Him. He said, The Son of Man must suffer . . . We are thinking of the cost of following Jesus. Here we learn what the cost is. He must suffer, be rejected, be killed and rise again, and He said, If any man wants to follow Me, he must forget himself and take up his cross every day and follow Me. They wanted to follow Him, so He told them what it would cost. We may understand more clearly what Jesus said if we put it this way: we must forget ourselves and take up His cross every day and follow Him. For a person will lose his own life if he wants to save it, but he will save his life if he loses it for the Lord's sake. Will a man gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his own life?

We read almost the same words in Matthew 16:26. It says, Will a man gain anything if he gains the whole world but loses his life? The Lord does not mean that the person will be lost in hell, but He means that the person's life in this world is useless. It is lost. A person may be saved forever in heaven, but his life may have been useless while he was living on earth. There are many Christians who have good minds and healthy bodies and money and many good things, but their lives are lost; they are useless to God.

Paul did not believe that a person could be saved at one time and afterwards be lost for ever, but he said, I beat my own body and work very hard to control myself because I do not want to be put out of the race after I have called others into the race, 1 Corinthians 9:27. Paul was afraid that he might become useless to God and that God would put him aside so he would get old and more useless still and forgotten. Paul was very much afraid that this might happen to him, so he said, "I beat my own body and control my desires. I must not become useless to God. I must be careful every day until I go to heaven."

The Lord said that it is possible for our life to become useless and Paul believed that it was possible. We can think of many men and women who could be useful to God, but they are not. They may be rich and clever and seem happy, but their lives do not count for God. God has put them to one side and uses someone else to do His work. God does His work through people and we should be willing to let Him use us.

In the book of Esther, Mordecai told Esther, "God will save us from our enemies, but He will use someone else to save us if you do not speak to the king for us. You and all your family will be killed," Esther 4:14. He meant that God would use Esther to save the Jews if she was willing, but He would use someone else if Esther was not willing to do what God told her to do. She would cause herself and her family to be killed by trying to save her own life. This is just the same as the truth which the Lord taught in Luke 9:24. You may lose your life for Christ's sake, but you really keep it. This is perfectly true; God said it. It is also very simple and plain.

Sometimes we pray that God would keep us from thinking like people of the world. We are in great danger of thinking just like the people of the world around us. We want our children to think like most other children think. We want to be great men and women in the world, because other people want to be great in the world. Christ does not say that. He tells us to be different. We should have other desires. This is why the Lord Jesus said very definitely, You cannot serve two masters, Luke 16:13. It is impossible — we cannot do it. The Lord Jesus did not say, "Don't try to serve two masters." He said that we cannot serve two masters. One master would tell us to do one thing and another master would tell us to do a different thing. The two masters want different things, and so we cannot serve both.

We need to be honest with ourselves when we think of serving self or serving Christ. Are we willing to live just as Christ wants us to do? Can we honestly say to God, "Father, this is the way You want me to think and live. This is Your rule for my life. Christ lived by Your rule and many others have lived by Your rule, so I know it is possible." We should pray to God and

tell Him we want to live according to His plan, and then really live for God in our daily life. We should live for God in whatever work we do.

Can we really tell God that we will obey Him? It will not be easy to obey Him. We need to think of our own life and our own plans and then look at these Bible verses and see what God wants us to do. Are we ready to live as He wants us to? We should honestly see what it means to live for ourselves. What does it mean? The Lord Jesus said, "Gain the whole world and lose himself—lose himself." God has bought us by the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross to use us for Himself. We will lose our life of usefulness for God if we live for self. If we have wasted our life we will be very much ashamed when we meet our divine Lord. It will be shame for us in heaven if no one can say, "I am glad that you came to me and told me about the Lord Jesus, the sinner's Friend."

We may soon be called to heaven and then the Lord Jesus will judge our lives. The Lord Jesus may come at any minute to take His people home to heaven and the next thing which the Bible tells us about is the time when the Lord Jesus will judge His people, 2 Corinthians 5:10. This may happen at any time. Are we happy when we think of the Lord Jesus looking over our life and judging it? Paul said, We fear the Lord and so we try to persuade men, 2 Corinthians 5:11. He said that just after he had said, We must all come before Christ to be judged by Him, verse 10. Paul knew that he would stand before Christ to be judged by Him, so he suffered great pain and worked very hard to bring others to Christ.

Are we really happy about the way we are using our time and our strength? Are we happy about the way we are living and the things we are doing? Are we happy about what we did last week or last month or last year? Soon we will stand before Christ to be judged by Him. How would we live today if we knew that it was our last day here on earth, and that soon we will be judged by Christ? We ought to live today in such a way that we will not be ashamed if He should come tomorrow.

The Lord said, If any man wants to follow Me, he must forget

himself and take up his cross every day and follow Me, Luke 9:23. Then in verse 57 a man came to Jesus and said, I will follow You wherever You go. All the things we read between these verses tell us something about following Christ.

The man came and said, I will follow You. The Lord said in verse 23 that a man must take up his cross every day if he wants to follow Christ. Many people have said and written very foolish things about taking up our cross. Some write about the cross and say, "Carry your cross with a smile." Many people say, "It is just another cross that I must carry," when they lose something or something goes wrong. They say, "That poor woman has a heavy cross to carry all her life."

We must try to understand correctly the word which the Holy Spirit has given us. He is talking about a spiritual truth. Losing money or having trouble in our life is not a cross. There are not different kinds of crosses. We cannot say, "This is my cross and that is his cross." God may be teaching us lessons through these troubles and sufferings, but they are not crosses.

This is what the Bible teaches: the cross means dying to ourselves. A man was going to die when he went out of Jerusalem carrying a cross on his back. He was going to die slowly; he was going to die in great pain, but he was going to die. The man who carried that cross did not carry it with a smile. It was not easy for him to carry the cross on which he was to die. He understood that he was soon going to die when he carried that cross. He might have said, "The cross that I am carrying is the end of me. I cannot live for myself any more."

Paul said, I die every day, 1 Corinthians 15:31, and, We are like sheep going to be killed, Romans 8:36. Every day he died a new death, for the sake of the believers in Corinth.

Let us remember that the cross means dying. The Bible teaches this meaning. The cross does not mean some difficult little thing which happens to us, but it means the death of self—the end of self. We should always remember this.

The man said, "I will follow you," but the Lord replied, "I want you to remember something. Foxes have holes and birds have nests. It is right that animals and birds have places where

they can rest. The Creator has given them the right to have a place to rest, but the Son of Man has no place to lay down to rest." This word lay is used only three times in the Gospels. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world His mother wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a place where people put food for their cattle, Luke 2:7. He rested in this manger when He was a baby. When He was on the cross He said, It is finished, then He bowed His head and died, John 19:30. The word bowed means He laid His head on His own chest. It is the same word as the one in Luke 2:7, where His mother laid Him in a manger. He never found a place where He could fully rest in peace and comfort in this world. Other people went to their own homes, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, John 7:53 and 8:1. This was the way of the cross. He had no place where He could really rest from the time He was born until the time He died.

Paul and Silas were whipped and beaten and their backs were bleeding, but they sang and praised God in the jail at Philippi, Acts 16:25. They were praying and singing until the middle of the night and then the jailer wanted to be saved. They did not say to him, "Couldn't you give us a bed to sleep on and some water to wash ourselves with? We will talk with you about being saved in the morning." They might not have had any rest the night before because of the noise of the people who were angry with them. They certainly had not rested during the day, but in the night they prayed and sang and then explained the Gospel to the man who had beaten them. They did not rest at all that night and in the morning when they were freed from prison, Paul went to the Christians and comforted them.

We might expect others to comfort us if we had suffered like Paul and Silas had, but Paul said, "The believers at Philippi will worry about me, so I must go and tell them we are free again." He went back to Lydia's house and comforted the believers although his back was sore and bleeding. Then he went to Thessalonica and Berea and on to Corinth to preach the Gospel, although he had not slept for two nights and had not rested for two days.

Why did Paul not stop to rest? Maybe he said, "I am not here to rest. I came to preach about Christ and I am going to Thessalonica to preach about Christ." Paul took up his cross every day and followed Jesus.

The Lord said to another man, Follow Me, but the man said, Lord, first let me go... We should remember that we can put the Lord first or we can put ourselves first, but we cannot really say, "LORD", and then say, "First let me go..." We cannot say LORD, and then say, ME FIRST. We must understand that He has to rule over us before He can use us as His servants. HE is first, not I.

The Lord's servant often finds it difficult to know how much he can do for his loved ones and still obey the Lord. The Lord Jesus says, If a person loves father or mother, son or daughter more than Me, he is not worthy of Me, Matthew 10:37. It is hard to love Christ more than our own father or mother, sister or brother, but this is necessary.

A missionary in Africa received a letter from a doctor in Canada. The doctor told the missionary that his mother was very sick. The missionary wanted to go to Canada to see his mother before she died, but there was a lot of trouble in Africa at that time and it was difficult for him to leave the work of the Lord. The doctor said he should come soon if he wanted to see his mother before she died. He was the only son in the family and he felt he should go, but it was hard to decide what to do.

The missionary took the letter to his friend and asked him what he should do. The friend said, "Our mothers knew that we might not be there to comfort them when they died. They knew this when they gave us to the Lord to serve Him. We were young when we left our home and our mothers to serve the Lord and we did not think of the time when our mothers would be dying and we would be far away in another land. But our mothers thought of the day when they would die and they willingly gave us to the Lord."

The missionary stayed in Africa and his mother died alone in the hospital soon afterwards. The missionary wanted to go to his mother, but the Lord's work was more important. It was not

an easy decision, but he was sure that he did what was right. He often remembered what his friend had told him, "Our mothers knew that they might have to die while we were far away in another country, but they gave us to the Lord anyway."

The same missionary has a son who has chosen to serve the Lord and to go far away from home. It is difficult for the father, but he wants his son to go and serve the Lord. It is an honor for the father, although it is hard to see him go. The missionary has made the same decision that his own mother made. It would have been nice to have his son living nearby and living an ordinary life, but the will of the Lord is most important and He is worthy of all we do or suffer for Him. The man in Luke 9 said, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. He meant, "Please, Lord, let me go and take care of my father, and then I will follow You." But Jesus said, Follow Me.

Another man said, "I will follow You, but first I want to go and say good-bye to my family. I want to gather the family together and have a good time and say good-bye." But the Lord said, "No, this will take too much time. The man who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for God's kingdom." God rules in His kingdom. That is what the kingdom of God means. The kingdom of God is God's rule and authority in a person's life. Not just sometime in the future, because God is ruling now. Everything else must be put out of our heart and God must rule. Everything else must be second to God's will.

We read about the conversion of the Apostle Paul in Acts 9:3-9. Paul fell on his face on the road to Damascus because he was blinded by the glory of Christ. It was real; it was not imagination. It was not a flash of lightning that blinded him. Even some Christians say that Paul did not see a real light, but only a new truth. Paul said what it was in 1 Corinthians 15:8, Last of all He appeared to me also. He did not say, "It appeared to me," but "He appeared to me." That sight of Christ blinded Paul so much that he did not see other things any more but he saw himself as a man who was nailed to a cross. He died with Christ, but he was alive and Christ lived in Him. He said, Lord, what do You want me to do?

Paul asked two questions, Lord, who are You? and, Lord, what do You want me to do? The answers to these two questions were joined together through all of Paul's life and they cannot be separated in our lives either. What we think about Christ will control what we do for Him. Paul said, "Who are You, Lord?" and Jesus showed Paul who He was. Our understanding of who Christ is will control what we do. He is Christ; He is Lord; He is worthy of all that we can say or do for Him. His disciples worshiped Him when they saw Him, Matthew 28:17, and then they went and worked for Him. I can really work for Christ when I know how great and glorious He is.

Paul did not know then how much he would have to suffer for the Lord's sake. Would he have been ready to suffer it all if he had known what was coming? We cannot be sure about this, but the things Paul wrote in 2 Timothy may give us the answer. Paul was a Christian for about thirty years. It may surprise us to learn that he spent eight years of those thirty preparing for God's service, he spent ten or twelve years traveling and preaching the Gospel, and he spent about eight years in prison.

Would we say, "Lord, You are worthy of my service," if we knew that we would have to suffer as Paul did? Paul wrote the letters to the believers in Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and the one to Philemon when he was in prison. He wrote 2 Timothy when he was in prison again at the end of his life. He suffered very much for God. Did God not know that Paul could have shaken the world if he had been free to travel and preach for those thirty years? God knew the best way to plan Paul's life. He did not make a mistake when He led Paul to prepare for His service for eight years, led him to serve for twelve years, and allowed him to live in prison for eight or ten more years.

Paul said, Let no one trouble me any more, for I have the scars on my body which show that I am a slave of Jesus, Galatians 6:17. He said these words near the beginning of his service for Christ. His body was marked and scarred like the slaves who lived in those days. Slaves had a mark burned into their skin to show that they belonged to a certain master. Paul's body was covered with marks and scars. The whip left a mark every time he was

beaten, 2 Corinthians 11:24,25. The stones left scars when people tried to kill him for Christ's sake. The men at Lystra threw stones at Paul until they thought he was dead, Acts 14:19. So now Paul could say that those scars showed that he belonged to Jesus Christ.

Paul also said, See what big letters I make as I write to you with my own hand, Galatians 6:11. He was nearly blind because of all his sufferings. He had been in the sea for a day and a night when the ship had sunk which he was sailing on. People in different places had kicked and beaten him. Paul's enemies said that he was an ordinary, weak little man, and yet really he suffered all this for Jesus' sake.

Many of the believers who had been saved through Paul turned against him when he was near the end of his life. Many churches refused to have anything more to do with him and he wrote to Timothy that everyone in the province of Asia had turned against him, 2 Timothy 1:15. The province of Asia would include Ephesus, where Timothy had been teaching, 1 Timothy 1:3, and other churches, and they had all deserted Paul. This made Paul feel very badly. The Lord Jesus suffered and was rejected by His own people. This is one of the hardest things for us—to be deserted, refused by those we love, those we have brought to Christ. They do not even thank us for helping them.

Perhaps we could say to Paul, "You have been like Christ; you have nearly reached the top in the Christian life because you have suffered so much. Before you suffered these things you had died in a spiritual way and you lived a new spiritual life." That is really the way a Christian should live. We too have decided to suffer with Christ; we have died with Him on the cross in a spiritual way and are willing to give up all our earthly things for Him. We are like Paul and the believers at Philippi; we are trying to reach the level where we are really living like Christ, Philippians 3:10,11. That does not mean that we are trying to be good enough to get life when the dead are raised to life, but it means that we want Christ's life to be seen in us now. Christ gives us a new spiritual life when we are saved, and now we want to live that life every day.

Would Paul be willing to suffer so many things for Christ again? He lost all his friends. He was near the end of the path which he had begun to travel when he was saved on the Damascus road. Now he knew what Christ meant when He said, "I will show him how much he must suffer for My sake," Acts 9:16. His suffering was the great test of his love for Christ. He said, "Perhaps my life's blood is to be poured out like an offering," Philippians 2:17.

Would Paul have been willing to suffer so much for Christ if he had known at the beginning what that suffering was? He has given us the answer to this question in 2 Timothy chapter 4.

He wrote this chapter when he was very near to the time of his death. He knew all that it costs to follow Christ and he was about to die. Timothy was the person whom Paul loved most and could talk to plainly. Timothy was probably deciding what to do with his own life, so Paul told him what to do. He told Timothy what he felt about serving Christ completely, with his whole heart. Did he say, "Timothy, I would not give everything to Christ if I had to choose again. I would think more about my own comfort. I think I have been too sincere, too wholehearted for Christ...? What did he say? He said, I want you to swear an oath—I call upon you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, the One who died and Who will judge the living and the dead people. Because of His coming and His kingdom, I command you to preach the Word; tell it, whether the time seems right or not; convince, reproach and encourage. Teach with all patience. For the time will come when men will not listen to true teaching, 2 Timothy 4:1-3.

Paul shows us his own life in these words. He preached the Word of God. He preached the Gospel whether the time seemed right or not. He convinced, encouraged, and even reproached people. He was always serving God whether it was easy or hard. This is how Paul had worked, and now he told Timothy that he should do the same as he himself had done. He loved Timothy very much, but he told him to serve God with all his heart. Paul could say, "All that I have seen or suffered has not changed my mind. My friends and loved ones have left me. No one stayed with me when I was on trial before Caesar

(2 Timothy 4:16). I will soon die, Timothy, but I want you to do the same as I have done. This is the only path for the Christian."

These verses show us Paul's mind and heart. He loved Christ as much as he had ever done. His heart belonged to Christ right to the end of his life. Even death would not change that love. Paul made his words even stronger when he said, I am ready to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance; I have been true to the faith, and now the prize is waiting for me, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord who is the righteous Judge, will give me on that day. And He will not only give that prize to me, but to all those who love Him and wait for Him to appear. Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas loves this present world and has left me and gone away to Thessalonica, 2 Timothy 4:6-10.

We can see three men here. One is Paul who accepted a command from Christ on the road to Damascus. He is now at the end of thirty years of a hard life; he had suffered many things for Christ. He looked back over it all and told Timothy, the second man, "Timothy, I really want you to follow the path that I have followed." But there was a third man whose name is Demas. Paul loved Demas deeply. In an earlier letter he said that Demas was a servant who had shared Paul's troubles and trials, Colossians 4:14. Now Paul was sad as he told Timothy that Demas had turned from the right path. Demas did not become a bad man, but he wanted to enjoy life and was not willing to suffer for Christ with Paul.

Paul was in jail where he suffered many things. Demas loved the present world. Look again at the end of verse 8: all those who wait with love for Him to appear. Here are two men on two paths. One man loved Christ and waited for Him to appear. The other man did not look for Christ to appear because he loved this present world. It does not say that he loved this present evil world. It does not say what kind of world it is, but it says that it is this present world. It is not the coming world or age which we read about in Hebrews 6:5. Demas loved this present world.

So we see these two men. One man wanted to save himself trouble and suffering and sacrifice. He left Paul and the path that Paul walked in, but Paul followed that path to the end. One man loved the appearing of Christ; one man loved the present world. Paul clearly saw these two paths and said, "I wonder what I should tell Timothy to do? Should I tell him to take care of himself and enjoy this present world?" Then Paul looked into Christ's face and thought of Christ's coming and kingdom, of His appearing and the reward He would give, and he said to Timothy, My greatest wish for you is that you would follow in my path and share my joy. He said, "Do your best to come to me soon. Take My place in the race. You can go on when I drop out of the race." These are the words of Paul when he was near the end of his life and remembered all he had suffered for serving Christ and saw the dangers of loving the present world, and he had made his choice. He said, "I would suffer it all again for Jesus' sake."

May the Lord help us to remember always the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom. We could look at the present world, the world Demas loved, and we too could love it. We also look at the cost of truly following Christ, and we can bow humbly before Him and say, "You are worthy, Lord. I want to follow You to the end no matter how much it costs." The Lord help us to do this by His grace and for His glory and for His name's sake.

ME FIRST? (Studies on Discipleship)

TEST 9 The Cost

(Use Exam Form on the website menu)

Enter the letter of the correct answer.

1. The cost of being a disciple of Christ is
 - a. a lot of money.
 - b. our good works.
 - c. the cross.

2. Herod was a wise man of the world
 - a. and followed Jesus.
 - b. but he could not understand Christ.
 - c. and understood who Jesus was.

3. Jesus was God and knew
 - a. nothing of what would happen to Him.
 - b. some of what would happen to Him.
 - c. everything that would happen to Him.

4. Paul was afraid that his life might become
 - a. useful to God.
 - b. useless to God.
 - c. a blessing to others.

5. If we waste our lives now, when we meet the Lord we will be
 - a. proud.
 - b. happy.
 - c. ashamed.

Enter TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

6. Taking our cross means dying to ourselves.
7. The Lord never found a place where He could fully rest in peace in this world.
8. Paul took up his cross every day and followed Jesus.
9. The kingdom of God is God's rule and authority in a person's life.
10. Demas was willing to suffer for Christ with Paul.

What Do You Say?