

Character, Conduct, and Calling

In the first lesson of the Leadership Development Series, we referred to the fact that after believing one needs to move into discipleship, which leads to becoming a *continuer* in His Word. This process is explained by Jesus.

John 8:31-32 NASB

(31) So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

(32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

There are two benefits to becoming a disciple and continuing:

- ◆ knowing the truth and
- ◆ being made free.

We need to remember that freedom is an *objective* of our walk with the Lord. Many times we think we are free when we aren't. This was true of the Jews of Jesus' day. They thought that because they were of Abraham's seed, they couldn't be in bondage to anyone (John 8:33). Today, many think, I am a born again, spirit filled Christian; I am not in bondage, I am free.

If people don't know that they are in bondage, it is very hard to convince them that they need to be free. In our society, things have become so twisted, the requirements of God so compromised, immorality so accepted that we no longer recognize them as bondage. However, it is the responsibility of a leader "to set the captives free". To do this he must be free himself and know how to help others be free.

TWO TYPES OF BONDAGE

There are two types of bondage:

1. that of which we are "aware", and
2. that of which we are "unaware".

Or, as the psychologists would say, "conscious and unconscious". We can be aware or conscious of a bondage to sin but hide it from others. This is epidemic today with those who are in bondage to pornography through Internet sites. However, we can be unaware of being in bondage to attitudes of the heart. Examples of these are prejudice and unforgiveness. These types of unconscious bondage can prevent us from moving on in the Lord and even cause us to be unable to accomplish the work that the Lord has assigned us.

Conscious bondage is easily recognized and can be dealt with in a straight forward manner for the Scriptures are clear about sin. We are made aware of sin by reading the Word and by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 6:12 NASB

(12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

Romans 6:16-18 NASB

(16) Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

(17) But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

(18) and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Paul says that whosoever sins is in bondage. God wants to set us free. We know to repent and turn from sin. We know how to confess our sins and be forgiven. That is something that is necessary in the life of every believer.

A person may think of himself as free because he has been delivered from bondage of some of the externals of sin such as tobacco, alcohol, drugs, etc. If we do no more than deal with the externals, then we are still trying to obey the Law to produce our own righteousness.

Jesus is concerned about the internals. In the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew chapters five through seven, Jesus moves the requirements of God from the *externals* of the Law to the *internals* of the heart. Our conformity to rules of behavior, which is what is required by most of our denominational Churches, is not nearly as difficult as having the conditions of our heart changed, which is a requirement of the Lord. As the Holy Spirit begins to do this within us, we are put under great pressure by the Lord, by circumstances, and by other people. That is why many choose not to continue.

A person cannot be set free if he is unaware that he is in bondage, because we must be active participants in our deliverance. For example, the fear of man is a bondage that the Scriptures isolate and define very clearly.

Proverbs 29:25 NASB

(25) The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.

However, we explain away our fear of man by calling it being bashful, timid, diplomatic, etc. Jesus presents the way to true freedom—knowing the truth. If we continue with Him, He will lead us into a place of freedom. He will do it by manifesting every area in our lives where we are in bondage. The *unconscious* bondage must become *conscious* before we can deal with it.

Only you and God know if you are free *internally*. Only you know what you do when no one else is around and you are tempted. Only you know which web sites you visit when you are by yourself. Only you know what you do when you are on a tight schedule, get behind every slow moving vehicle and hit every red light in town. Only you know what makes your personal thermostat blow. Only you know if the fear of man makes you a people pleaser.

HIDDEN BONDAGE IN THE HEART

The Lord must show us our hearts for us to deal with hidden bondage . Many times He does this through the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Under the right circumstances, what's in our heart will come out.

Matthew 12:34 NASB

(34) "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

We can see a good example of this in the life of Job. Job was a mature Man of God, yet he had some unconscious bondage in his life that the Lord wanted to deal with.

Job 1:5 NASB

(5) When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job 3:25-26 NASB

(25) "For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me.

(26) "I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."

Job routinely offered sacrifice for his children just in case they had sinned. He was very careful to do this. Later, he said that he wasn't at peace but, instead full of dread because what he had feared came upon him. So, we can see that Job was in bondage to a fear of losing everything (because that was what came upon him) and he legalistically tried to maintain the status quo by offering sacrifices continually for his children. In other words, he felt like everything was going too well and he wanted to do everything right to make sure that things didn't go wrong. This is bondage. These things covered other deeper things in his heart as we shall see.

The Lord allowed Satan to move against Job in several ways but always put a **limit** on Satan's activities. In the middle of his tragic circumstances, his heart problem is exposed.

Job 13:15 NASB

(15) "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

The first half of this verse is often quoted as a testimony to Job's faith and patience. However, the second half exposes his heart. The Lord does not allow us to maintain our ways before Him. It is vain to argue our ways when the Lord is teaching us His ways.

If we desire to continue with Him, it is the Lord's obligation to show us when and where we are in bondage. Not to condemn us, but to do us good by showing us where we are stunting our spiritual growth. Many times, He shows us through the circumstances that He allows into our life.

If we are Children of God, then there are no accidents in our walk with Him.

Romans 8:28 NASB

(28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

All things mean that every circumstance regardless of appearance is **redemptive** in nature. The Lord can and will use it to our good. There are no un-needed circumstances or people in our life. The Lord *blesse*s or *afflic*ts us with people or circumstances according to our need.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 NASB

(2) "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

(3) "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

The wilderness was appointed by God for the Children of Israel. He had three reasons for leading them through the wilderness:

1. to humble them,
2. to test them; and
3. to know their hearts.

Obviously, God is God and knew the conditions of their heart; therefore, it was them that needed to know their hearts. This would be revealed as they were put to the test.

Deuteronomy 8:16 NASB

(16) "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

This was done by the Lord with a redemptive purpose. He intended to do them good at the end. When it was all over, they would be better off because they would know their hearts.

Why does God have to show us our heart? Because we can't know it except by the revelation of God.

Jeremiah 17:9 NASB

(9) "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

We can't understand our own heart, because it is deceitful. Only the Lord can show us our heart and bring understanding. He says in the next verse, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, ...".

The Scriptures give us three types of problems that reside in our heart: errors, hidden faults, and presumptuous sins.

Psalms 19:12-14 NASB

(12) Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.

(13) Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins: Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

(14) Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

For the meditation of our heart and the words of our mouth to be acceptable to Him, we have to have all three of these areas dealt with so that they don't rule over us (keep us in bondage).

DESIRE AND ABILITY

We receive a new nature when we are born again. With this new nature comes the desire to please God. Jesus said in John 8:29, "...for I do always those things that please Him" (speaking of the Father). This is another objective of our continuing with Him—that we might have the ability to do only those things that please the Father. We must be loosed from all forms of bondage in order to be free to please the Father.

The *desire* to please God and the *ability* to please Him are two different things. While we receive a new nature, we also still have an old nature. The desire that God gives us to please Him is in conflict with other strong desires that we have, such as, the desire to please ourselves or others. We are in bondage to self, ideas, opinions, and especially to the desires of those that we love. We simply cannot please God when we are in this type of bondage.

But, as we continue with Him, He begins to deal with our *character*, which, in turn, affords the *ability* we now lack to fulfill our new *desire*. **Nature is given; character is developed.** The new birth does not give us a new character, only a new nature. Character is developed as we continue in His Word, discover God's will and then by doing the things that we discover will please Him. As this happens, we develop the ability to fulfill our desire to do God's will.

Jesus said, "*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). The Kingdom of God is a condition in the heart of the believer where the will of God is done, even as it is in heaven. But, "God is God", you say, "Isn't His will always done?"

We need to understand that in the Greek there are two different words used for our English word "will"—*boulema* and *thelema*. *Boulema* means the eternal counsels of God which are unfolding through the ages—His purpose—His determination. It is going to be done whether we like it or not! God's intention will come to pass. However, *thelema* means God's desire or wish and frequently depends upon the response of each individual for fulfillment (an example of this is salvation—it is not God's will, i.e., desire, that any should perish).

Jesus was telling the Disciples to pray that God's wish or desire be done in Earth as it is in Heaven. Can you see that God's will (wish, desire) is not being done on earth as it is in heaven? This has nothing to do with the eternal counsels of God, but rather His intimate intervention in the affairs of our lives.

It is not the will (wish, desire) of God that divorce, family problems, poverty, sickness, etc.

continue in the world unchallenged. God sent his King to change and adjust the situation to conform to His desire and we have inherited the job.

Is it possible for our everyday conduct to be so closely attuned to the Father's will that all of our actions are pleasing to Him? Yes, it is possible! Then, why can't we do it? Because, the *ability factor* has to be taken into consideration.

For the ability factor to be implemented it is necessary that we embrace the process of change. This requires strong **motivation** because we all resist change. It is a painful process.

There are two forms of motivation:

- Internal, and
- External.

Internal motivation is provided by the desire that is born in our hearts to serve God. This desire is birthed many times when we perceive the purpose of God in our life and long before we have developed the ability to accomplish His purpose. When we first recognize the purpose of God in our life, our tendency is to fulfill it with the arm of the flesh. God cannot allow us to be successful in the flesh. We must learn to depend upon Him for our success. This means that our attempt to serve Him by fulfilling our purpose in the flesh will meet with obstacles and various difficulties. As this occurs we lose motivation and become disillusioned with the promises of God.

However, if we have a heart that desires to grow, the Lord will also provide motivation for us through **external circumstances**. The scriptures call these external motivations **tribulations and trials**. Growth in the depths and understandings of God do not occur without adversity.

It is our **will** that determines what finds expression in our life. It is through our wills that we exercise **choice**.

Our choices always reflect our **character** and produce our **conduct**. The will of man expresses itself in 3 ways:

- Actions,
- Thoughts, and
- Intents (motives)

Actions have external consequences and can be controlled by the will to conform to an external standard without necessarily dealing with the thoughts and intents of the heart. A hypocrite is one whose actions are not in accord with his thoughts and intents. An actor is one whose actions conform to an outward script while his thoughts and intents are completely different.

Our character is determined by our thoughts and intents. Since we are to have the character of Jesus, then our thoughts and intents must conform to the thoughts and intents of Jesus. The scriptures refer to this as having "the mind of Christ". We are to be "transformed by the renewing of our mind". Our minds are renewed by having the mind of Christ.

The key element in having the mind of Christ is the human will. Jesus exchanged His will for the Will of the Father. We must exchange our will for the Will of Jesus.

THREE HINDRANCES TO LEADERSHIP

Even though we have a burning desire to know and do God's will, we seem to fail in our ability to do so. An example of the difference is illustrated by a child that is just beginning to learn to tie his shoes. The *desire* is there; but, the nervous system has to be *developed* enough to provide the coordination necessary to accomplish the task.

In the deep hidden recesses of our heart we can find the three primary hindrances to our developing the ability to always do God's will. I believe that every believer that has the desire to continue with the Lord must address these three hindrances before he can reach the place of fulfilling the purposes of God.

While some of these may be stronger or weaker in various people, I believe they all exist to some extent and must be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit:

- Rebellion,
- Resentment, and
- Independence

Rebellion

There are multiple references in the Word of God to His commandments and the obedience required. The rebel in us rises up when the command of God or the revealed will of God is in opposition to our own will or desire. We then attempt to twist or misinterpret the commands (rationalize) until we feel free to do what we wanted to do to begin with. Deep within us, we know when we do this. We may not admit it, but we know when we have done it. God knows too, and will do something about it.

Resentment

Resentment is more subtle than rebellion. We can move in obedience and yet have a seething resentment within us that may be even more repugnant to God than actual disobedience. When we say "*Why would God treat me like this?*", we are doubting God's character, His goodness and wisdom and may actually be hardening our heart to His commands. Too often we put up a facade of obedience, but harbor a spirit of resentment.

Independence

We cannot do anything of ourselves or for our own glorification. We are part of a cooperative

effort; we move according to prescribed rules and regulations. This attitude of independence is manifested when we say, "*show me Lord and I'll take it from there*". We don't learn to pray for the sick, cast out devils, or even pray or study on our own. We have to learn dependence. God will allow us to operate on our own for a while, but the moment we begin to exhibit a method and try to tell God how to do it, He will arrange a situation where our own way just won't meet His requirements. Then, it becomes a choice of rebellion, resentment, or return to the source of our dependence.

These three "*characteristics of our old nature*" must be brought out into the open to be faced and dealt with before God can mature us in a discipleship relationship. These three attack, complicate, infect, and thwart our **ability** to carry out our **desire** to please the Father.

God will help us overcome these hindrances. He intends to do a work in our heart that will enable Him to establish His Lordship in us. It is possible to enter into such a relationship with God that we can walk with Him without rebellion, resentment, or independence to hinder us.

The early Church exhibits this phase of continuing in the lives of the members. Paul and Barnabas are ministering in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to people who were born again, baptized in water, and filled with the Holy Spirit. They were leaders in the Christian community of their day. But, they needed something else and Paul is preparing them for continuing.

Acts 14:22 NASB

(22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

They needed to be strengthened because coming under the Lordship of Jesus meant that they would go through many tribulations.

In our denominational Churches today, there is little of this happening. We teach an "easy grace" that requires no suffering on our part. This is contrary to Scripture.

1 Peter 5:10 NASB

(10) After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

To be perfected, conformed to the image of Jesus, confirmed in our calling, and established as unshakable requires that we "continue in His word" and this will take us through many tribulations causing us to suffer as our old nature is reckoned dead.

If you continue, God is going to work on you, changing your character so that you can carry out your desire to do His will. When desire becomes ability to obey, the Lordship of Jesus becomes a reality in your life.

COMING INTO ALIGNMENT

As we continue in God, we learn how to turn our desires into ability. We find our character conforming to the teachings of Jesus. And the hindrances along the way become testimonials of our struggle with change. In all of this our will begins to come into alignment with God's will.

God's will is like a straight line. It is straight, inflexible, and unchanging. It does not bend for anyone. It becomes the standard by which all actions are measured. It is the yardstick, the ruler of the Ruler. It is the same for every person regardless of race, color, station in life, intellectual or physical abilities.

Jesus always did the things that were pleasing to the Father. Jesus' will is also like a straight line because He only did the will of the Father. The ability to always do the will of the Father was a learned accomplishment in Jesus' life (Hebrews 5:8). Just as he learned to obey by experience, so do we.

Putting aside one's will for the will of another can cause suffering. Jesus' will is perfectly aligned with God's will in all instances—regardless of personal inconvenience, preference, pain, or outcome.

Now, let's consider a third will, the *will of man*. This is where confusion and chaos come into the picture. Even though a believer, a person still has a will that is self-serving. He has a **desire** to do the will of God—to make his will "line up" to God's will—but the believer must *become a continuer*. The desire must become ability. The new nature must mature into **conduct**.

Continuing in the Word of God is designed to bring our will into alignment with the heartbeat of God. We are told how this will happen by the message of Isaiah as quoted by Luke:

Luke 3:4-6 NASB

(4) as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.

(5) 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;

(6) AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.'"

The mountains of pride, arrogance, self-will, rebellion, and resentment must be brought down; while the valleys of depression, despair, and loneliness must be brought up. The curves of deflection and deviation from the known will of God must be straightened. The ruts of past habit, pattern, and "my ways" of doing things smoothed out. Then, those around us can begin to see Jesus in us—demonstrated in a life that is changed and conformed to the image and will of God's Son.

To continue with God is a great adventure. It is not going to be easy and it is not going to always be pleasant. To not continue may provide some minor comfort at the moment, but it is to lose out

on intimacy and closeness with the Lord. Are we willing to spend some time with the **tribulations** in order to come into alignment?

As we come into alignment we learn that there are **rules** that must be followed. *Why rules?* Didn't Jesus say that we would be free? Doesn't that mean no rules? Of course not! We are free because the rules have been written on our heart. We obey because they are part of our nature.

It's the rules that cause rebellion, resentment, and independence to be revealed in our life. Every time we face a rule, we have each of these choices. It is when we lay aside our will and assume the will of the Lord that we learn dependence. Remember, God doesn't change His rules for anyone—we are the ones who must change.

Our hearts are revealed by how we obey the rules. Paul used "sports talk" to illustrate the situation.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NASB

(24) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

(25) Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

(26) Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

(27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

When a race is run, it is run by the rules. There is a judge's stand overlooking the field to make sure that all of the runners obey the rules. If a runner tries to take a shortcut across the field, then the judge will disqualify him from the race.

The meaning of the Greek word for *disqualified* is "ordered to stand aside". Paul is saying that you can run in such a way that you can be disqualified and therefore not be eligible for the reward. He was not afraid of losing his salvation, but of being disqualified for the crown—his reward for a specific assignment in the Father's business.

The rules are designed to bring us face to face with the requirements of God. Our choice to obey the rules will bring about a change in our character with a resulting change in our **conduct**.

CONFORMED TO JESUS

We keep saying that we must be conformed to the image of Christ, that our goal is to be like Jesus. What does it mean to be like Jesus? There are two things required to be like Him:

1. to have His character
2. to express His lifestyle

- in thought
- in word
- in action

Our character is expressed in our lifestyle. Our lifestyle is revealed by our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

Ask—Seek—Knock

How do we achieve in ourselves the ability to express Jesus in thought, word and action?

Matthew 7:7 NASB

(7) "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

This scripture reveals three things that we need to do—ask, seek, knock.

I believe that these typify our growth level in the Lord. When we first become Christians, we live at the "ask" level. This is the gift mentality. We've just learned that we have a loving Father that desires to bless us with all good things. We ask for everything that God said we could have. All of the promises are ours.

Prayer is involved in all of these areas. At the ask level we simply ask. "I want this Daddy." Our loving Father provides for us. However, many Christians don't even live on the "ask" level. They never ask for the things that God has already said that he would give. In James it says we "*have not because we ask not*". There are many things that we need to ask for in order to receive them. The second part of that scripture says that we ask and don't receive because we "*ask amiss*". We ask from the wrong motives. Just like an earthly father would not give his child something that the child was not ready to handle or was dangerous for the child, our heavenly Father does not give us things that we are not ready to handle or would harm us. God never said that He would answer our every prayer; He did say that He would provide our every need. There is a difference. We also forget sometimes that "no" is an answer.

The problem with many spirit filled people is that they become content with the "ask level" and never go beyond it. There is a tendency to treat the Lord like a head butler. "Hop to Lord, I need to pay the bills this month." God "winks" at this for a season; but, there comes a time when He wants us to grow up. When this happens, it appears to us that the Lord is not answering our prayers. We start rebuking the Devil and reading more books on faith and positive confession. When actually, God wants us to move on in Him.

However, as we continue to move beyond the "ask" level to the "seek" level, the type of prayer changes. There are things in the scripture that we are to ask for and there are things that we are told to seek. In Psalms 27:8 we are told to seek the Lord's face. Jesus told us to seek first the Kingdom of God. These are two things that we can't receive by asking; we have to seek. Seeking implies a whole lot more than a simple prayer of asking.

The dictionary defines seeking as "*to go in search, to look for, to pursue, to aim at, to entreat*". To pursue fits with our ideas of pursuing goals. We are seeking the Kingdom of God. We are seeking to be subject to the King. We are seeking to be like the King. These are the things that we are pursuing.

At first God treats us like a baby. Our slightest need is met. We ask and receive abundantly. But, as we begin to mature, He begins to teach us to seek. He stops being so quick to answer us so as to drive us to seek Him. After we have learned to "*seek*", the Lord leads us into the next level which is "*knocking*". Knocking has to do with ministry—knocking on the doors of the heart. Between seeking and knocking we have to learn stewardship. After learning to seek the Kingdom, we will find it. Then, we have to learn to **steward** the things of the Kingdom before we enter the "*knock*" level.

Seeking pre-supposes several things:

- **spiritual hunger**—What desire drives you? You must hunger for more or you will never seek.
- **dependence**—Whose strength sustains you? You must become dependent on God.
- **obedience**—What will you do when you find it? You will need to be obedient to follow Jesus.
- **enough maturity to establish priorities**—What is your number one priority? If you can't establish that then you will never seek.

As we begin to mature, the Lord puts more constraints on us. As our hunger for more of the things of God grows, it causes us to make choices about our priorities. We no longer have the time to do all that we want to do. We have to start choosing how we will spend our time. We can choose self interest or we can choose the things of God. We no longer have time for both. Being a disciple is time consuming. It requires effort on our part.

Maturing requires three things

1. Desire
2. Goals
3. Expenditure of energy.

The desire that is born in our hearts causes us to set goals and priorities. However, these are not accomplished without the expenditure of energy. You do not grow without effort. A passive spirit doesn't mature. We must actively participate in the maturing process. This requires discipline. We must discipline ourselves to maintain our focus on our priorities.

Activity & Attitude

We must learn to discipline ourselves in our **activity** (even good activity) and maintain a rein on our **attitudes**.

Luke 10:38-42 NASB

(38) Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.

(39) She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word.

(40) But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up *to Him* and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."

(41) But the Lord answered and said to her, "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;**

(42) but *only one thing is necessary*, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Choosing a wrong *activity* will always affect our *attitude* to the detriment of our spiritual progress. Let us choose according to the will of the Lord.