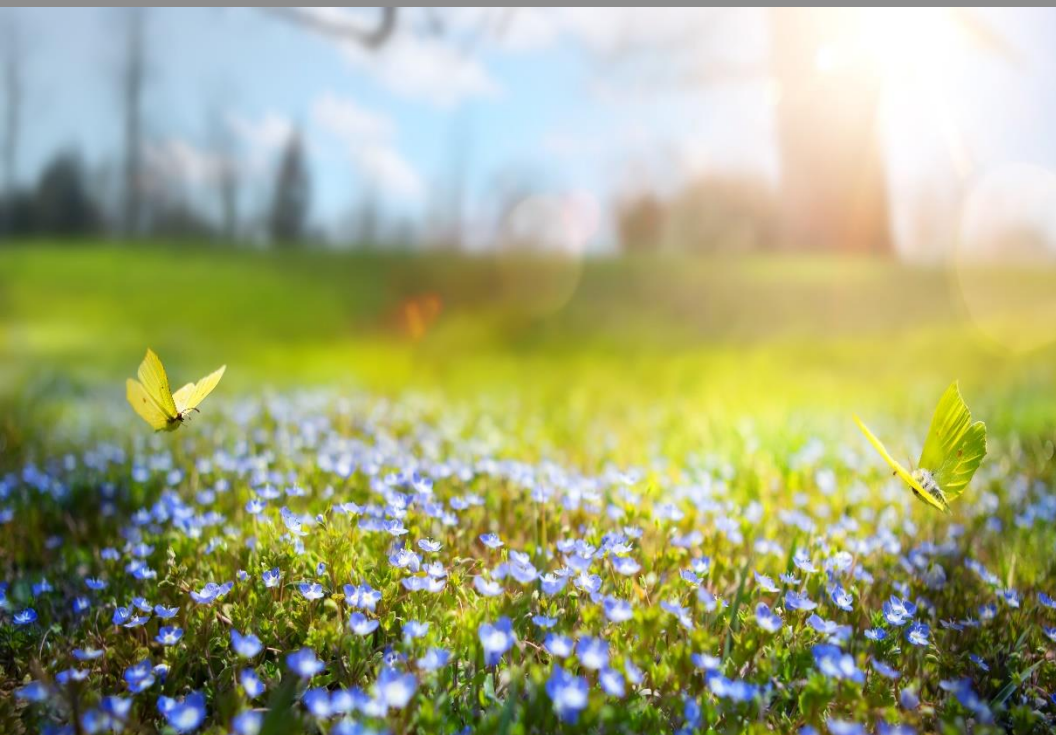


West End Messenger

March – April 2021



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Inside This Issue:

Article 1: “I Will Follow You, Lord”

Article 2: “I Don’t Believe In Church”

Article 3: How Can You Make A Difference In This World?

Article 4: Three Deceitful Characteristics Of Sin

Article 5: Are You Hungering And Thirsting For Righteousness – Or Craving Religion?

Article 6: Everything The New Testament Says About Music In Worship Today

Article 7: Limit Your Opportunities To Sin

Article 8: Running To Win The Prize

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Article 1

“I Will Follow You, Lord”

We all should reach a point in our lives when we say to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord.” But, when we do this, we should truly understand what we are saying. For, there are many who want to be disciples of Christ, but then do not commit to and follow Jesus in the way He desires. So, we need to learn three lessons about making this commitment from Luke 9:57-62.

1) Discipleship includes a high cost. As Jesus traveled on a road, someone came to Him and said, “I will follow you wherever you go” (Luke 9:57). But, Jesus said to him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

As this man was eager to follow Jesus, Jesus wanted this man to know what he was signing up for. He wanted him to know that it would not always be easy. In fact, Jesus said that He did not even have anywhere to lay His head (unlike the foxes and birds). Therefore, as you consider being Jesus’s disciple, you must consider that it has a high cost associated with it. While discipleship is worth the sacrifice, Jesus wants you to consider the cost prior to the time you begin following Him. It may cost you relationships. It may cost you financially. It may cost you suffering. It may even cost you your life.

2) Discipleship puts Jesus first. After this man, Jesus said to another, “Follow me” (Luke 9:59). But, that man told Jesus, “first let me go bury my father.” (Luke 9:59). Jesus responded, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60).

This man was willing to respond to Jesus’s invitation to be His disciple, but, he wanted to do something else *first*. While burying your father may seem like an important task, Jesus recognized that (in this case) it was more important to this man than his discipleship. Jesus knew that only those who were willing to put Him first were His true disciples. Therefore, as you consider

being Jesus’s disciple, you must consider that true discipleship always puts Jesus first. You must not let anything stand between you and following Jesus Christ. Not your family. Not your friends. Not your job. Not your worldly possessions. Not your earthly desires. Nothing!

3) Discipleship involves no turning back. Finally, another man said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house” (Luke 9:61). Then, Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

This man volunteered to follow Jesus, but, he also wanted to do something else *first*. And, Jesus recognized this problem. Jesus knew that He was like a man who was trying to plow a field but keeps looking back. Such a person is not “fit for the kingdom of God”! Therefore, as you consider being Jesus’s disciple, you must consider that you cannot begin to follow Jesus Christ and keep looking back to your old life. You can’t wish for the old ways you used to live. You can’t wish for the old relationships you used to enjoy. You can’t wish to experience the former pleasures. You can’t long for the former treasures. Wishing to have or experience the things that were part of your rebellious life of sin will only work to distract you from faithfully following Jesus Christ today!

When you tell Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord,” you need to recognize what is involved. When you do, you will be able to make the commitment the Lord requires of you. But, you also must recognize that this commitment will be worth the high cost and sacrifice! For, following Jesus Christ will lead you to eternal life in Heaven with the Father (John 14:6)!

Article 2

“I Don’t Believe In Church”

Many people who believe in Jesus do not believe they need to get involved with organized religion by joining a church. They consider Christ as essential but church as optional to pleasing God.

Consider the following statements that are made and some Biblical responses.

1) “I can worship God anywhere.” Many believe they fulfill God’s desire to be worshiped by worshiping at other times and places than with a church. However, while God desires people to worship Him privately (i.e. Acts 16:25), God also desires corporate worship with a church! For example, Hebrews 10:24-25 records the following command to Christians. “And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” Certainly, if all a person does is worship God privately, he/she is disobeying this commandment!

2) “There are hypocrites in church.” Many have been negatively impacted by churches in the past or are turned off by the hypocrisy they see from members of churches. However, while God condemns all sin and hypocrisy (Matthew 23), the presence of hypocrisy in churches does not eliminate God’s expectation for you to be part of a church! In fact, there is not a single approved example in the entire New Testament of a person becoming a Christian and choosing not to join a local church. Yet, there are many approved examples throughout the New Testament that show Christians joining a local church – even being part of churches that had problems to correct (1 Corinthians; Revelation 2-3). Certainly, if a person allows the hypocrisy of others to hinder him/her from obeying God in joining a church, this person is no better off than the hypocrite!

3) “I don’t need a church to teach me what the Bible says.” Many reason that they are capable of studying the Bible and learning God’s will without assembling with a church. However, while it is true that you can understand God’s word by studying the Bible on your own (Ephesians 3:3-5), local churches serve a greater purpose besides just teaching what the Bible says (though you can still profit from learning from spiritually knowledgeable and mature teachers in a church)! For example, the church engages in collective worship that is meant to spiritually strengthen those who attend in a way you will not be strengthened by worshiping alone. 1

Corinthians 14:26 says that when the church comes together, everything “is to be done for building up.” In addition to this, the church provides accountability to serve Christ and stay away from sin that you miss out when you *only* study the Bible alone. Certainly, if a person refuses to be part of a church because he/she studies the Bible privately, this person only gets part of what is needed for a spiritually strong and healthy life!

4) “No church teaches the complete truth.” Many have grown frustrated by the amount of religious error and denominational confusion that exists in churches. However, while it is true that there are a great many churches today that tolerate or even promote false teaching (Romans 16:17-18), local churches of Christ still exist around this world that do stand for the truth of God’s word! For example, 1 Timothy 3:15 says, “But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” So, rather than disconnecting from all organized religion because of the false teachings common in churches today, make it your mission to find a true church that only teaches God’s truth or start one that does. Certainly, if a person refuses to be part of a church because he/she sees religious error, this person will not help others avoid the false teaching or give others an opportunity to be part of a true church that pleases God!

Whether you don’t believe in church for these or other reasons, please recognize that God’s plan for you involves being part of a faithful local churches that follows His teachings and blueprint! This is important for your own spiritual growth and development, for helping others grow in the faith, and for reaching those who do not follow Christ. So, rather than rejecting organized religion, find a true church that follows God according to the teachings of the New Testament and join yourself to them!

Article 3

How Can You Make A Difference In This World?

There are, undoubtedly, many problems that exist in the world today. As a result, some people who long for a better world become activists or choose their career field in something they believe will impact the world for good. However, there is one way to impact this world that is far better than all the others!

1) No matter what you do, you will not change some basic things about this world. While you can have a positive impact on some people and do some good things, you must recognize that no matter what you do, this world is full of evil. 1 John 5:19 says that “the whole world is under the sway of the evil one.” So, as people live to please their own desires and refuse to submit to God’s perfect laws, evil will continue to flourish in this world. People will continue to murder and abuse others. People will continue to use drugs and alcohol. People will continue to have racial prejudices. People will continue to steal and cheat. Although your work may help lower the amount of wickedness in this world, it will continue.

Then, no matter what you do, people will still suffer and die. No advance in scientific or medical research will ever unlock immortality on this earth and find the cure to every cause of human suffering. For, when sin entered the world, the world became cursed to experience death and suffering (Genesis 3:1-24). Hebrews 9:27 plainly says that “it is appointed for people to die once.” And, this entire world will end one day when Jesus returns (2 Peter 3:7-13). Although your work may help ease some suffering momentarily or prolong a person’s death, everyone will still die and all the things you work for on this earth will end when Jesus comes.

2) Heaven is the only paradise. I do not mention these things to discourage or to stop people from working to make positive impacts in the world. Rather, I mention them to simply help us keep things in the proper perspective and to encourage people to put an even greater focus on impacting people in a way

that will last! For, no matter what you or anyone else does, earth will always be a temporary place that is full of evil and suffering.

The only place that will be free from these things is the home Jesus went to prepare for His faithful followers in Heaven! Rather than being distracted by the temporary thoughts, concerns, and pleasures of this world that will be destroyed, Christians are to rely on God's promise and "wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). This new dwelling is Heaven and is pictured in Revelation 21:1-22:5. Specifically, Revelation 21:4 indicates that every tear will be wiped away, with death, grief, crying, and pain having passed away. And, Revelation 21:27 indicates that nothing evil will be present in the Heavenly city. Therefore, do not think people will ever achieve on earth what will only exist in Heaven!

3) Helping people follow Jesus is the greatest difference you can make! Think about the difference Jesus came to make. Although He showed His compassion to heal others, rebuked wrong thinking and sinful actions, and taught people to do good to others, He did not do these things because He was focused on people's physical wellbeing and happiness. Instead, Jesus was focused on people's souls and their eternal wellbeing! Luke 19:10 records Jesus saying, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost." Jesus realized that sin separates people from God and has eternal consequences. The only way people could be reconciled to God is through His sacrifice and faithful obedience to Him!

Your efforts should also reflect the reality that helping people follow Jesus is really the only way you can make a lasting difference. Everything else will only be temporary. But, in following Jesus for yourself and then diligently teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can save both yourself and those who hear you if they will respond in obedience to the gospel (1 Timothy 4:16; Romans 10:13-18). Then, the people you teach the gospel can help others, who can help others, who can help others, etc. (2 Timothy 2:2).

When Jesus comes, everything people have accomplished on this earth will end and will no longer be important. The only

thing that will truly matter is whether people believed and obeyed the gospel that will save our souls (James 1:21)! Therefore, if you truly want to make a lasting difference during your life, commit yourself to following Jesus and helping others do the same so both you and they can spend eternity in Heaven!

Article 4

Three Deceitful Characteristics Of Sin

Sin is deceitful. Hebrews 3:12-13 warns, “Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won’t be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception.” Sin says, “It will be fun.” “You’ll be able to stop whenever you want to.” “Nobody will get hurt.” However, you should never trust Satan and sin! Specifically, let’s consider three deceitful characteristics of sin.

1) Sin takes you further than you wanted to go. Sin often wants us to think that we will be able to stop at whatever limits we put on it. Yet, sin routinely takes people further down the path of darkness than we ever would have imagined we would have gone. 2 Samuel 11 illustrates how King David quickly spiraled into the deep abyss of sin after being considered a man after God’s own heart. When he was on the roof of his palace, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. Now, David (who was a married man) had a choice about what to do with this temptation. He chose to inquire about her and found out she was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah. Still, David sent for and committed adultery with her. This resulted in Bathsheba becoming pregnant. As her husband was away at war, this meant David was in trouble! David tried to bring Uriah home so he would have sexual relations with his wife and the adultery would never be discovered, but Uriah was a man of integrity and did not – even after David got Uriah drunk. After David’s attempts to cover up his sin failed, David gave orders to the commander of the army that resulted in Uriah being killed in battle, along with others. So, what started as lust spiraled downward into adultery,

deceit, and murder! And, sin will try to do the same to you if you let it in your life!

2) Sin keeps you longer than you wanted to stay. Sin often wants us to think that we will be able to walk away whenever we want. Yet, sin routinely takes such a hold on people that they remain in sin far longer than they intended. In fact, once sin takes hold in your life, sin will do whatever it can to keep control for your entire life! Although I don't know how long David intended to violate God's law, it is possible that he only intended to commit adultery once and be done. Yet, this sin consumed David so that some time passed before he finally came to his senses (2 Samuel 12). Thankfully, David did come to his senses. Many never do. Little do they realize that the decision to sin will result in a lifetime of slavery to the sin! And, sin will try to do the same to you if you let it in your life!

3) Sin costs you more than you were willing to pay. Sin often wants us to think that we will be able to decide when we've paid enough and want it to cost us no more. Yet, sin routinely involves many "hidden fees." Although you may decide that you are willing to sacrifice some things to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, you may not (at first) be willing to sacrifice all that it will try for. For example, even though he repented, David's sin cost him dearly (2 Samuel 12). Disaster would come on him from his own family. David's kingdom would never be the same after this. And, even the child conceived in the sinful relationship with Bathsheba would die. Surely, David did not calculate all this cost whenever he committed adultery with Bathsheba! Thankfully, at least David made his life right with God by repenting of the sin so he did not experience the eternal consequences for the sin. Many people will pay dearly throughout their earthly lives for the sin they have committed – and will also pay eternally because they do not correct the sin! And, sin will try to do the same to you if you let it in your life!

Sin makes many false promises. However, God wants you to know about the deceitfulness of sin now so you can refuse to fall for its lies! While sin will offer you many things that will seem appealing to your fleshly desires, recognize that it will take you

further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you are willing to pay. Ultimately, sin results in eternal separation from God in the fires of Hell (James 1:14-15)! Therefore, determine to stay away from sin at all costs!

Article 5

Are You Hungering And Thirsting For Righteousness – Or Craving Religion?

There are many people today who *crave* religion at times. However, there seems to be few who truly hunger and thirst after righteousness. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6). There are some fundamental differences between the two. As we observe these differences, evaluate yourself: Are you hungering and thirsting for righteousness – or craving religion?

1) One is a need and one is a momentary desire. Think about the cravings you’ve had. Perhaps you craved chocolate, pizza, or your grandmother’s famous dish. Whatever it was, even the most intense cravings prove only to be momentary desires rather than pressing needs to sustain life. Similarly, those who crave religion may have an intense desire to be devoted to a particular set of beliefs and practices – for a brief time. But, this is only a momentary desire and not something that is viewed as being absolutely essential!

Yet, those who hunger and thirst do everything they can to seek the needed sustenance. Therefore, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness do so because they truly recognize that their spiritual lives are dependent upon their being right with God! They realize that pursuing righteousness is essential to the very thing that they seek (eternal life in Heaven, Hebrews 11:6) and they are diligent in their pursuit.

2) One is lasting and one is passing. No matter how intense a craving is at any given time, it is only temporary. Even those cravings you would “give anything” to have fulfilled and that

consume all your thoughts soon pass and are forgotten. Similarly, those who crave after religion may have a burning desire to follow a particular set of beliefs and practices for a moment in time. However, when the craving subsides and a new thing comes into focus, their dedication to the religious beliefs and practices diminish.

Yet, those who hunger and thirst for physical sustenance do so until they get what they need for their survival. And, there is a continual pursuit after the basic sustenance needed to survive each day. Similarly, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness pursue righteousness continually – as an ongoing need for spiritual life through Jesus Christ. Anytime their focus begins to shift, they repent and turn their focus back to seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

3) One is based on God and one is based on self. Although a craving may *seem* like the most pressing thing at a given moment, it is just a personal desire. Similarly, those who crave religion only do so based on how they believe religion can benefit themselves at a particular time. When religion is perceived to be the most beneficial (on a personal level), they will be more devoted. However, when other things are perceived as being more personally beneficial at a given moment, they pursue those things.

Yet, those who hunger and thirst after what they need to sustain their lives have a much deeper drive. Similarly, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness do not *only* do so because it is personally beneficial to them; but, because it is the proper response to God's nature and His sacrifice! These recognize how much God has done to save us and present themselves to God as "living" sacrifices that are pleasing in God's service (Romans 12:1-2) as they try to seek God. Although someone with a craving may be "picky," the one who is truly hungry and thirsty will take whatever he/she can get to survive. So it is with those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness. They will live for God regardless of what God teaches or instructs!

There are many people who crave religion occasionally or even regularly (i.e. every Sunday morning). But, those who hunger

and thirst for righteousness will have a life-long and intense need and desire for being right with God! So, are you hungering and thirsting for righteousness – or are you craving religion? One will lead to salvation and one will not!

Article 6

Everything The New Testament Says About Music In Worship Today

When Jesus taught about worship in John 4:21-24, He gave two criteria for the kind of worship that is pleasing to God. He said that it must be in offered “in Spirit and in truth.” It must be both heartfelt/sincere and according to God’s standard of truth. So, when we learn that God wants people to worship Him with music today, we must consider what kind of music God authorizes – vocal, instrumental, or both? Therefore, let’s consider everything the New Testament says about music in worship today and draw some conclusions.

1) Ten verses on the subject. Ten verses tell us everything there is to know about the kind of music God authorizes in worship today. You would do well to study each verse carefully and in its proper context. Matthew 26:30 says, “After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” Mark 14:26 says, “After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” Acts 16:25 says, “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Romans 15:9 says, “and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to your name.’” 1 Corinthians 14:15 says, “What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding. I will sing praise with the spirit, and I will also sing praise with my understanding.” Ephesians 5:19 says, “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual

songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Hebrews 2:12 says, “saying: ‘I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; I will sing hymns to you in the congregation.’” Hebrews 13:15 says, “Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.” And, James 5:13 says, “Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises.”

2) One common theme. Did you notice a theme as you read those verses? Now, I did not edit them in any way (look them up for yourself and see). In every verse you read in the New Testament that applies to how we should worship God with music today, the Bible only ever speaks of singing! Therefore, you can know for certain that God approves of you worshiping by singing to Him.

3) Zero New Testament verses authorizing a mechanical instrument in worship today. As you read (and reread) the passages in the New Testament about worshiping God with music, pay very close attention to how many of them authorize a mechanical instrument. Not a single one! The only instrument authorized by these passages is the human heart (the mind). Again, Ephesians 5:19 instructed you to be “singing and making music with your heart to the Lord.” But, the heart is not a piano, a guitar, a drum, a harp, and such things. So, as you search the New Testament for authority to use a mechanical instrument to worship God today, you come up empty! There is not a single passage authorizing its use.

You can know that God approves of you worshiping Him with vocal music. But, there is no authorization from God to worship Him with a mechanical instrument. Therefore, you must refuse to offer God a type of worship that He never asks for or authorizes! Instead, you must be content to worship God according to what He has authorized in His word of truth!

Article 7

Limit Your Opportunities To Sin

Sin is what happens whenever you have the desire to do something that displeases God plus opportunity to do it, plus action that displeases God. So, if you truly desire to defeat the devil, one thing you can do is to do your best to limit your opportunities to sin. Although you cannot eliminate every opportunity Satan gives you to sin, you can do some things to seriously limit your opportunities. Consider a few things that can be done.

1) Cut off what you struggle with. Jesus believed in taking drastic measures to avoid sin because He knew the severe spiritual consequences of sin. In Matthew 5:29-30, He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." So, for instance, if you cannot defeat the temptation of lust through other means, cut off the television, the internet, the magazine subscriptions, etc. to no longer give you that opportunity to sin. Be bold enough to take the appropriate measures to cut off whatever it is you struggle with so that you limit your opportunities to sin.

2) Don't make plans to fulfill the desires of your flesh. Some people live like Christians most of the time, yet leave the door open to commit some sin. Ordinarily, they try to avoid sin. However, if the right opportunity came along, they would take it. Don't be like this! Romans 13:14 says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh." Don't think that any opportunity to sin is too good to pass up. Instead, determine that your life really is about serving Jesus Christ. Shut the door to sin. Look for opportunities to serve Christ rather than opportunities to please yourself!

3) Avoid evil companions. It may be that you do pretty well limiting your opportunities to sin and resisting temptation

whenever you are by yourself. However, maybe you know that there are certain people who will cause you to be tempted. Being around them will often present some kind of opportunity to sin that would be harder for you to resist than normal. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” Though you will always be around evil people as you live in the world, you should avoid putting yourself around people you know will make sin difficult for you to avoid.

4) Stay away from every kind of evil. Maybe this sounds like an oversimplification. But, limiting your opportunities to sin does not have to be extremely difficult. If you study God’s word, you will know what is evil and what is good. Then, if you really want to avoid sin, you will know to stay away from those things that are evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 instructs you to “test all things,” hold on to “what is good,” and stay away “from every kind of evil.” It is that simple. To the best of your ability, stay away from every kind of evil. Don’t see how close you can get to it without sinning. Just stay away from it – recognizing how dangerous it really is!

While there are other strategies you can use to avoid sin, limiting your opportunity to sin is a simple one you must not overlook. Do what you can to evaluate your life and cut down the number of opportunities you have to sin against God. And, don’t be afraid of taking steps that may seem drastic to others. While you will not be able to eliminate every temptation (since you must still live in this sin-filled world and interact with sinful people), you can cut down on many needless and self-inflicted temptations!

Article 8

Running To Win The Prize

The Christian life is compared to running in a race to win the prize that is waiting at the finish line. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 says, “Don’t you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.

So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” There is a way to run your race so as to win the prize. This passage gives us four keys as to how this can be done.

1) Run with perspective. A lot about how we will live on this earth is about keeping the proper perspective. It is easy to get distracted by all the things that are going on in life so as to not live in the way that really matters. So, we can lose our focus on the “imperishable crown” and begin to focus more on perishable things. To this point, Jesus warned people not to lay up treasures for themselves on this earth, since they will be moth-eaten, rust, be stolen, and be taken from us at death (Matthew 6:19; Luke 12:20-21). Rather, we must all lay up treasures in Heaven, where those things can never be taken from us and will not end at death (Matthew 6:20; Revelation 14:13). So, we must work to keep the proper perspective of running for the imperishable crown waiting for us rather than settle for the temporary things of life, laying aside any hinderance or weight that tries to stop us short of the finish line (Hebrews 12:1-2).

2) Run with direction. Along with keeping the right perspective as we run, we must also keep our eyes set in the right direction. If we lose the proper perspective and focus on temporary things, we will quickly veer off the course that results in true victory. Every choice we make during our lives amounts to this: Are we choosing to run on the path that is difficult but leads to eternal life in Heaven or the path that is broad that leads to Hell (Matthew 7:13-14)? Surely, one of these directions in life fails to lead toward the finish line that will result in victory! So, as the race goes on, things become difficult, and you get tempted to take the easier path, you must remember that the easier path doesn’t produce the same outcome as the more difficult path. Therefore, you must set your sights and Heaven on stay the course!

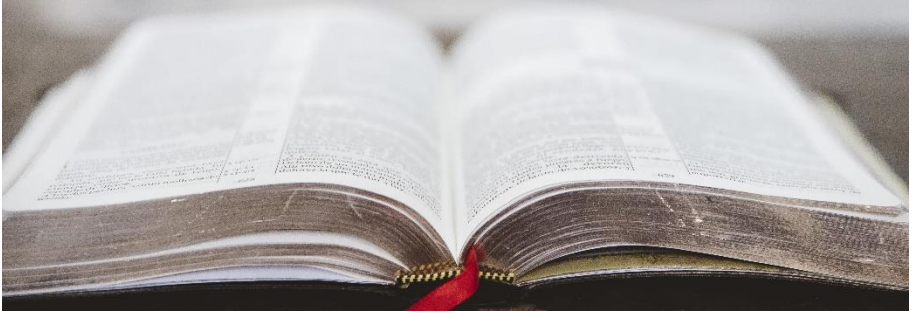
3) Run with purpose. Winning the race of faith and receiving the imperishable crown in Heaven will not happen by accident. So, those who choose to run so as to win this race will not be like those who “run aimlessly” or like someone who is shadow

boxing (“beating the air”). Everything about our lives is, therefore, so focused on the imperishable crown and running in the direction of Heaven that we live every day with the clearly defined purpose of glorifying God. Any other purpose is, ultimately, meaningless because it will all end at death (if not before). Every moment of your life, then, must be committed to fearing God and keeping His commandments, doing all things to His glory (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

4) Run with discipline. Think about how much discipline an Olympic runner demonstrates to prepare for his/her race. Training diligently for years. Refusing to take the easy path. Denying self of pleasures that work against the goal of winning the prize. And, this is all for a prize that is perishable! Certainly, those who are running for the imperishable prize in Heaven ought to be even more diligent to run in such a way to win this prize! This will mean demonstrating self-control over your fleshly passions, refusing to stop whenever the race becomes difficult, and continuously working to honor God by doing good works in His name. Although this will often not be pleasurable or easy, you must discipline yourself every day to win the race and not be disqualified! And, you must not start to give up before you cross the finish line!

You must decide whether you will live in such a way as to win the imperishable crown of eternal life in Heaven. Through Jesus Christ, God has put victory within your reach. But, not everyone will choose to run in a way so as to win the prize – just as all the runners in a race will not win the prize. Therefore, if you desire to win the prize, you must run with perspective, with direction, with purpose, and with discipline.

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