

Clutter

“Make the most of every opportunity.”

If, today, the risen and exalted Jesus were to physically walk up to you and say, “Follow Me,” what would you say? What would you do? This isn’t so hypothetical. In the Gospels, that’s exactly what Jesus says to each of us. The words of Jesus in the Gospels, after all, are His words and they’re written there for us, today. It makes no difference that He said those words 2,000 years ago when He cloaked His deity than if He, the very same Person, says those very same words today to you personally. So, what’s your response? I suspect that most of us hide our response of “No.” How do I know that? Because so few of us today are actually following Him, our professions of faith notwithstanding. To follow Jesus is too radical for any of us today. We’ve got our lives too filled with other things.

Our lives are cluttered. We’ve hopelessly cluttered up our lives with all kinds of things and ideas and interests and commitments and pursuits that there’s simply no way we could abandon all of them to follow Jesus. All that clutter is really useless and meaningless. It’s all bling. It’s all massive distraction from the imperatives of Scriptures. That clutter is all going to burn up in the day of God’s wrath. But right now it’s so real and compelling to us that we can’t recognize it as purposeless clutter. So we continue to wallow in it. In fact, we actually love the clutter.

We can’t get rid of the clutter because it’s now part of us. It’s our very life. That’s what’s so tragic. Jesus calls us to be transformed into His beautiful and perfect character and to continue doing His work of calling and preparing people for the Kingdom. That’s what following Jesus involves. But we can’t do that because of the clutter.

“Clutter” is everything the world puts on offer that appeals to us to prevent us from following Jesus. It’s entertainment, sports, politics, and travel. It’s everything – *everything!*—on the Internet. It’s maintaining a nice house, pursuing a terrific fulfilling career, shopping for ever more stuff, enjoying a nice hobby, and/or pursuing some interest—some interest *other than* Christ’s revealed will. We are enthralled with our clutter, so much so that even the concept of setting priorities in life is alien to our thinking.

Unbelievers are madly in love with clutter. It’s all they know in life. They may hold to some religion or to some anti-theistic ideology, but those are peripheral. At the core of the life of every unbeliever is all that I call clutter. Their lives are hopelessly and permanently cluttered up with what keeps them from God. They *want* the clutter. We should want to be rid of it! Getting rid of the clutter is how we repudiate the world, it’s how we demonstrate to God and to the angels that we’re different; it’s how we demonstrate that we’re following Christ.

Why do we believers so badly want the clutter? I suspect that (although we’ll never admit this) it’s because we’re bored with our modern American version of Christianity. We’re sated with Bible preaching and teaching. Being a spectator isn’t fulfilling. We’ve long ago decided we will not do Gospel outreach, so our passive “Christian” lives are empty. We vainly try to fill them with . . . What else? With the clutter that’s so freely on offer.

Now, I can almost hear the howls of protest. “I *do* follow Jesus, my way!” No, to follow Jesus is either as Scripture defines it, or it’s not following Him. “You’re pushing legalism!” No, legalism is an attitude; so if we do something out of love for Christ, to exalt Him, that’s praiseworthy. It’s not legalism. “The things you call ‘clutter’ are really important for my ministry.” Perhaps so, but beware. We can too easily rationalize all manner of wrong-doing. Careful thought needs to be given to whatever is supposed to be necessary because if it isn’t, we’re trying to deceive God. “I’m free to live this life how I want to, just so I believe in Jesus as my Savior.” Huh? Who is Jesus but Lord? If He’s Lord, and He commands you to follow Him, you do it! If you belong to Jesus by faith in Him, you’re *not* free to live your life as you please, but to do His revealed will. Or else. “There are no Scripture passages that say what you’re alleging!” Oh? The word “clutter” doesn’t appear, but much Scripture addresses the issue. **“Love not the world nor the things that are in the world”** is the only one anyone really needs. But there are lots more: **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy being.”** **“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.”** **“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.”** And this verse: **“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think [not even *think!*] about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature,”** in which the “sinful nature” is all that is contrary to God’s revealed character and will for us. Enough.

Let's think about this from a different angle. What's the meaning of life? This question isn't just for philosophers to argue over. It's for every human to answer. Now, I'm not asking, What gives meaning to life? There's much that gives meaning to life, such as investing ourselves in family and other kinds of relationships, creating beautiful things, experiencing various kinds of pleasures, creating goods and services that benefit others, and more. I'm asking this, What is the meaning of life? Since God authored life, He must supply the answer. And that answer is: Life is for becoming like the Son. In this era, the era of the Incarnate Son, the meaning that life has is our being like Jesus. That's why we're here. It's why we embrace the Gospel, it's why all the New Testament has been given to guide us, and it's why the Spirit of Christ is given to empower us. God has suffused human, creaturely life with meaning because He loves the Son and seeks for the Son to be exalted, and that is by our deliberately, lovingly, gratefully, wanting to be like Him. We're not here to live however we please, pursuing whatever interests us. That constitutes a meaningless and wasted life. We're here to be like Jesus.

The purpose of life is to experience the blessings of eternal union with God. The Triune God is bonded into a perfect unity by mutual love, peace and joy, and participation in that blessed state is freely on offer to us, human creatures, thru the Son. It's plain to me from Scripture that we attain that blessedness by cultivating our relationship with Jesus, by becoming like Him and doing God's will, in this present life. This is why Jesus calls us to follow Him. To follow Jesus (also called discipleship) means to be like Him and do as He instructed and commanded. It involves radical commitment: It involves personal sacrifice, it involves suffering loss, and it involves eschewing sin and abandoning clutter. It means knowing Jesus and His words and His will by continual, thoughtful reflection on the Scriptures. And it necessarily involves obeying Him regardless of the consequences. It's not easy. But the effort, made by interaction with the infinite God, fulfills the purpose of life.

Let's not suppose that we already are living as God expects. That's a deadly notion. Just because we've been "civilized" by growing up in the Western world, we too easily think we're already godly people. That's nonsense. The life of Jesus is a supernatural one. Following Jesus means knowing God's will and obeying it, sacrificing self for others, being humble, and loving others with God's kind of transcendent, selfless love. Following Jesus means purposely living to honor God, to love God, and to love others by meeting their needs and seeking their blessedness. No one can live such a life on their own, but in dependence on the Spirit of Christ – assuming that we don't quench that Spirit by worldliness, idolatry, sin and pursuing other interests (clutter).

Dear Reader: My plea is that you'll think deeply and carefully about how you're pursuing your life and how it compares to what the radical Christian life, as found in the Bible, ought to be. May this lesson be a good reason to begin another, fresh encounter with Christ in His Word. We cannot be careless about how we live because, like it or not, God holds us accountable for what He's invested in us. And besides, Jesus and all that's on offer in Jesus is worth far more than whatever sacrifice we make in order to follow Him.