

The Seriousness of Living

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound responsibility of living a serious life that honors God and positively influences others.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:12

Topics: "Responsibility in Christian Living", "Building Up Others"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the seriousness of life, urging that every action and word carries moral weight and contributes to either blessing or cursing the world. He illustrates the partnership between God and man in all endeavors, particularly in spiritual work, highlighting the importance of faithfulness in our responsibilities. Miller warns against carelessness, as it can lead to the loss of souls and the marred work of God. He stresses that our contributions to others' lives must be of lasting value, akin to gold and silver, rather than worthless materials. Ultimately, he calls for a life dedicated to building up rather than tearing down, reflecting the gentleness and love of Christ.

Transcript

All life is serious. We are not butterflies, to flutter a little while in the air and then drop into the dust. The words we speak and the things we do are not snowflakes dropping into the water--a moment white, then gone forever--but are beginnings of immortalities. We are not done with anything in life as it passes from our hands. Nothing is indifferent. There is a moral character in all that we do. Either we are blessing the world, or sowing the seed of a curse in every influence that goes out from us. It befits us, therefore, to give conscientious thought to all our life.

In one of his epistles, Paul has a remarkable passage about working for God. He tells us that God and we are co-workers, and that we can do nothing without him. This is true even in our common affairs. In a little shop on a back street, a man makes a mariner's compass. It is taken on board a great ship, and by means of its trembling needle the vessel is guided over the sea unerringly to its destination. A man made the compass. Yes--a man and God. A man did the mechanical work, put the wonderful instrument together; but it was God who put into the magnet its mysterious power. This illustrates a common law. God and man are co-workers; and without God man can do nothing, while God's perfect work needs man's best.

It is true especially in spiritual work. The gospel had been preached in Corinth by Paul; and as one might throw a handful of spices into a bitter fountain and sweeten the waters, so the words of the gospel dropped into the foul life of the heathen city, were sweetening it. Now, there was a large body of faithful

Christians in that city. They had been brought to Christ, and were his disciples. This was Paul's work. Yes--Paul's and God's. Paul was a great preacher--but it was by the power of God that the mysterious change had been wrought. So it is in all Christian work. We soon learn that we can do nothing without God.

Yet our part is important, and we must do it well and faithfully. Carelessness or neglect may lead to the marring of a life, or the loss of a soul--and the blame will be ours. A young mother wrote in a letter, "When I took my little boy in my arms the first time, and his little hand closed tightly round my finger, I realized what a godly woman I must be in order to help him to be a godly man." God needs our faithfulness in doing his work on human lives. That is, he has ordained to use us, and we are held responsible for doing well our part. Our unfaithfulness may mar the work of God.

Paul had something serious to say also about the responsibility of those who work upon the walls of God's temple. They may build either gold, silver, and costly stones, or wood, hay, and stubble. There is only one foundation--Christ. Gold, silver, and costly stones represent the beautiful things we should build into our life, or into the lives of others.

Gravely responsible is the work of a Christian minister. Whenever he speaks to people, he is laying materials on the walls of God's temple. He must do work worthy of God's honor. If he has only wood, hay, and stubble to bring, he would better never enter the pulpit. The same is true of the Sunday school teacher. He also is at work on God's building. If he has only the trifles of social topics, bits of gossip, airy nothings, to give to his class, what that is worth while--is he putting into the pupils' lives?

The lesson applies to parents. They get the young life from God when as yet nothing has been built into it. What do they bring to put into the character they are helping to build? What are the influences of their home? What songs are sung beside the child's cradle? What lessons are taught at a time when every lesson becomes a permanent part of the life? What books are put into the young hands when every sentence makes an indelible mark on the soul

But the teaching is for us all; for we are all builders on the life-walls of others. What opportunities for edifying each other we all have in our conversations, as we sit together or walk by the way! Words are wonderful things. They may become adornments in the life of him to whom they are spoken; they may give happiness, courage, comfort, or impulse. There have been single words which have changed destinies. Then there are also words which are only rubbish--wood, hay, and stubble. Too much of the common conversation of the street, the parlor, the table, is poor building-material to put into human lives. Too much of it is only idle words. Too much is criticism of the absent, hurtful gossip about people. Too much of it is wrangling and bitterness.

We may think, too, of what we are building and allowing to be built on the walls of our own character. What are our companionships? Companionships make us. Everyone who takes a half-mile walk with us, or talks with us ten minutes, lays something on the wall of our life. The books we read do their part in our character-building. Our thoughts also have their important place among the builders. As we think, so we grow. Trifling thoughts--turn into a flippant, shallow life. Sad thoughts--turn into a sullen character. Reverent thoughts--turn into a life on which rests the hallowed marks of divinity. Not only do they go into the walls of our own life--but when they are uttered they go out into the world and build themselves into the character of others, becoming impulses, inspirations, in people's hearts. What are our thoughts--gold, silver, costly stones, or wood, hay, stubble?

There is more of the lesson. "The fire shall prove each man's work--of what sort it is." Whatever in it is gold, silver or costly stones--shall abide; but whatever is wood, hay or stubble--shall perish. The things we are putting into the lives of others--are they imperishable things--things that will be elements of beauty in the immortal life? It is not enough that they be not evil; the yet more searching question is: Are they the gold, silver, and costly stones of truth and love?

Very grave is the responsibility of the man or the woman who writes a book--a novel, for example, which catches the fancy of people, and is read by thousands. "It is a great success," men say. Yes; but what does it put into the lives of those who read it? What impulses does it start? What impressions does it leave? Does it kindle holy or unholy fires in the hearts of its readers? Is it gold, silver, costly stones; or is it wood, hay, and stubble, which it builds into life-walls? It is a high privilege to be permitted to write words that carry in them the seeds of good, which become strength, encouragement, cheer, hope, and comfort in other lives. But suppose that one's gift is perverted from its holy use, and the words one writes carry in them the poison of moral death; what serious accounting must the writer have when the harvest is gathered up!

The work done in our own life also, as well as that which we do in other lives, must be proved; and only that which is immortal shall endure. No doubt many of us add much rubbish into the building of our character. We read books that do us no good, even if they leave in us no virus of evil. We indulge in thoughts, feelings, imaginings, longings--which build up in us nothing that we can carry into eternity. We spend hours in conversation, consisting at best of only idle words, imparting no inspiration toward better things. Whether in our own life or in the lives of those around us, only that which is pure and will last forever, is fit building-material.

The end of Paul's lesson shows us a man, saved himself, so as through fire, while all his work is burned up. We think of one who has spent all his life in building a house, and gathering into it the things for which he has toiled. The house is burned, with all that is in it. The man himself escapes unhurt--but he carries nothing with him. So, says Paul, shall some men pass into heaven, barely saved--but losing all their work. They have lived uselessly. They have not at all advanced Christ's kingdom. In all their life, they have done nothing that will endure. The world would have been quite as well without them and their work. We need to remember that it is not enough to be busy, active, ever doing something; the work we do must be true work for God--such as will really bless the world.

There is something yet more serious in this lesson. One who builds only uselessly will be saved, though his work shall perish. But one who destroys God's temple, shall himself be destroyed. One may destroy the temple of God, by teaching error which shall mislead souls, or by setting an example before others which shall influence them toward evil; or one may hurt other lives by selfishness or ungentleness. There are some Christians who seem never to have learned love's secret of helpfulness. There is nothing that this sorrowing, sinning world needs more than gentleness. Of the gentleness of Jesus it was said, "He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick." Isaiah 42:3. We need to pray for the grace of gentleness, that we may walk softly among men, never hurting another life by harsh word or ungentle acts. "Learn from Me--for I am gentle and humble in heart." Matthew 11:29

It is sad enough to be a useless Christian, doing no good, building nothing that will last; but it is sadder far to live to tear down with unhallowed hand--what others with love, prayer, and toil have built up; or by unloving and censorious words--to discourage those who are sincerely trying to do God's work, and to bless other lives. We all should pray to be saved from the doom of those who destroy the temple of God.

No one should be content to live either hurtfully or uselessly. While such mighty, immortal potencies are in all life, we should not be satisfied with anything less than the consecration of our every act and word and every shred of our influence to holiness and good.

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