

Equipping Pastors International
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Lesson #7

DISCIPLESHIP
Why Should I Be a Fanatic?

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Most Christians have heard stirring messages on discipleship. Sayings such as full surrender, wholehearted commitment, unconditional obedience, totalitarian rule and complete submission are familiar to Christians.
- B. In spite of all exhortations to obedience, the sin nature and the devil keep telling the Christian that he should be moderate in all things. He rationalizes that this consecration thing can be overdone and it is easy to take things too far. Surely Christianity does not make wild demands upon the Christian to become a religious fanatic. He even finds what he thinks is biblical proof to support his position of moderation. Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men" (KJV). However, the Greek word does not mean moderation but "sweet reasonableness," referring to one's attitude, not a modified dedication to Christ. NOTE: This whole idea of moderation may become, as we must admit if we are honest, a very convenient cloak for compromise, half-heartedness and sloth. The main reason the Church is in spiritual decline today is that Christians are not fanatical enough about biblical Christianity. It is because of lack of commitment by Christians that the younger generation has been turned off to the Church.

II. SCRIPTURAL EXHORTATIONS

- A. Matthew 9:9: When Christ called Matthew to follow Him it was an authoritarian demand. Matthew responded with complete obedience. There was no discussion about a pension, job conditions, appointment of a successor or how he would receive his financial support. Christ called and Matthew obeyed.
- B. Matthew 10:32-42: It costs something to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not just a fire escape from hell but a life lived for Jesus Christ. Following Christ is a totalitarian business and there is nothing moderate about His demands at all.
- C. Luke 6:46-49: The hypocrisy of Christianity is that one calls Christ the Lord and yet does not obey what He says.
- D. Matthew 7:21-23: A test of one's genuine salvation is his desire to do the will of God.
- E. Luke 11:28: It is not the hearers of the Word that are blessed of God but the doers (James 1:22). There can be no moderation in the doing of the commands of God.

III. FANATICISM VERSUS WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

- A. Wholeheartedness: The dictionary defines wholeheartedness as "sincere and energetic." What Christ wants from our lives is single-hearted devotion to Him. We are to have a life of faith

and commitment to a real person. NOTE: Wholeheartedness will also bring balance into one's life as a Christian, but no moderation. Balance comes as one weighs one scripture with another, but there is always commitment to all truth. For instance, we are to lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth, but we are to care for our own household, so we see it is not wrong to have a savings account if there is a spiritual end in view (Matt. 6:19 cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). Another instance is that we are to love the Lord with all our being but we are also to love our neighbor (Matt. 22:37 cf. 22:39).

B. Fanaticism

1. When we think of a Christian fanatic, we think of a wild-eyed Bible-thumper who is odd and eccentric and who takes extreme positions on everything. However, the dictionary defines a fanatic as "a person with an extreme and uncritical enthusiasm and zeal." A fanatic is someone who is sold out to something and so believes in it that it will be carried out. He is a zealot, an enthusiast and a non-conformist. This should be true of all Christians who have a living faith in Christ. Someone has defined a fanatic as a person who, when told the cause is hopeless, redoubles his efforts.
2. Positive Fanaticism: A Christian is often called a fanatic and in the right context this is a compliment, for it shows that the Christian believes in Christ and the Bible and is willing to suffer to make this known to others.

If I root for my favorite football team, I am a fan. If a person likes a certain music group, he is a fan. No one seems to get too upset. But lend your support to Jesus Christ and you are immediately tabbed a fanatic.

a. Winston Churchill said, "A fanatic is one who cannot change his mind and will not change the subject." In this definition, a Christian cannot change his mind about Christ and the Bible, and he will not change the subject of the gospel as it relates to all men.

b. D. L. Moody said, "No one has ever blessed the world until he has been called a fanatic." A person must have convictions before he will make any impact on society. When a Christian is called a fanatic, he is communicating with those about him.

3. Negative Fanaticism: Most of the world thinks of a fanatic as an ostentatious, inconsiderate, ill-mannered, overbearing, narrow-minded, self-opinionated person. A fanatic is thought of as an unbalanced bigot who is a little crazy. It is possible for a Christian to be a negative fanatic who uses his religion as a cover-up for his offensiveness and crudeness. NOTE: A negative Christian fanatic is offensive, not because he is carrying his Christianity too far but because he is not carrying it far enough. It is impossible to take Christianity too far if it is applied properly. If a person is negatively fanatical, it is not because he is biblical but because he is

unbiblical. He is stressing one aspect of Christ's truth above another. He obviously is forgetting to have love. A person must be equally fanatical about all the teachings of Christ. He may have a need to become fanatical about love and become fanatical about humility. It is just as important to love your neighbor as it is to see that your neighbor hears the gospel. NOTE: The truly biblical man may make us feel uncomfortable; yet he has a winsomeness and attractiveness about him that reminds us of Christ Himself. Christians need to be more fanatical about being Christ-like. Christ Himself was totally committed; yet He attracted men to Himself. He also repelled some men for they hated what He stood for. NOTE: If a Christian repels men because of a faithful witness for Christ, he can thank God for the privilege of suffering for Christ. However, if he repels men because of his own ignorance and lack of love when presenting Christ, he cannot say he is suffering for Christ. He is suffering because of his own stupidity.

IV. CHRIST WAS WHOLEHEARTED FOR GOD

- A. A casual reading of the four gospels will tell us that Christ was wholly committed to God. This brought the scourge of the world upon Him and He was labeled a fanatic.
- B. In one place He was called greedy, fond of wine and a friend of the riffraff (Luke 7:34). In another place, he was called demon-possessed and crazy (John 10:20).
 1. Christ was no moderate. He stirred men wherever He went. He was blasted for His nonconformity and was truly unconventional. He was committed to God and was called a fanatic by modern terms. Christ was not a colorless character about whom no one had anything good or bad to say. One thing for sure, He was not out to please people by compromising in order to avoid offence. He made many people uncomfortable in His presence. At times, He rebuked men unmercifully.
 2. Christ was unique because He would hold His convictions in love and not compromise even one of them. He moved among the most sinful of people and did not give up His doctrine or compromise His testimony but radiated love to those around Him. His first commitment was to God.

V. EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIANS

- A. Christ was called a fanatic. Is the Christian better than his Lord? There are times when the Christian will give forth the gospel uncompromisingly which will bring cynical smiles, sneers, hostility and social ostracism. The charge of being a fanatic should not deter us from being faithful.
- B. The Apostle Paul was called a fanatic (1 Cor. 4:9-10). Are we better than he? NOTE: No one likes to be a spectacle, to be laughed at and ridiculed. Most Christians hesitate to identify themselves with the despised and rejected Jesus. No one likes to be called a fool or a fanatic, but there are times when we must be called these things by the non-Christian world if we are going to be faithful to Christ and wholeheartedly committed to

God (Luke 18:28-30). Remember the promise! NOTE: D. L. Moody said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man totally yielded to God." NOTE: A thought for a Christian fanatic is, "If you are right and I am wrong, then I have lost only my respectability on earth, but we will all be in heaven together. If I am right and you are wrong, you have lost your soul!"