

Equipping Pastors International
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Lesson #5

DISCIPLESHIP

What Are the Marks of a True Disciple?

Luke 9:23-26

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. A disciple is to be equated with a believer or Christian.
"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). If a person claims with his lips that he is a disciple of Christ, what are the marks or characteristics that should be seen in the true disciple? These marks are evidenced in the attitudes and actions of the person who claims to be a follower of Christ.
- B. There is no real value in saying one is a disciple if there are no works to back up that profession of faith in Christ.
NOTE: Discipleship does not mean perfection in the Christian life, for no Christian is without sin. Discipleship means a basic desire to do the will of God as it is commanded in the written Word of God. Disciples will fail at times, but when they do they will know that they have transgressed God's moral law and they will be miserable until they confess their rebellion and get back into temporal fellowship with their Lord. There are faithful and unfaithful disciples, but all Christians are disciples.
- C. The Bible gives us the marks of a disciple, and we need go no further than the Scriptures. To add or take away from the Bible is sin. From the Word of God, there are ten marks of a disciple.

II. A DISCIPLE FOLLOWS CHRIST

"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; . . ." (John 10:27). "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). To follow someone means that a person has to leave someone or something, so to follow Christ means to leave the old life with all its sin and to obey Christ.

III. A DISCIPLE RENOUNCES SELF

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Christ is put ahead of self. Self is dethroned and Christ is enthroned, and there is a desire for a Christ-controlled life.

IV. A DISCIPLE RENOUNCES THINGS

"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33). Things are given a secondary place to Christ. Material possessions are not evil in themselves but become evil when a person is possessed by them. Christ expects disciples to put Him above all material wealth.

Perhaps you have heard the story of Francesco de Bernardone, the fun-loving son of a wealthy merchant in Assisi. One day Francesco faced a dying leper as he rode his horse along a dusty path. It was a dreadful experience as the young man fastened his eyes upon the open sores of a forgotten social outcast. This was, of course, a normal reaction, but suddenly a picture flashed before the healthy young man on horseback. It was a picture of himself as he knew Jesus saw him. Before the picture faded and reason could stop him, the youth leaped from his horse and put all of his money in the leper's hand. Then he kissed the leper's hand. It was at that moment Francesco de Bernardone died a spiritual death that later gave rise to the man we know as St. Francis of Assisi.

V. A DISCIPLE HAS GREATER LOYALTIES FOR CHRIST THAN FOR FAMILY

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Friends and family take a secondary place to Christ. Read also Matthew 10:34-37 and Luke 9:57-62.

VI. A DISCIPLE SUFFERS FOR AND IF CALLED TO DO SO, GIVES HIS LIFE FOR CHRIST

"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). The true disciple loves Christ more than life itself. Verbal persecution will be the lot of all Christians. Many will suffer social persecutions and some will be called upon to die a martyr's death for Christ. The disciple should not fear death for he has eternal life. Death is but God's usher to escort the disciple into the very presence of Christ forever. NOTE: God makes a promise to disciples: **"And He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life'" (Luke 18:29,30).**

VII. A DISCIPLE CONTINUES IN THE WORD

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31, 32).

- A. According to the context of John 8, the Lord is talking to religious Jews and the vast majority was hardened to Christ. Apparently a few of them trusted Christ (8:30) but they were uneasy about leaving their old life to follow Him. (It is possible to have an intellectual, superficial faith in Christ and not be saved.) Jesus gives them a challenge and tells them that they are His disciples if they continue in His word (8:31). The R.S.V. correctly translates this "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." These believing Jews then declare themselves to be professors and not possessors of Christ. They claim to be of Abraham's seed, for they thought salvation was related to physical descent from Abraham (8:33). Then Christ pronounces that they are not true disciples or believers because His Word had no place in them (8:37).
- B. The true disciple who continues in the Word shall know the truth and the truth of the Word will set him free (8:32). The reason that men hate God's Word is that they have never been born of God (8:47).
- C. The true disciple has a deep-seated conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He believes that the Bible is authoritative and is to be obeyed by sinner and saint alike. He loves to know and study God's Word, and he will not compromise it to please men. NOTE: This does not mean that all disciples will be intellectual giants in the Word, but they will desire to put into practice the Word that they do know.

VIII. A DISCIPLE PRODUCES FRUIT IN HIS LIFE

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8).

- A. A true disciple will be a fruit-bearing Christian. Abiding in Christ will produce fruit (John 15:4, 5) which will indicate to the world that the person who professes Christ is Christ's disciple. Receiving Christ in salvation makes one a disciple of Christ, but abiding in Christ produces fruit which gives evidence that one is a disciple of Jesus Christ. ***"So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20).*** NOTE: Fruit bearing is not optional for the believer-disciple, for Christ said, ". . . so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8, KJV).
- B. Fruit, in this context, is referring to the vine reproducing itself through the branch. Fruit is the life of Christ being reproduced in the believer by means of the Holy Spirit. This is the fruit that is the result of keeping the commandments of Christ (Jn. 15:4 cf. 15:10). This context is not primarily about soul-winning fruit, although it may be implied (15:16). It is primarily dealing with the fruit of the Spirit. ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; . . ." (Gal. 5:22, 23).***

IX. A DISCIPLE RECOGNIZES GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

"And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.' As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him any more" (John 6:65, 66).

- A. The context of John 6 is that our Lord had fed the 5000 by a miracle of multiplying the bread and fishes. Many people were thronging to Him because He was a miracle-worker and they loved the spectacular. Yet they had not received Christ as Lord and were mere professors (6:26).
- B. Then Jesus gives His discourse on the bread of life where He claims that He is the Bread of Life and all who partake of Him by faith may have a free and gracious salvation (6:28-29, 33) and they shall never spiritually hunger (6:35).
- C. However, Jesus teaches the divine side of salvation that is equally as important as personal faith in Christ. He declares that no man can come to Christ unless the Father draw him first (6:37, 44, 65). Remember these were religious people who put a great emphasis upon human works for salvation. Christ Himself declares God's sovereign right to draw some and pass by others for salvation. This saying was not at all accepted by the hearers. They said that it was a hard saying and none could accept it (6:60). The Lord asked them if this offended them (6:61), for the doctrine of sovereign election is always offensive to the natural mind,
- D. In 6:66 we have the climax of our Lord's teaching to religious Jews who had made some superficial professions of faith in Christ. Our Lord's teaching was so hard that **"many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."** What offended these professing disciples who turned away from Christ? It was the teaching of God's sovereignty in salvation (6:64, 65). These who turned back were not true disciples but professors who were not willing to bow their wills and minds to the Lord. The true disciple accepts God's Word in simple faith and places his will in subjection to Christ and says, **"Not my will, Lord, but Thine."** NOTE: The doctrine of sovereign election in salvation causes many to turn from the truth and never follow Christ. So difficult is this doctrine even many true disciples reject it because it does not match up with their finite reasoning. One can be saved and deny sovereign election but he cannot have a deep appreciation of his salvation until he accepts this truth. NOTE: We can learn from the late great Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon who said the following about John 6:66:

The defection in this case was on account of doctrine. . . The truth was too hard for them and it was not to be borne with. **"It is a hard saying. Who can hear it?"** A true disciple sits at the feet of his Master, and believes what he is told even when he cannot quite comprehend the meaning, or see the reasons for what his Master utters; but these men had not the essential spirit of a disciple, and consequently when their Instructor began to unfold the innermost parts of the roll of truth, they would not listen to His reading of it. They would believe as far as they could understand, but when they could not

comprehend they turned on their heel and left the school of the Great Teacher. Besides, the Lord Jesus Christ had taught the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and of the need of the Spirit of God, that men should be led to Him, **"for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him, and he said, 'Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.'**" Here our Lord uttered a bit of old-fashioned free-grace doctrine, such as people nowadays do not like. They call it "Calvinism," and put it aside among the old exploded tenets which this enlightened age knows nothing of. What right they have to ascribe to the Genevan reformer a doctrine old as the hills I do not know. But our Lord Jesus never hesitated to fling that truth into the face of His enemies. He told them, **"Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."** Here he tells them plainly that they could not come unto Him unless the Father gave them the grace to come. This humbling doctrine they could not receive, and so they went aside. (The Forgotten Spurgeon)

- E. Christ then turns to the original twelve disciples and asks them if they will also depart because of this hard doctrine of election. Peter, the spokesman for the group says, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (John 6:68)**. NOTE: If we accept Christ's teachings on eternal life then we must also accept His teachings on sovereign drawing of some to salvation.

"Thou alone hast power, I know
To save a wretch like me.
To whom, or whither should I go
If I should run from Thee?"

X. A DISCIPLE HAS LOVE FOR OTHER DISCIPLES

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35).

- A. The disciple of Christ loves to help, pray for, and be with other disciples. When the unsaved world sees love among Christians, then and only then will they know they are disciples. NOTE: Love will be attractive to the non-Christian world. It is not through orthodoxy or fundamental soundness that Christians prove to the world that they are disciples but through love for one another. The unsaved man does not care about doctrine but he is looking for reality in the lives of those who profess to be Christians.
- B. Christ is not saying that when a Christian fails to love another Christian that the unloving one is not saved. The

verse says, "**By this all men will know that you are My disciples. . .**" What Jesus is saying, however, is if a Christian does not have the love he should have towards all other Christians, the world has the right to make the judgment that He is not a genuine Christian.

XI. A DISCIPLE TELLS OTHERS ABOUT CHRIST

"Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32, 33). "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). The disciple is commanded not only to follow Christ privately but also to confess Him publicly. It is not enough to deny ourselves in secret if we deny Him in the open. Now the very fact that Jesus told His disciples not to be ashamed of Him shows that He knew they would, at times, be tempted to be ashamed. Also that He spoke of "this adulterous and sinful generation" shows that He knew disciples would find it difficult to witness to an unwilling world. NOTE: If we are not willing to be a witness by life and by lips, then let's stop calling ourselves Christians!

XII. CONCLUSION

John R. W. Stott, rector of All Souls Church, London, and honorary chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen of England, says,

If, then, you suffer from moral anemia, take my advice and steer clear of Christianity. If you want to live a life of easygoing self-indulgence, whatever you do, do not become a Christian. But if you want a life of adventure in which you have the privilege of serving Him and your fellow men; if you want a life in which to express something of the overwhelming gratitude you are beginning to feel for Him who died for you, then I urge you to yield your life without reserve and without delay to your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (Basic Christianity)