

Sunday, May 28, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (45)

Disciples of Christ – 1

As we continue our study of drawing closer to God, we have covered much ground. Thus far in this 2 year theme we have addressed:

- Who God is – we need to know Him if we are to draw closer to Him and how to trust Him
- Sin – what is sin and how it can separate us from God
- God’s grace – the prime factor and God’s part in our salvation
- Our need for true repentance
- Holiness – we have addressed what it means to live a holy life and how to pursue holiness in every area of our life
- Fellowship – we have examined what fellowship is (joint participation), how it begins with God and that fellowship ought to be the foundation of our fellowship with one another – whether as Christians or as the church. We have also studied compromise and how it affects our fellowship in all of these areas.

Today, I would like to go on a different path. I would like to begin addressing the subject of discipleship. What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? What are some of the qualities associated with being a disciple? What is the cost, responsibilities and rewards of discipleship? How does being a disciple affect our relationships with one another?

I. What is a disciple?

- a. Defined – from the Greek, μαθητής (mathētēs) in its simplest form, the word means a learner or student. But the term actually goes much deeper than that. It describes one who learns from a teacher how to live and strives to follow his teachings and life in his own. It is also a word that involves relationship between the pupil and teacher.
- b. The word was not exclusive to Christians following Jesus. It actually existed centuries prior to Jesus coming to this earth. Disciples were associated with various Greek philosophers and even among the Jews. Mark 2:18 speaks of the disciples of John and of the Pharisees (they were asking Jesus about His disciples not fasting). John 9:27-28 finds the formerly blind man that Jesus gave sight to engaged in discussion with the religious leaders. They declared he was a disciple of Jesus and noted, “We are Moses’ disciples”. Thus it was a commonly used word.
- c. Usage in scripture
 - i. The word disciple is found ~274 times in the New Testament, ALWAYS in the gospels and Acts.
 - ii. Sometimes it referred to the twelve (Matthew 10:1), and other times varying groups of His followers (Matthew 12:49-50, 8:21), and other times a group that likely included SOME of the apostles. Its most frequent usage in the gospels could refer to any of these groups (IOW, it is not clear if it was only the 12).
 - iii. Jesus would at times use it to describe anyone who was willing to follow Him – cf. Luke 9:23. Luke 6:40 – a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.
 - iv. More on this in a moment.
 - v. Acts makes it clear that it was a reference to ALL followers of Jesus – Acts 1:15, 6:1-2, 9:36 (Tabitha), etc. The disciples are mentioned ~30 times in that book.
 - vi. Of note is Acts 11:26, “And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” (A mix of Jews and Gentiles).

- vii. In the rest of the NT, the word is never used, but clearly followers of Jesus were His disciples. In place of that we find the word “Christian”, saints & brethren (Colossians 1:2, Philippians 4:21-22, etc.), believers (1 Tim. 4:12), etc.
- d. Discipleship – like the word, “Christianity”, it is not found in the NT, but it is word that is defined as the state of begin a disciple or follower. When we hear this word, it is a reference to the life of a follower of Jesus. Or the process of becoming a committed follower of Jesus Christ (Dictionary of Bible Themes); As we talk about disciples and what it takes to become a disciple, we notice some key passages to consider.

II. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

- a. There are several passages in the teachings of Jesus that help us understand what is involved in being a disciple of Jesus. With these we can see what is expected.
- b. Luke 9:23-24 – there are at least 6 passages of scripture that we can consider. This one is the only one that does not use the term “disciple”, but it is clear that such is what Jesus is talking about and it is perhaps the most profound
 - i. Begins with desire – this cannot be emphasized enough. The idea of desire is wanting something strongly. Matthew 5:6 – blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Consider Mary and Martha – Luke 10:41-42 – Mary chose the good part. Colossians 3:1-2 – we set our mind on things above. Unless the desire is there, the necessary commitment will not be there either. Unless we desire, we will not respond. I think of the parable of a great supper – Luke 14:15-24 – a man has a great supper and invites many, but many made excuses. The parable implies among other things that they really did not want to go. As a result they were cut off.
 - ii. NOTE: We need to understand the difference between what one needs and desire. This is especially true BEFORE we convert someone. As one source noted, You can convince people they need to be immersed before they desire to be a disciple. How often do we baptize someone who does NOT truly understand discipleship – the commitment they are entering into. They NEED to obey the gospel, but it has to be because they REALLY WANT to do so. More than once we have baptized someone only to see them never return or drift away shortly thereafter. Sometimes that is on them, but often it is on us because we pressure them into the act without converting them. I think this is a good place to contrast Acts 2:38 and 3:19. We often tie these 2 texts together, and rightfully so. I believe the “be converted” or “return” of 3:19 can parallel “be baptized”
 - iii. Let him deny himself – this is the first step in becoming a true disciple. I need to realize that I am surrendering my life to Him. I am making up my mind, I AM going to be His disciple.
 - 1. Romans 12:1-2 – a living sacrifice
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 – the run the race of life to win. And to do so, you must be willing to be temperate in all things.
 - 3. 1 Peter 4:1-4 – we no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. There has to be that change there.
 - 4. Galatians 2:20 – I am crucified with Christ...
 - 5. This will be further emphasized in our next passage.
 - iv. Take up his cross daily – when we think of the cross, we think of suffering. And that is likely the point – a willingness to endure whatever comes your way.
 - 1. 2 Timothy 3:12 notes that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecutions. We emphasized this as we engaged in a study through 1 Peter 4:12-16, etc.
 - 2. The point is a disciple has to be willing to endure hardships, whatever they may be as he learns from his Master – cf. 2 Timothy 2:3-4.
 - 3. And as we consider our Lord, we know how much He suffered for us – 1 Peter 3:18, 2:21-24, etc.

4. Luke 14:27, which we will notice in a moment Jesus says that, *“Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”*
 5. Consider also Galatians 2:20 again. AND 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 – we live for Him who died for us and rose again. 1 Corinthians 15:30-31 as Paul deals with his suffering and the resurrection of Jesus he said, *“I die daily.”*
 6. AND, if for some reason we are blessed to escape persecution (NOTE: Nowhere does scripture tell you to go looking for trouble, nor does it teach that if possible you can avoid it (like Paul appealing to his Roman citizenship and to Caesar (Acts 22:25, 25:11-12), just do not compromise to avoid it), you will still be living a life of sacrifice and paying a price for your genuine faith.
 7. This verse is also found in Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34 but they both omit the word daily. Luke reminds us that our willingness to bear our cross is not limited to occasional times, but DAILY if needed. This shows TRUE commitment. NOTE: As I understand, some early mss also omit the word in Luke, but its presence is found in most mss, including many early ones.
- v. **Follow Me** – the final admonition in this text is that we follow Him. This is the very description of a disciple.
1. According to Matthew, on at least 5 occasions Jesus said, *“Follow Me”* – Matt. 4:19 – fishers of men; 8:22 – let the dead bury their own; 9:9 – Matthew; 16:24 – our text; 19:21 – to the rich, young ruler.
 2. What does it mean to follow Him? While He is certainly not on earth anymore, He has given us an example to follow in various aspects of our life.
 3. We do not let distractions keep us from following Him – cf. Luke 9:57-62
 4. We obey what He tells us to do – John 8:31, 14:21. Note that this text emphasizes that we ABIDE in His word.
 5. John 12:26 says, *If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.* This is as He is preparing to go to Jerusalem and be crucified. And this summarizes what it means to follow Him – we serve Him!
 6. Matthew 19:27-29, *Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.* In this text we see the promised reward if we will follow Him and become His disciples.
- vi. **Consider also the order** – This is a great text on discipleship because it gives us order:
1. Begins with a humble realization of who we are in relation to our Lord and teacher.
 2. We *“count the cost”* and are willing to pay the price because we have determined its worth (cf. Romans 8:18).
 3. And therefore, we listen to, learn OF and FROM Him and strive to imitate His life in every way that we can.

And thus we are introduced to what it means to be a disciple. We will continue this thread in our next few lessons. We still have a few more verses from Jesus to examine. And then we will discuss how being a disciple will involve every relationship we are in. Meanwhile, let me encourage you – if you desire to draw closer to God, you need to resolve to be His disciple. Are you a disciple of Christ? Think about it!