

1. An Overview of Discipleship

Biblical material: Matt. 4:18-22; 10:24, 25; Mark 3:13, 14; 8:34, 35; Luke 14:25, 26.

Quotes

- The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence. He inspires self-distrust. He guides their eyes from himself to the spirit that quickens him. He will have no disciple. *Amos Bronson Alcott*
- Christ did not appoint professors, but followers. If Christianity ... is not reduplicated in the life of the person expounding it, then he does not expound Christianity, for Christianity is a message about living and can only be expounded by being realized in men's lives. *Soren Kierkegaard*
- Knowing that we are fulfilling God's purpose is the only thing that really gives rest to the restless human heart. *Chuck Colson*
- To be as good as our fathers we must be better, imitation is not discipleship. *Wendell Phillips*

Questions

What is the real meaning of disciple? What are we meant to be learning? What are the possible misunderstandings of the concept of discipleship? How would you explain what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? What are disciples supposed to represent? How do we represent God to the world? What kind of disciples are we to be?

Discussion/ Comment

"Discipleship involves willingness to follow commands ..." (Monday's Lesson). How did Jesus explain his "commands"? He gives a new command—but it's not a command at all! His burden is easy, his yoke light. In this Jesus is demonstrating that God wants to teach us, but not to impose on us. He invites, but does not enforce. He permits, but does not demand. It's all about internal, rather than external, control. We are to identify with the rightness of God and his actions, not because he is God, but because it is right!

Jesus did not want disciples in the sense of servants. Rather he spoke about his disciples as friends—because they would operate not at a level of unquestioning obedience, but thoughtful acceptance of all things true and right.

How do we understand Wendell Phillips comment that "imitation is not discipleship"? What of the famous work by Thomas a Kempis, "The Imitation of Christ." Surely we *are* supposed to imitate Christ? Or not? The problem with imitation is that we often imitate what we can see—the outward aspects. What Jesus pleads for is our thoughtful understanding, not a thoughtless imitation. When he prays to the father for our oneness, it is a oneness of understanding of the truth about God, not a uniformity of practice.

In all his actions, and in his invitation for us to follow, Jesus never laid out a "disciples' manual." It is not about following a course, or achieving a pass in the discipleship exam. It's about knowing the person, and identifying with his thoughts and convictions, his beliefs and goals. It's ironic that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and he gave them thoughtful insights with which to begin, we the disciples took such guidelines and turned them into a chant to be recited! Vain repetitions of prayers gain nothing, said Jesus: "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many

words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Mt. 6:7, 8 NIV). The problem, said Jesus, quoting Isaiah, is with disciples who don’t think, who believe they just have to do what they’re told: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” (Mt. 15:8, 9 NIV).

Jesus stressed this point time and again in his teaching. His desire is not for followers who will just go along with things. He is not looking for numbers to prove popularity. He knows that the ones shouting hosanna one day will be shouting crucify the next. He wants honest disciples who will think and question, not look to their own self-righteousness and pride, but who are teachable and open to God. In fact disciples who are filled with a sense of their own importance are a liability to God. It’s not about rule-based obedience, but a heartfelt need of God in our human hopelessness, placing ourselves in the hands of the only Being in the universe who can heal the damage of sin and restore us into His image once again. Jesus put it strongly:

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.’” Luke 18:9-14 NIV.

True discipleship means understanding the real basis of our relationship with God!

Ellen White Comments

To know God is the most wonderful knowledge that men can have. There is much wisdom with worldly men; but with all their wisdom, they behold not the beauty and majesty, the justice and wisdom, the goodness and holiness, of the Creator of all worlds. The Lord walks among men by his providences; but his stately steps are not heard, his presence is not discerned, his hand is not recognized. The work of Christ’s disciples is to shine as lights, making manifest to the world the character of God. They are to catch the increasing rays of light from the word of God, and reflect them to men enshrouded in the darkness of misapprehension of God. The servants of Christ must rightly represent the character of God and Christ to men. Says the apostle, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” {RH, March 5, 1889}

Christ came to reveal to the world the knowledge of the character of God, of which the world was destitute. This knowledge was the chief treasure which he committed to his disciples to be communicated to men. The truth of God had been hidden beneath a mass of tradition and error. The sacrificial offerings which had been instituted to teach men concerning the vicarious atonement of Christ, to teach them that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, had become to them a stumbling-block. All that was spiritual and holy was perverted to their darkened understanding. They were blinded by pride and prejudice so that they could not see to the end of that which was abolished. Jesus came to change the order of things that then existed, and reveal to them the character of the Father. He drew aside the veil which concealed his glory from the eyes of mortals, and made manifest to the world the only true and living God, whom to know aright is life eternal. {RH, November 1, 1892}