

## 2. Discipleship Then and Now

**Biblical material:** Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Mark 16:20; John 3:21-30; Acts 5:34-39.

### Quotes

- The form that discipleship takes is conditioned by the historic times in which one lives, as well as by the context of an individual's life, but the underlying principle remains the same: each of us is called by love to love; called out of our narrow individualism and our small private world, to allow ourselves to be "turned around" by the allurements of God, and to live for him, as Jesus did. *Thelma Hall*
- It's hard to remember that Jesus did not come to make us safe, but rather to make us disciples, citizens of God's new age, a kingdom of surprise. *Stanley Hauerwas*
- Embrace a formula or a list in order to "live the Christian life," and you are doomed to frustration. *Gene Edwards*

### Questions

What can we learn from ancient practices of disciples? How is this relevant to us today? What were the differences between Jesus' disciples and those of John the Baptist? What do the various "schools" tell us about the master-teacher attitudes? When Jesus asked "Will you also go away?" what was he implying? What makes us a disciple?

### Discussion/ Comment

As the lesson notes, usually it was the disciples who chose the teacher. So how did Jesus' make their decision? What attracted them, and what was the evidence? Jesus had many disciples who followed him for what they could get. Think of the thousands who tagged along—and got fed. Then they decide to make him "king," to set him up as the front man to confront the Romans. As if they could make the King of the Universe any more of a king than he already was! And remember Pilate's comment, "So you are a king then?" and Jesus' reply.

The key verse is John 3:21: "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (NIV). That's the evidence—both to determine the truth about Jesus, and also his followers.

To his credit, Rabbi Gamaliel used the same concept when the disciples were brought before the Sanhedrin. He wisely pointed to recent examples of "fanaticism" that could be viewed by some as paralleling Jesus' ministry. He explained that these controversial movements had come to nothing. Clearly they were of human origin, then. But, he warned, if those involved in Jesus were doing God's will, anyone fighting them would be fighting God. Maybe Gamaliel was only wise in his apparently "neutral" wait-and-see analysis, but perhaps was more convinced then he admitted to the truth revealed by Jesus and his disciples...

For Gamaliel had his own disciples, including one Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). Could it have been that Gamaliel's appeal to allow the evidence to speak that was behind the struggle Saul experienced on the road to Damascus, and how he eventually was convinced that the Jesus and those he persecuted really did have the truth after all? In any event, the disciples of Jesus were released (though beaten with rods first), and remained free to be an effective witness for truth.

Even here, we proceed carefully. For Jesus himself, though God incarnate, did not seek to have followers because of his own personality. He refused to accept anything that was of "hero worship," only accepting the appreciation of the truth that he had come to reveal. Sadly, and all

too often, such charismatic “teachers” exploit their role, look to be personally revered, and seek adulation from their disciples. Jesus would have none of this, and there was no beauty that we would desire him, no personal attractiveness that would get in the way of a clear appreciation of the truth. God wants only disciples of truth, not for any other reason.

When the disciples went out, and there was confirmation by “signs,” (Mark 16:20), what was being confirmed? Again it is not the person of the disciples, or the person of Jesus that is being confirmed. It is a confirmation of “his word”—the mission of Jesus to reveal the nature and character of the Father.

The same is applies to us, and the reason why we wish to be disciples of Jesus. Not for any kind of material gain, or prestige, or advancement. Nor because we want appreciation in society, to be respected in the community, or to satisfy any of our selfish desires. Jesus only wants disciples who want to have the truth, and to be set free, saved, and healed.

### **Ellen White Comments**

“Come ye yourselves apart,” He bids us. If we would give heed to His word, we should be stronger and more useful. The disciples sought Jesus, and told Him all things; and He encouraged and instructed them. If today we would take time to go to Jesus and tell Him our needs, we should not be disappointed; He would be at our right hand to help us. We need more simplicity, more trust and confidence in our Saviour. {DA 363}

But though Mary had not a right conception of Christ’s mission, she trusted Him implicitly. To this faith Jesus responded. It was to honor Mary’s trust, and to strengthen the faith of His disciples, that the first miracle was performed. The disciples were to encounter many and great temptations to unbelief. To them the prophecies had made it clear beyond all controversy that Jesus was the Messiah. They looked for the religious leaders to receive Him with confidence even greater than their own. They declared among the people the wonderful works of Christ and their own confidence in His mission, but they were amazed and bitterly disappointed by the unbelief, the deep-seated prejudice, and the enmity to Jesus, displayed by the priests and rabbis. The Saviour’s early miracles strengthened the disciples to stand against this opposition. {DA 147}

You know how it was with John; when he saw his Master slighted by the Samaritans, he was indignant, and inquired of Jesus if they should not call down fire from heaven upon his enemies; but Christ said he had “not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” John was constantly learning to copy the life of Jesus. He was learning in Christ’s school. He says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Thus it was, lesson after lesson Christ gave to his disciples, that they might know the will of the Father, and shine as lights in the world. John and Peter were men whom God could trust, but Judas was not. They had received and heeded the lessons, and gained the victory; but Judas had failed at every trial. He saw his faults, but instead of correcting them revenged himself by picking flaws in others around him. And you see by his sad fate, my brethren, that that is not a safe business for the sons and daughters of God to engage in. I counsel you to be kind, to be courteous, to let no feelings arise against your enemies. You can gain no spiritual strength by talking about the defects of those around you; but if you continue to do this, like Judas you will eventually separate yourselves from God and his work. Paul says to Timothy, “Take heed unto thyself;” that is, seek God first for thyself. Let us individually turn our attention to ourselves, diligently guard our own souls, and set a Christ-like example before those whom we would criticise. {RH, August 18, 1885}