

PORTRAITS OF DISCIPLESHIP

by Heath Rogers



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Introduction

Jesus calls us to follow Him and to become His disciples, but what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?

Jesus is open and honest about the demands of discipleship and calls upon men to count the cost to make sure they are willing to meet these demands (Luke 14:25-33). We cannot truly call ourselves “disciples” today if we are not meeting the demands the Lord set forth in His word.

Our Lord is the Master Teacher. He employs illustrations in His teaching, making use of common items to better explain spiritual realities. The image of a shepherd looking for his lost sheep, a sower going forth to sow seed, a blind man trying to lead another blind man, or a camel going through the eye of a needle, made effective teaching tools.

There are times when Jesus spoke plainly about the demands of discipleship. However, the Lord also makes use of various illustrations to emphasize particular responsibilities and blessings of discipleship. In looking at the illustrations used by the Lord and His apostles, we gain a better understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a true disciple of Christ.

As the table of contents points out, the lessons in this book are arranged according to the different relationships and responsibilities that are involved in discipleship. All of the illustrations used by the Lord and His disciples have limitations in application. As one proceeds through this study, he should not try to overextend these illustrations, but should appreciate the points of application found in each illustration.

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Sherrel A. Mercer and Steve Wilson in appreciation for their support, encouragement, mentoring, and friendship as I labored under their oversight at the Robison Street Church of Christ in Edna, Texas.

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WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

The Disciple's Identity

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23)

Before we begin to look at portraits of discipleship, we must first understand what a disciple is.

What Is A Disciple?

The word "disciple" is translated from the Greek word **mathetes** which means "a learner or pupil." However, this word involves more than our modern idea of a pupil or student. The Biblical concept of discipleship emphasizes the teacher-student relationship. A disciple is a devoted supporter and follower of his teacher. He accepts the views of his teacher and adopts his teacher's way of life.

What Are The Demands Of Discipleship?

Although Jesus has many followers, He makes it clear that not everyone who follows Him is a true disciple.

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has **cannot be My disciple**" (Luke 14:33, emphasis mine – HR).

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine'" (John 8:31, NASV).

Only those who meet certain conditions or requirements are recognized by the Lord as being His true disciples. What are these conditions? How can we know whether or not we are truly disciples of Christ?

1. We Must Deny Self

We know that self-denial is an important quality to have. There are times when we must deny ourselves of things in order to

Jesus is not the only person in the Bible who had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples (Matt. 9:14), the Pharisees had disciples (Matt. 22:16), and some of the Jews claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28). However, as **Christians**, we are concerned with being a **disciple** of Jesus Christ.

If I am going to be a true disciple of Christ, **I must** put Christ at the center of my life and on the throne of **my heart**.

achieve certain goals or to avoid certain problems. However, Jesus did not tell us that we must practice self-denial. He said that we must deny self, and there is a difference between the two.

The Lord's instructions regarding discipleship are found twice in the gospel of Luke. A comparison between these passages will shed some light on what Jesus meant when He said "let him deny himself."

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

"Hating" our family members is worded as, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," in Matthew 10:37. Jesus is not teaching us to hate others. He is saying that our love for Him must be greater than our love for any other person or thing.

The first requirement of discipleship is that we remove from our heart everything and everyone that hinders total obedience unto Christ. No one is to come between us and our loyalty to Christ, including ourselves.

Denying self is accomplished when we put the will of Christ in the place of self (Gal. 2:20). If I am going to be a true disciple of Christ, I must put Christ at the center of my life and on the throne of my heart. I must always choose to do those things that please Him, not myself (2 Cor. 5:9).

2. We Must Be Willing To Suffer For Christ

The second requirement given by the Lord is that we take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Many people have shown their misunderstanding of this statement by carrying around large, wooden crosses. This is not what the Lord meant by this statement. The cross was not a religious symbol when Jesus spoke these words. It was not worn as a piece of jewelry or hung on the wall as a decoration. In Jesus' day the cross was a much feared instrument of suffering and death. Jesus told His disciples He was going to suffer and die (Luke 9:22); then He said that if one desired to come after Him, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him (v. 23).

Jesus was up front with those who desired to be His disciples. This was not a glamorous position He was offering them. It was not a means of climbing the social ladder or achieving greatness in the eyes of men. Discipleship was (and still is) about following Jesus, and the path that Jesus was walking was leading Him to His death. Unless we are willing to walk the path He walked, and bear the suffering that comes with it (2 Tim. 3:12), we cannot be His disciples.

3. We Must Learn From Christ

The third thing Jesus says to do to is “follow Me” (Luke 9:23). This was done literally by those who lived at that time, but how can we follow Jesus today?

Although there is a literal aspect to His command, what Jesus means is for men to follow His teachings (John 8:31). Remember, discipleship primarily denotes one who learns. In the Great Commission, Jesus sent His apostles out to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...**” (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis mine – HR). In His Great Invitation, Jesus says, “Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me**” (Matt. 11:29, emphasis mine – HR).

The way we follow Christ today is by following His teachings. “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). There is no way that one can truly be a disciple of Christ without following His teachings.

4. We Must Bear Fruit

“By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8, NASV). The illustration of the vine and branches emphasizes the importance of bearing or producing fruit. As we abide in the teachings of Christ, we are expected to bear much fruit. The production of this fruit is proof we are the Lord’s disciples. Without the fruit, there is no proof of discipleship and the Lord removes us and burns us in the fire! – vv. 4-6.

What is this fruit we are to produce? Steady progress in spiritual growth (2 Pet. 1:5-8), good deeds (Matt. 25:34-46, Eph. 2:10), and increased talents (Matt. 25:14-30), to mention a few.

5. We Must Love Our Brethren

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

Before Jesus left His disciples, He commanded that they love one another as He loved them. In doing this, they would prove to others they were really His disciples.

This requirement is one of the most challenging because it involves our attitude towards other people. No one is a “lone disciple.” Disciples are to worship together (Heb. 10:25) and work together in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Different things can happen that will threaten the

peace and unity of the local church. This is why disciples are told to “put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14).

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh, but our love for Him is to be shown by the way that we love other disciples (1 John 4:12, 20-21). When we are seen biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:14-15), the world has a hard time believing that we are truly disciples of Christ.

6. We Must Be Committed To Following Christ

Perhaps the one thing that is lacking in discipleship today is a failure to make a commitment to follow Christ in every aspect of one’s life. Being a disciple is not something we do once and it is taken care of for the rest of our life. The Lord emphasized a “daily” commitment (Luke 9:23). We are faced with choices every day in which we have to deny self and do what Christ would have us to do.

We are to count the cost before becoming a disciple (Luke 14:28). Once we have made this decision, we are not to look back, but keep moving forward (Luke 9:62).

Conclusion

If we are going to make a serious claim to being a disciple of Christ, we must do so on His terms, not on our own. Are we really a disciple of Christ? Have we put Him first in every part of our lives, and committed ourselves to following His teachings until the end?

Questions

1. What is a disciple? _____

2. Is everyone who claims to follow Jesus a true disciple? _____
3. What does it mean to deny self? _____

4. What does Jesus mean when He required us to “hate” our loved ones (compare Luke 14:26 with Matt. 10:37)? _____

5. How does Paul view his life in Christ (Gal. 2:20)? _____

6. Who should a disciple of Christ seek to please (2 Cor. 5:9)? _____
7. What does Jesus mean when He spoke of taking up one’s cross (Luke 9:23)? _____

- 8. What promise is found in 2 Timothy 3:12? _____

- 9. How are we to follow Christ today (John 8:31)? _____

- 10. What were the apostles to do after they had made disciples (Matt. 28:20)? _____

- 11. What does it mean to call Jesus "Lord" (Luke 6:46)? _____

- 12. What is expected from those who abide in the teachings of Christ (John 15:8)? _____

- 13. What new commandment does Jesus give His disciples (John 13:34-35)? _____

- 14. How do we show our love for God (1 John 4:12, 20-21)? _____

- 15. What role does love play in our relationship with other disciples (Col. 3:14)? _____

- 16. What does Jesus want us to do before we commit ourselves to following Him (Luke 14:28)? _____

- 17. Describe the kind of commitment we must make in order to be true disciples of Christ (Luke 9:57-62). _____

Lesson 2

AN ATHLETE

The Disciple's Commitment

"...Run in such a way that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24)

Man's respect for a commitment is sorely lacking in our world today. Promises, agreements, and contracts are broken with little thought to the consequences it will have upon others or upon one's own reputation. People do not seem to stick with things and see them through like they once did. This kind of an attitude does not work if one is to be a disciple of Christ.

Jesus requires a commitment from those who are His disciples. He was up front with men, telling them the cost of discipleship and demanding they count the cost before committing themselves to following Him. One who looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

Athletics In The First Century

The ancient Greeks were noted for their devotion to the athletic games and gymnastic sports. They believed it was just as important to develop the body as it was to educate the mind. After Rome conquered the Greeks, the Romans continued this interest in the games.

As a rule, the Jews found the games to be offensive. The games were a form of idolatry. They were played in honor of the gods, and began with a sacrifice being made in honor of the gods. Also, the contestants trained and competed in the nude. The Greek word for exercise (gumnazo) literally means "to practice naked."

There were four primary games: the Isthmian, Nemean, Pythian, and the Olympian. The Isthmian games were held every two years just outside of Corinth. The Olympian games, held every four years, were the most celebrated of these events. Our modern Olympics are based upon these games.

The games consisted of a number of events, including different kinds of races, jumping, discus, javelin, wrestling, boxing, and even contests between heralds and trumpeters.

Commitment

The act of **binding** yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of **action**.

We **exercise** ourselves towards **godliness** in different ways (all of these verses contain Greek words that were used to describe different aspects of athletics).

Praying

- Rom. 15:30
- Col. 4:12

Obeying The Truth

- Gal. 5:7

Learning And Defending The Word Of God

- Heb. 5:12-14
- Jude 3

Spreading The Gospel

- Rom. 15:20
- Phil. 4:3
- Col. 1:29

Helping Other Christians

- Gal. 2:2
- Phil. 2:16

Willing To Suffer For The Sake Of The Gospel

- Heb. 10:32-33

Finishing The Course

- Luke 13:24
- 2 Tim. 4:7-8

Contestants were trained under very strict rules and supervision. They were required to prepare for a period of ten months prior to the games. Thirty days before the events began they resided at one place where they exercised regularly, followed a strict diet, avoided luxuries and got sufficient rest – all while under constant supervision. If a contestant failed to follow these rules, he was disqualified from the games.

These games were still very popular in the first century. Stadiums had been built in various places across the Roman Empire, and large crowds of people came to watch the contests. Because of their popularity, Paul was able to make good use of the games as illustrations throughout his epistles show. The athlete provided an excellent example of the kind of commitment Jesus requires from His disciples.

An Athlete Must Be Committed To Rigorous Training

If an athlete was going to win the crown, he knew he had to commit himself to training for almost an year in order to qualify for the games, much less be able to compete with other highly trained athletes. Paul makes some allusions to this type of training in 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

In verse 25, Paul says that he is “temperate in all things.” The word “temperate” means to exercise self-restraint, to have power over one’s self. The athlete has to abstain from all things (both unlawful and lawful) that would hinder his ability to compete at the highest possible level. A dedicated disciple must be in control of himself in order to be equipped to serve Christ (Gal. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:6).

Paul also says, “but I buffet my body and make it my slave” (v. 27, NASV). The word “buffet” is translated from a word that literally meant to give someone a black eye. The idea is to strike an opponent, knock him to the ground, and keep him down (make him a slave). Paul applies this illustration to his own extreme practice of self-mastery. He did not physically harm his body, but he brought his passions into complete subjection. He was willing to do anything that was necessary in order to render total obedience to Christ (Matt. 5:29-30; Gal. 2:20).

In 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul tells Timothy to exercise himself toward godliness. The word “exercise” is translated from the Greek word *gumnazo* (from which we get our English word “gymnastic”). With the use of this word, Timothy would

have instantly thought of the exercises that prepared an athlete for his competition in the games. Paul is telling Timothy to stop wasting his time with worthless arguments and “get back into the gym!”

Godliness is piety or devotion to God. A disciple is to be committed to being a devout and dedicated follower of Christ. Just as an athlete is committed to his workout routine, disciples are to be committed to prayer and Bible study, being present for all of the assemblies, prepared for Bible class, etc.

An Athlete Must Be Committed To Competing By The Rules

In order to enter the games, an athlete had to prove to the judges he was of pure Greek blood, had not forfeited his right of citizenship through misconduct, and had undergone the necessary training. Likewise, no one can be a disciple of Christ unless they meet certain requirements set forth by the Lord (Luke 14:26-27).

Once an athlete was in the games, he had to compete according to the regulations governing the contest (2 Tim. 2:5). If an athlete broke the rules, he was not only denied the crown, but was sometimes disgraced and even punished. In our own time, we have seen Olympic athletes stripped of their medals because it was learned that they did not abide by the rules.

Paul even says that he could become disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27). He took great pains to make sure he did not lose his right to the crown. Entering the race does not mean we have won it. We must strive lawfully in order to win the crown (Matt. 7:21-23).

An Athlete Must Run To Win

The athlete is not crowned as a champion simply because he has trained and competed by the rules. It is not enough to be in the game. He has to run to win! The attitude he possesses as he competes is very important. An athlete cannot win with an “I’ve done good enough to get by” attitude. The victory goes to those who run to win.

Hebrews 12:1 speaks of an athlete’s determination to win. The writer encourages his readers to “lay aside every weight.” Runners and swimmers remove all extra weight and streamline themselves for maximum performance. Disciples must cast off and throw aside everything that hinders them from following Christ. These “weights” would obviously include sinful activi-

“The **hope** of eternal life is not sealed in a single glorious moment in one’s experience of conversion; but it is a **life-long** fidelity to the risen Lord, the running of life’s race **all the way** to the finish line”

(Coffman 142).

ties, but involvement in innocent things can become a distraction that weighs us down and keeps us from serving Christ to the best of our ability. If our desire to follow Christ is like that of an athlete, we should be willing to lay aside anything that weighs us down.

The writer also admonishes his readers to “run with endurance.” A runner needs the ability to “keep on keeping on.” The disciple’s race is not a sprint. It is a marathon. We must keep running until we reach the goal (Heb. 10:36). We cannot quit until the race is over.

Paul tells the Corinthians to “run in such a way that you may obtain” the prize (1 Cor. 9:24). In a literal race, there is only one winner. The athlete must run in such a way that he is the first one to cross the finish line. An “I have done good enough” attitude will not win the race. We are to serve Christ in such a way that, if Christianity is a race, we should be the first one to cross the finish line.

Paul goes on to describe the intensity of his spiritual training: “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty” (v. 26). Paul knew what he wanted and was determined to get it. He had his eye on the prize. He was not distracted by weights or entanglements. He looked unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2), set his mind on the things above (Col. 3:1-2), and pressed toward the goal for the prize (Phil. 3:12-14).

“Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air” (v. 26). In the sport of boxing, a missed blow wastes energy and exposes oneself to the opponent. Paul did not waste any opportunities. He was deliberate and purposeful in his service to Christ. We must show the same determination and commitment in our service to Christ.

Conclusion

The citizens of the first century world were very familiar with the games. They knew about the training that was required, the rules that governed the competitions, and the efforts that were necessary in order for one to gain the victory. Paul called upon disciples to show the same commitment in following Christ. We are to exercise ourselves to godliness, strive lawfully, remove every hindrance, and run with endurance. Only those who have the commitment of an athlete will win the imperishable crown of life.

References

Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1977. 142. Print.

Questions

1. Describe the kind of training that contestants had to undergo in order to compete in the ancient games. _____

2. What happened to a contestant who failed to follow these training guidelines? _____

3. What does the word "temperate" mean? _____

4. How is temperance important to an athlete? _____

5. How is temperance important to a disciple? _____

6. In what sense does Paul "buffet" or "discipline" his own body (1 Cor. 9:27)? _____

7. Why does Paul "buffet" or "discipline" his body? _____

8. In contrast to bodily exercise, how is exercising oneself in godliness profitable for all things (1 Tim. 4:7-8)? _____

9. List some ways that we can exercise ourselves in godliness. _____

10. How must an athlete compete if he is to win the crown (2 Tim. 2:5)? _____

11. Why do we need endurance (Heb. 10:36)? _____

12. What are some "weights" that must be laid aside in order to follow Christ more effectively (Heb. 12:1)? _____

13. Are these "weights" always things that are sinful in and of themselves? Explain. _____

Lesson 3

A SOLDIER

The Disciple's Battle

"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3)

The first disciples of Christ lived in the Roman Empire and would have been very familiar with the dress and duties of the Roman soldiers. When the apostle Paul referred to Christians as soldiers of Christ, he was using an illustration with which his readers would have been all too familiar. In this lesson, we will consider some things that we can learn about discipleship from a soldier.

1. We Have A Commander

We are soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3-4). He has enlisted us as soldiers, and we must please Him with our service. He is the captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). As a commander, He gives us orders to follow (Matt. 8:8-9, Luke 6:46). However, He does not send us into battle. He leads us (Matt. 16:24) and is ever present and ready to help us in the fight (Heb. 2:18; 4:14-16; 7:25).

2. We Have An Enemy

The existence of an army implies the possibility of an enemy. Who is the enemy of God's people? Is it the false religions of the world, denominations, or cults? Is it the atheists who are promoting a humanist agenda in our society? Is it brethren who are teaching and fellowshiping error? While battles come from these sources, none of them are our true enemy, "for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12).

Our adversary is the devil (1 Pet. 5:8). The Bible warns us of the seriousness of our enemy. With its figurative language, the book of Revelation describes Satan as "a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads" (12:3). He is not to be underestimated.

We are **soldiers** of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3-4). He has **enlisted** us as soldiers, and we must please Him with our **service**.

The Whole Armor Of God

Belt

- The Truth

Breastplate

- Righteousness

Shoes

- Preparation
Of The Gospel
Of Peace

Shield

- Faith

Helmet

- Salvation

Sword

- Word Of God

We have been informed about the nature and the strategy of our enemy, "for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). We know that he is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). Satan is extremely dangerous and cannot be trusted. He is a predator, attacking the weak and unsuspecting (1 Pet. 5:8). He disguises himself and his true motives (2 Cor. 11:14). He has help in the spiritual realm (Eph. 6:12), as well as from men who are ensnared through sin and error to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26).

We must remember who our enemy is. Satan is a strong, crafty, and evil adversary who will do anything to devour our soul. He does not fight fair. Many soldiers have fallen because they have underestimated the enemy.

3. We Have Weapons

The Lord has not left us alone and defenseless against this formidable enemy. We are given the whole armor of God that we may be able to withstand in the evil day (Eph. 6:13-18).

Belt – The belt was a foundational garment. It held everything in place. The thing that holds everything in place for the disciple is the "truth." The unquestionable truth of Scripture gives the soldier of Christ stability as he fights his battles.

Breastplate – The breastplate consisted of pieces of leather or metal fashioned together. The purpose of the breastplate was to protect the heart and other organs. "Righteousness" is moral uprightness, holiness, godliness, and integrity. A disciple who is protected with righteousness cannot be penetrated with accusations, threats, or false charges. One who fills his heart with righteousness is not easily tempted to sin.

Shoes – Roman soldiers wore sandals with hobnailed spikes to assure good footing. When their feet were shod, they were ready. Our feet are to be shod with the "preparation of the gospel of peace." We must be ready to use, spread, defend, and teach the gospel.

Shield – The Roman shield was a full body shield. It consisted of a framework of wood, wicker or metal, covered with thick leather and sometimes lined with metal. This shield could absorb the impact of an enemy's weapon, repel spears and arrows, and be used as a protective roof. Our shield is our "faith." Committed conviction repels Satan's attacks of temptation, doubt, fear, worry, lust, etc.

Helmet – A helmet was usually made of metal, though some were made of leather. We certainly appreciate the importance of protecting the head. Helmets are worn today in a variety

of hazardous situations – sports, construction, mining, military exercises, etc. A blow that would merely injure another part of the body could be fatal if landed on the head. The assurance of our “salvation” allows us to hold our head up in our fight (2 Tim. 1:12).

Sword – The sword was the soldier’s most important weapon. This is the only offensive weapon on this list. Our sword is the “word of God.” The word of God is a sharp sword that penetrates the heart of man (Heb. 4:12) and defeats the enemy (Rev. 19:15, 21; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

All of these weapons have one thing in common – they all come from the word of God. God has not left us defenseless. We have His word.

Although not specified as a piece of the armor of God, we must recognize the place and importance of prayer (v. 18). The strength to overcome the enemy is found in the Lord, not ourselves (v. 10).

4. We Must Train

Paul told Timothy to be a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Soldiers have to go through boot camp and training to be their best. They have to exercise and run drills in order to stay in shape and be prepared to serve.

If the word of God is our weapon and armor, we have to learn how to use it. Given time, every disciple is expected to be experienced and skilled in the word of God (Heb. 5:12-14). We need to progress from nursing on the milk of the word to rightly dividing the meat of the word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Where does this training take place? When we read, study, and meditate upon the word of God, we are developing and training. However, many valuable opportunities to train ourselves in the word of God are found in the assemblies of the church. Time spent listening to gospel preaching, preparing for and taking part in Bible classes, preparing to teach a class or deliver an invitation, attending gospel meetings, home Bible studies, etc. are all valuable opportunities to learn the word of God.

It takes time to train ourselves in the word of God. There are no shortcuts. We are not to entangle ourselves in the affairs of this world to the point we neglect our duty as a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4). If we are too busy to train (study the word of God), then we are too busy.

5. We Must Fight

Soldiers are not enlisted, trained, and equipped to sit around and do nothing. When the order is given, the soldier must be ready to fight. A number of words are used to express the duties of an active soldier of Jesus Christ.

Fight (1 Tim. 6:12). If we have enlisted in the Lord’s army, then we must fight the good fight of faith. The Greek word that is translated *fight* means to engage in a conflict, to contend with an adversary. The Lord did not provide a scabbard for our sword. It must remain drawn and we must be ready to use it.

Wrestle (Eph. 6:12). While some modern warfare is fought at a distance (sending jets and missiles), wrestling denotes hand to hand combat. Spiritual warfare is a messy struggle which demands our involvement. The opponent must be engaged, overpowered, pinned down, or run out of the ring.

Resist (1 Pet. 5:9). We are never to surrender to the enemy. We are not to lay down our arms or negotiate a peace treaty. In Christ we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). Being fully clothed with the armor of God, we are equipped to repel his attacks, resist his temptations, and make him flee from us (James 4:7). Remember, the armor of God does not protect the soldier's back. We must stand and fight.

Endure Hardships (2 Tim. 2:3). War is not an easy or pleasant task. A soldier of Christ must be prepared to endure the hardships that come with spiritual warfare (resisting temptation, overcoming moments of doubt and fear, standing for the truth in an unbelieving world, contending for the faith when error threatens the Lord's church, dealing with the desertion of fellow soldiers, etc).

6. Where Is The Battleground?

This is not a physical battle that is fought at a physical location. It is a spiritual battle that is fought in the hearts and minds of men (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

It is fought in our own minds when we are tempted to sin. Like the Lord, we must use the word of God to resist every temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). We must take precautions and safeguard ourselves against temptation (Rom. 13:14), filling our hearts with those things that are true, noble, and just (Phil. 4:8).

This battle is also fought in the minds of other people. The strongholds of error must be pulled down by a presentation of the truth so that every thought of man can be brought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Those in opposition to the truth must be humbly corrected so they can come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

When we are resisting temptation, teaching the truth, exposing error, warning against spiritual dangers, bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, restoring erring brethren, winning lost souls to Christ, etc., we are fighting the "good fight of faith."

Conclusion

A soldier is a good portrait of the responsibilities of a disciple. Jesus is our leader, and we must please Him with our service. While there are many blessings found in being a disciple, the reality is we have a powerful enemy seeking to devour our soul. We are equipped, however, to win the battle for our soul. We are to take advantage of opportunities to study, lean strongly upon the Lord in prayer, resist the enemy and stand victorious with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Who is our commander (2 Tim. 2:3-4)? _____

2. How does John describe Jesus in Revelation 19:11-16? _____

3. Describe how Jesus is willing to help us in our spiritual battles (Heb. 2:18; 4:14-16; 7:25).

4. Who is our adversary? _____
5. What do the following verses tell us about our enemy?
 John 8:44 - _____
 1 Peter 5:8 - _____
 2 Cor. 11:14 - _____
 Eph. 6:12 - _____
 2 Tim. 2:26 - _____
6. Describe each piece of the armor of God and its spiritual application to the life of a disciple (Eph. 6:14-17).
 Belt _____
 Breastplate _____
 Shoes _____
 Shield _____
 Helmet _____
 Sword _____
7. What is expected of a disciple (Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:15)? _____

8. When do disciples undergo their training? _____

9. What does the word "wrestle" imply about our spiritual battle (Eph. 6:12)? _____

10. What does Jesus use to resist the devil (Matt. 4:1-11)? _____

11. What is promised to those who resist the devil (James 4:7)? _____

12. What are some hardships that must be endured by soldiers of Christ? _____

13. Where does this spiritual battle take place (2 Cor. 10:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)? _____

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

The Disciple's Transformation

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!' (Jer. 18:6)

The prophet Jeremiah was sent to the house of a potter to learn a lesson (Jer. 18:1-6). Jeremiah saw the potter working the clay on a wheel, correcting a vessel that had been disfigured and shaping it once again into a good vessel according to his liking. God then told Jeremiah that He was the Potter and Israel was the clay.

Although not used by the Lord, the figure of the potter and the clay is a good illustration of at least two demands of discipleship: the need to deny self and follow the teachings of Christ. Let's consider some lessons we need to learn at the potter's house.

God Is The Potter

As our creator, God is in control of this molding process (Jer. 18:6). He has power over the clay. We must remember God's place (Rom. 9:20-21). God has a design in mind for all of His creation – including us. We have no right to reply in protest against His divine will and purpose.

What do we know about this Potter? We know that He knows us (Ps. 139:1-3), He cares about us (Luke 12:6-7), He knows what is best for us (Deut. 6:24), and He has a plan for every vessel that He creates (Ps. 139:13-16).

Disciples Are The Clay

We have no power over the Potter, or any right to criticize His plan. We must remember our place.

In order for this illustration to work in our lives, we must make ourselves clay. The clay cannot be worked and formed unless it is soft and malleable. In order for us to be clay in God's hand, we must have:

...the figure of the **potter and the clay** is a good illustration of at least two demands of discipleship: the need to **deny self** and **follow** the teachings of Christ.

We are not **molded** to be an **ornament**, but to be useful and **prepared** for every **good work**.

Faith – we must believe that God’s way is right and trust that His way is best for us.

Humility – we must accept our place under the potter’s authority.

Meekness – we must show a willingness to yield to God’s will, accepting it as what is best for us (James 1:21).

Obedience – this illustration works for us only inasmuch as we are willing to participate. Calvinism uses this illustration to teach that man is incapable of resisting God’s sovereign control, but this is not true. God respects man’s free will. God fashions us after His will if we are willing to allow Him to do so.

We Are Molded By The Lord’s Teachings

In the illustration, the clay is molded by the potter’s hand. Disciples are molded by the teachings of Christ.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This passage explains how this molding process works.

1. We are not to be conformed to this world. To be conformed is to be fashioned like something else, to be pressed into a common mold. Disciples are not to be like everyone else in the world.
2. We are to be transformed. The word “transformed” is translated from the Greek word **metamorphous**, which is the word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.” This word indicates that we are to change into another form. This is not merely a spiritual change, but a change that is expressed outwardly in our character and conduct. The form that disciples are to change into is the form of Christ (Gal. 4:19).
3. This transformation is accomplished by a renewing of the mind. To renew is to renovate or to make a complete change for the better. The mind is not renewed instantly or miraculously. It is renewed as we study and learn the teachings of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). The transformation of life is made as we apply these teachings to ourselves. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:9-10).

This transformation is not done without our cooperation. We must allow God’s word to teach us new values and priorities, a new view of our role and purpose, a new way of thinking,

acting, and reacting to different situations. Only then will our lives be an expression of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

This is where the real work takes place in this illustration. Just as the clay must respond to the potter's hands in order to be shaped and molded, so we must respond to the teachings of Christ in order to be true disciples. We cannot say that we are clay in the Potter's hands unless we are yielding to the teachings of Christ.

This Molding Is A Process

The renewing of the mind and transforming of life takes time. It takes time for the clay to be worked, turned, and molded into a vessel. In a sense, no one is there yet. God is still working on all of us (Phil. 3:12-16). The clay turns on the wheel as it is being molded. It doesn't seem to "get anywhere," but it is being turned into something great.

This illustration reminds us of our need for God. No one achieves their full potential without God. Just as a lump of clay cannot become anything without the potter putting it on the wheel, we cannot become what God would have us be unless we submit ourselves to His will.

The illustration also reminds us of God's patience and personal interest in our lives. The potter that Jeremiah saw took a vessel that was marred and ruined and, instead of throwing it away, he continued to work on it until it became a good vessel. God does the same thing for us. We may sin and fail to be what God would have us be, but as long as we seek forgiveness and yield to Him, God can make us right again.

Let us remember that the life of a Christian is a process. God is making something of us and no one is there yet. In the end, we are better than anything we could have ever been by ourselves.

This Molding Has A Purpose

What is the final purpose intended by this molding process? God desires that we be honorable and useful vessels in His service. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

We are not molded to be an ornament, but to be useful and prepared for every good work. If we have cleansed our lives of sin, and have taken on the mind of Christ, then God will find us ready and useful vessels. However, if we have sin in our lives, or have failed to renew our minds, God will find us unprepared, uncooperative, and unfit for use in His service. If we serve God in holiness, readiness, and obedience, then we have fulfilled the purpose for which we have been molded.

Conclusion

There is much that can be learned about discipleship at the potter's house. As our Creator, God is the Potter and we are the clay. In order to be molded into the image of Christ, we must obey the teachings of Christ. The renewing of the mind is a process, not a one-time event. God has a purpose for our lives. We must be ready to serve Him.

Questions

1. What message does God reveal to Jeremiah at the potter's house (Jer. 18:6)? _____

2. Why doesn't the clay criticize the Potter's work (Rom. 9:20-21)? _____

3. What does God have in mind when He gives us commands to obey (Deut. 6:24)? _____

4. What form should disciples desire to take (Gal. 4:19)? _____
5. Are we willing participants in God's molding process? _____
6. Before clay can be shaped and molded, what form must take? _____

7. What role does humility and meekness play in this molding process? _____

8. What is supposed to happen to our minds (Rom. 12:2)? _____

9. How does Paul describe this transformation/molding process (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10)?

10. What purpose does God have in mind with this molding process (2 Tim. 2:20-21; Eph. 2:10)? _____

11. What does the illustration of the potter and the clay say about our need for God? _____

12. What does the illustration of the potter and the clay say about God's patience with us (Jer. 18:4)? _____

13. What interest does God have in our lives and our potential (Ps. 139:13-16)? _____

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

The Disciple's Dependence Upon Christ

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)

On the night that He was betrayed, as He made His way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus spoke with His disciples about the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8). He told them that God was the vinedresser, He was the true vine, and He helped them understand that they were the branches.

The emphasis of this allegory was not that the disciples produce fruit, but they abide in Christ. "In Me" is found six times in this story, and in verse five Jesus said, "for without Me you can do nothing." Jesus was about to be taken away from them. It was imperative they continue to abide in Him to accomplish the great work He had prepared them to do.

The story of the vine and the branches has much to teach us about discipleship. A disciple is more than a mere student. He is a follower and a supporter. He has a special relationship with his master. The most important relationship that disciples maintain is their relationship with their Master – Jesus Christ. Disciples are related to Christ in a manner comparable to the relationship between a vine and its branches.

The word "abide" means "to stay or remain." It is stated in the present tense, which means it is a continual action. Discipleship is not a hit-and-miss vocation. The branch's life depends upon maintaining a connection with the vine. Likewise a disciple must maintain his connection with Christ in order to stay alive spiritually.

We don't abide in Christ just by becoming a Christian. Abiding is a purposeful, continual action. Specifically, we abide in Christ by following His teaching.

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

We don't **abide** in **Christ** just by becoming a **Christian**. Abiding is a purposeful, continual action. Specifically, we abide in Christ by **following** His teaching.

We do not **abide** in Christ...

- by wishing it to happen,
- or with good intentions,
- or even by failing to do evil.

Disciples can only abide in Christ if they **continue** to follow His teaching.

"...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

"But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5).

"Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him..." (1 John 3:24).

We do not abide in Christ by wishing it to happen, or with good intentions, or even by failing to do evil. Disciples only abide in Christ when they continue to follow His teaching.

Let's consider some lessons on discipleship that we need to learn from the vine and the branches.

If we abide in Christ...

1. We Will Be Like The Vine

Although not stated specifically in this story, we know this must be true from what we know about nature. James asked if a fig tree can bear olives, or if a grapevine can bear figs (James 3:12). The obvious answer is "no." We understand that "like" begets "like."

Branches grow forth from the vine and take on the nature of the vine, just as disciples take on the character of their Master (Luke 6:40). As we abide in His Word, His teachings mold our thoughts, form our character, and control our will. Those who abide in Christ ought to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:6).

2. We Will Bear Fruit

Bearing fruit is also mentioned six times in this passage. As the vinedresser, God is inspecting the branches for fruit (v. 2). Such emphasis makes it clear that God is looking for fruit in our lives.

What is this fruit? Spiritual growth and maturity (2 Pet. 1:5-8, Gal. 5:22-23), increased talents and opportunities (Matt. 25:14-30), good deeds (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10, Titus 3:14), involvement in the work of the gospel (Phil. 4:15-18), winning lost souls (Rom. 1:13), and praise that is offered unto God (Heb. 13:15).

Because of God's help, there is a progression in the quality and quantity of the fruit that is borne. We are to "bear fruit" (v. 2),

we are pruned to “bear more fruit” (v. 2) and we are to “bear much fruit” (v. 8). We are not to rest upon past accomplishments, or become satisfied with our current level of maturity. As disciples, we are expected to grow and produce more fruit.

3. We Will Be Pruned To Bear More Fruit

When we abide in the vine and bear fruit, we are pruned (v. 2). Pruning is very important. An untrimmed vine develops long, green shoots which must be cut off. Otherwise, all the energy and nutrients of the vine go to growing these new branches as opposed to growing fruit.

This pruning had already been done to the disciples, to a certain extent, as they had heard and applied the Lord’s teaching (v. 3). The teachings of Christ cleanse our lives of hindrances and rebellious attitudes if we examine ourselves and make the proper applications.

God will strip away everything in our lives that does not contribute to producing fruit, if we allow Him. God has several ways of “pruning” us. He cleanses us with His word (Ps. 119:9). He disciplines us through His providence (Heb. 12:10-11). He allows us to suffer, knowing that such occasions give us opportunities to mature (James 1:2-4, Rom. 5:3-4). Although it is unpleasant, this pruning process is not a punishment. It is an expression of God’s interest, love, and care. He is helping us to be more fruitful.

4. We Will Remain Connected to the Life-Giving Vine

There is a reason that disciples must continue to abide in Christ. The branches derive their life from the vine. When they are removed from the vine, they will die. Likewise, disciples draw their spiritual life and ability to produce fruit from Christ. When we keep His commandments, we maintain this essential connection to Christ and stay alive spiritually.

As the branches are totally dependent upon the vine, so disciples are totally dependent upon Christ (John 15:4-5). A disciple is nothing without his master. Jesus said, “for without Me you can do nothing” (v. 5). Abiding in Christ is a life-long commitment. No fruit can be produced by an “on again – off again” disciple. This connection to Christ must be maintained.

Failure to abide in Christ and produce fruit invites disaster. Jesus said such branches are taken away, cast out, allowed to wither and die, and cast into the fire and burned (vv. 2, 6). It is

What Kind of Fruit Are We To Produce?

Spiritual Growth And Maturity

- 2 Pet. 1:5-8
- Gal. 5:22-23

Increased Talents And Opportunities

- Matt. 25:14-30

Good Deeds

- Eph. 2:10
- Titus 3:14

Involvement In The Work Of The Gospel

- Phil. 4:15-18

Winning Lost Souls

- Rom. 1:13

Praise Unto God

- Heb. 13:15

obvious that Jesus is speaking of punishment in Hell (Matt. 13:40-42; Rev. 20:14-15). This passage affirms the possibility of apostasy.

5. Our Prayers Will Be Answered

We are not left to ourselves to produce fruit or suffer the consequences of being removed from the vine. God wants us to succeed, and He is ready and willing to help us produce fruit.

“Ask what you desire” (John 17:7). This promise to answer prayer must be kept in the context of this entire passage. Prayer is not a blanket wish-list. Any request by a disciple pertaining to the production of fruit will surely be granted.

However, this promise is conditional: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...” Prayer is a privilege given to the faithful child of God. If we fail to remain connected to Christ we sever our prayer-line with God.

6. We Will Glorify God

God is glorified when disciples do what they are supposed to do, “bear much fruit” (v. 8). As the vinedresser, the fruit produced is a direct reflection upon God’s planning, efforts, and care.

In a world that is blinded by the darkness of sin and filled with religious hypocrisy, God is truly glorified by those faithful few who stand up and stand out – proving the genuineness of their claim to be disciples by the fruits they produce in their lives. When people see our good works, they will glorify God (Matt. 5:16). A disciple can have no greater goal than to bring glory unto God (1 Cor. 10:31), and no greater satisfaction than to know that God is being glorified before others.

Conclusion

We can learn a lot of lessons about discipleship from the vineyard. Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. Discipleship is abiding in the teachings of Christ. As we do so, we take on the nature of Christ, produce fruit to God’s glory, receive pruning, maintain our connection to the source of spiritual life, and receive the answers to our prayers.

Questions

1. How many times are the words “in Me” found in John 15:1-8? _____

2. What does the word “abide” mean? _____

3. How does a disciple abide in Christ? Use Scriptures to support your answer. _____

4. Explain how branches are dependent upon the vine, and how this applies to a disciple's relationship with Christ. _____

5. Who are disciples to be like (Luke 6:40)? _____
6. What does God want disciples to produce? _____
7. Why does God prune the fruitful branches (v. 2)? _____
8. How does God cleanse or prune disciples? Provide Scriptures to support your answer. ____

9. What happens to those disciples who fail to produce fruit (v. 2) or fail to abide in Christ (v. 6)? _____

10. What condition does Christ place upon prayer in John 15:7? _____

11. Explain how God is glorified when disciples produce fruit. _____

Match the correct Scripture with the spiritual fruit that we are to produce.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| ___ Spiritual growth and maturity | a. Eph. 2:10 |
| ___ Increased talents and opportunities | b. Rom. 1:13 |
| ___ Good deeds | c. Phil. 4:15-16 |
| ___ Gospel efforts | d. 2 Pet. 1:5-8 |
| ___ Winning lost souls | e. Heb. 13:15 |
| ___ Praising God | f. Matt. 25:14-30 |

Lesson 6

A CHILD OF GOD

The Disciple's Security

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12)

Jesus taught His disciples to address God as their Father in Heaven (Luke 11:1-2). Followers of Christ have a special relationship with God. Jesus has made it possible for His followers to become God's children.

In this lesson we will consider some of the blessings and responsibilities of being a child of God.

We Have A Right To Be Called A Child of God

Claiming to be a child of God would be a futile statement for one who is outside of Christ. However, those who receive Jesus as the Son of God have the right or authority to be recognized as children of God (John 1:12).

There is a way we can know for certain that we are a child of God. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit tells us what we must do in order to be a child of God, and our spirit knows whether or not we have met the conditions. If we have met the conditions, then we know we are a child of God.

We Have Been Born Again And Adopted

There are two ways that a child can become a member of a family: either by physical birth or by adoption. The Bible speaks of the saved as having been born again (1 Pet. 1:23). However, the Bible also speaks of the saved as having been made the children of God by adoption (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5).

Adoption is a deeper and more meaningful illustration than being born again. To take care of a child who is born to you is only natural. However, to choose to accept and take care of a child who is not born to you is an incredible act of love and compassion.

To settle a dispute about **greatness** in the kingdom, Jesus once set a **little child** in the midst of His disciples and told them, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means **enter the kingdom** of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

Becoming Like Children -

Matt. 18:3

Disciples of Christ need to learn some important lessons from children.

○ **Humility.** The primary quality that the Lord had in mind was humility (v. 4). Children are a great example of the application of this quality. As a rule, children are not arrogant and boastful. Unless catered to, they do not exhibit a "my way or the hi-way" attitude. They are humble, respectful of authority, and willing to yield. We must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, yielding obedience to His will.

○ **Trust.** Children are trusting, not because they are gullible, but because they have never been disappointed. God is faithful, and our willingness to trust Him should be an acknowledgement of His faithfulness.

○ **Innocence.** Childhood is characterized by purity and innocence. We protect our children from the ravages of reality in order to prolong this blissful stage of their lives. Children are free

(Cont. on p. 37)

Being born again stresses a spiritual creation. Adoption is an image of rescue and redemption. The Bible portrays those who are orphaned as being helpless and vulnerable (Ps. 10:14, 17-18; James 1:27). The one who is adopted is rescued from a state of helplessness. He has been given an equal place in a family, with all the blessings, privileges, and responsibilities that go along with it.

The Blessings Of Being A Child Of God

1. We Have A New Name. One who is adopted into a family takes on that family's name. Disciples of Christ have a new name: "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). The Greek term that is translated "were called" is **chrematizo**, which means to reveal or speak by divine direction. God is the one who called the disciples "Christians." We wear the name "Christian" as that name which is given to us by our Father.

With that new name we have a new identity with the world. We stand in stark contrast with the children of the devil (1 John 3:10), shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15).

2. We Are the Object of God's Love and Attention. Some people wonder if God really cares about them. The fact we are a child of God is evidence of His great love for us (1 John 3:1). This love is displayed when God sent His only begotten Son to die for us while we were still in our sins (Rom. 5:6-8).

As His children, we have God's attention and interest (1 John 5:14-15). His eyes are open to our struggles, and His ears are attentive to our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12; cf. Ps. 34:17). John was told that God would be like a loving Father who tenderly wipes the tears from His children's eyes (Rev. 21:4).

3. A Father's Provision. Fathers are commanded to provide for their families (1 Tim. 5:8). God provides for His own (Ps. 37:25). As God's children, we are not to worry about the necessities of life, but commit ourselves to His kingdom and trust in His care (Matt. 6:25-34). God knows our needs (Matt. 6:32), and will care for us as a good and loving Father (Matt. 7:7-11). We are to simply ask, and God will gladly give us what is good (James 1:5, 17), in abundance (Phil. 4:19).

4. A Father's Protection. Fathers protect their children, and the Bible shows that God protects His children. God is faithful to guard us from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3), to limit the severity of his temptations, and to provide a way of escape out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

God never abandons us (Heb. 13:5-6). We have confidence in the fact that He is our constant companion and helper. We can overcome the world because our Father is greater than anything in the world (1 John 4:4; 5:4). Nothing separates us from His love (Rom. 8:31-39), nor snatches us out of His hand (John 10:28-29).

5. A Father's Guidance. Fathers are to teach their children (Deut. 6:7, Eph. 6:4). God likewise gives us instruction and guidance. We are to look upon God as our shepherd (Psalm 23) and our guide (Matt. 6:13). A child of God is one who is led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14). A disciple abides in the words of Christ (John 8:31), and thus lives by the word of God (Matt. 4:4). God also gives us needed discipline, which is further proof we are His children (Heb. 12:5-11).

6. An Inheritance. Fathers leave an inheritance to their children. As children of God, we stand to inherit that which belongs to our Father (Rev. 21:7). If we are children, we are heirs (Rom. 8:16-17). We are qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints (Col. 1:12), which is reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

The Responsibilities Of Being A Child Of God

Adoption into the family of God brings great blessings, but it also brings responsibilities.

We must live up to the precious new name that we wear by keeping ourselves separate from the sinful world (2 Tim. 2:19; 2 Cor. 6:17-18).

We must return God's love for us with a wholehearted love for Him, shown by our obedience to His commands (Matt. 22:36-38; 1 John 5:3).

We must walk by faith, trusting in God to provide for our daily physical and spiritual needs, as well as delivering on His promise of an eternal reward in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:7; 2 Tim. 1:12).

Becoming Like Children - Matt. 18:3

(cont. from p. 36)

from suspicion, malice, cynicism, and ulterior motives. God would have His children to be innocent of sin (1 Cor. 14:20).

○ Forgiveness.

Sometimes children can get in terrible fights, but within minutes they have made up and go off hand in hand playing with each other. Children don't want enemies. They want to have friends and to play. They, almost instinctually, know how to do this. Instead of harboring resentment and nursing grudges, they forgive and get back to the important thing – playing. God wants His children to show the same willingness to forgive and move on (Col. 3:13).

○ **Growth.** Children grow. Luke says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). God expects His children to grow in their knowledge of His will and in the exercise of their talents and abilities (Eph. 5:17; Heb. 5:12-14; Matt. 25:16-18).

We must follow God's word, grow spiritually, respond positively to His discipline, and take the way of escape from temptation that He provides for us (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 10:13).

We can leave our Father's house. When we do, we forfeit all rights and privileges as a son (Luke 15:11-24, esp. v. 19), as well as our eternal soul (James 5:19-20). When we sin, we must repent and seek God's forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Conclusion

Of all the illustrations used by the Lord and His apostles to describe the meaning of discipleship, perhaps none is more meaningful to us than that of being a child of God. It is not so much a description of our responsibilities as it is a portrait of God's great love for us.

God is our Creator. He is deserving of our reverent fear and faithful obedience. However, God wants to be our loving Father. He wants us accept the place that He offers us in His family, to wear the name of His Son, to live in faith knowing that He loves us and cares for us, to accept His guidance and protection, and to remain faithful so that we can be with Him in Heaven for eternity.

Questions

1. Who gives us the right to be called children of God (John 1:12)? _____
2. How does the Holy Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16)? _____

3. In your own words, explain the significance of God adopting you as His child. _____

4. Who gives the name "Christian" to the disciples (Acts 11:26)? _____
5. What are children of God to do in this world (Phil. 2:15)? _____

6. How can we know that God loves us (Rom. 5:8)? _____
7. Of what is John confident (1 John 5:14-15)? _____

8. What had David never seen (Ps. 37:25)? _____
9. Why should we not worry about our daily necessities (Matt. 6:32, 7:11)? _____

10. Who helps us overcome the world (1 John 4:4, Heb. 13:5-6)? _____

11. How does God help us during times of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13)? _____

12. How does God guide us (Matt. 4:4)? _____

13. How should we respond to God's chastening (Heb. 12:5-11)? _____

14. What do faithful children of God stand to inherit (Rev. 21:7)? _____

15. How does Peter describe our inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-4)? _____

Match the correct Scripture with the corresponding responsibility of being a child of God.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> To grow | a. Matt. 22:36-38 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Come out and be separate | b. 1 Cor. 10:13 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depart from iniquity | c. 2 Cor. 5:7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Love God | d. 2 Cor. 6:17-18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obey God's commandments | e. 2 Tim. 2:19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk by faith | f. 2 Pet. 3:18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take way of escape from temptation | g. 1 John 1:9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confess and pray for forgiveness | h. 1 John 5:3 |

Lesson 7

A MEMBER OF THE BODY

The Disciple's Place

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another"
(Rom. 12:5)

The Bible refers to the church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is a spiritual body, with Christ as the head and every member as a part of the body. The Bible uses the word "church" in two ways. Sometimes it uses the word in a universal sense, referring to all of those who are saved (Matt. 16:18). Other times, it uses the word in a local sense referring to all of the saved in a given physical location. All disciples are made a part of the universal church the moment that they are saved (Acts 2:47). However, the Scriptures teach that individual disciples are to identify themselves as members of a local church (Acts 9:26).

Paul makes frequent use of the portrait of a body as a means of emphasizing the importance of disciples working together in the local church. A disciple is not the only person following his master. While disciples have a special relationship with their Master, they also have a special relationship with other disciples (Rom. 14:7). It is important that disciples realize their place and their role in this body of fellow believers.

Benefits Of Being In The Body

1. Salvation. As the church is the body of saved people (Acts 2:47), it makes sense that salvation is found in the Lord's church, not outside of it. Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). All spiritual blessings are found in Christ, not outside of Him (Eph. 1:3-14).

2. Identification With Christ. Members of the church are members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5). Just as a bride is identified with her husband, so the church is identified with Christ. A failure to be identified with Christ will result in our eternal damnation (Matt. 7:23; 25:12; 2 Tim. 2:19).

The wisdom of God is shown in joining disciples together into one body. In addition to the eternal benefits of being in

A **disciple** is not the only person following his master. While disciples have a special relationship with their Master, they also have a special **relationship** with **other disciples** (Rom. 14:7).

the body of Christ, there are also some immediate benefits to being a member of a local church.

3. Support and Edification. God has seen fit for disciples to assemble together on a regular basis as a means of exhorting one another and stirring up love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25). When they are together, weak members receive strength (Gal. 6:1) and comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-5) from stronger members.

4. Prayers. Members of a local church assemble together and pray for one another (Acts 12:5). Prayers can be offered for those who are sick or struggling with physical or spiritual problems (James 5:14-16).

5. Strength in Numbers. It is God's will for disciples to draw strength from one another. This can only happen if disciples spend time together and build relationships with one another. The members of the church in Jerusalem are said to be "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). While a band of faithful disciples draw needed strength from one another (Eccl. 4:9-12), the disciple who chooses to be a loner makes himself vulnerable to the roaring lion who is seeking to devour his soul (1 Peter 5:8).

Responsibilities Of Being In The Body

As with everything else, where there are privileges there are also responsibilities. One who is a member of the body of Christ must...

1. Respect God's Plan and Purpose. Just as God designed and created the human body, He also designed and created the church (1 Cor. 12:18, 24). The church functions correctly when it functions the way God designed it to operate. We must respect the fact we are not authorized to make any changes to the Lord's church.

By equipping individual members with various talents and abilities, God composes every local church (Rom. 12:3-8). We respect God's pattern for the church and our role within the church by making use of our talents in accordance to God's will.

2. Respect the Authority of Christ. Christ is the head of the church, which gives Him all authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). As the head directs the body, so Christ directs His church. As members of the body, we must hold fast to Christ as the head (Col. 2:19). We must continue to follow His teachings. We can only abide in the body of Christ as long as we are willing to hold fast to the Head of that body.

3. Respect the Other Members. This respect is shown in different ways.

- Recognize the fact that we are members of one another (Rom. 12:5). Disciples are bound together in Christ.
- Have care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25-26). The members of the human body have care for one another. When one part of the body hurts, the entire body is affected and comes to its aid.
- Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:12-15). We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We are to treat one another with humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, and kindness. We are to be quick to forgive one another, putting on love "which is the bond of perfection."

- We are to do our share (Eph. 4:16). There is work to be done in the body of Christ. Members are not spectators; they are workers (Eph. 2:10). Every part has a role to play. Every Christian is to use his God-given abilities.

Diversity, Yet Equality

The Scriptures admit there is diversity in the body of Christ, but they also show how God is able to use this diversity to our benefit. The equality of the members is shown in different ways.

1. Diversity in Backgrounds, but Equal Access to God.

In Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Things like race, socioeconomic status, and gender do not make a difference in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-18; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28). We all come from different backgrounds, but through Christ we all have equal access by one Spirit to the Father.

We are all equal members under one common Head. The clergy/laity distinction is not taught in the New Testament. We are all priests serving equally under Christ as our High Priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9). There are no "second class" citizens in the kingdom of God. The "second generation" Christian has no higher spiritual standing than one converted from the world. The babe in Christ is no less a member of the body than the long-time disciple. There is no probation period for the restored brother. Some Christians may be more mature or knowledgeable than others, but every member stands equally before God (Rom. 14:1-4).

2. Diversity in Functions, but Equally Important.

The Corinthians overemphasized spiritual gifts (especially speaking in tongues) to the point that those who did not have the gifts were made to feel unimportant. This was contributing to the division in the church in Corinth.

Paul used the composition of the human body as a means of showing the foolishness of such an idea (1 Cor. 12:15-27). First, Paul addressed those who did not have the gifts (vv. 15-17). Just because one is not the most prominent member of the body does not mean that he is not a member of the body. There is no room

The Responsibilities Of Church Membership

When one is saved he is **added** by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47), but every disciple should desire to make himself an **active** member of a local church (Acts 9:26). Membership in a local church has great **benefits**, but it also carries certain **responsibilities**:

- Faithful attendance (Heb. 10:24-25)
- Submit to the leadership (Heb. 13:17)
- Receive instruction so that one may grow and mature spiritually (Eph. 4:11-15)
- Contribute to the moral purity of the church (1 Thess. 5:21-22)
- Contribute to the peace and unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6)
- Contribute one's money, time, and talents to the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:2)

for jealousy among disciples. Each of us is unique, and the talents we possess have been given to us by God for a purpose.

Then Paul addressed those who had the gifts and looked down upon those who did not (vv. 21-24). Every member needs every other member in order to function as a body. The reality is that the less honorable, less noticeable members turn out to be some of the most important members. We may play different roles in the local church with our different talents and levels of maturity, but each member is equally important. We cannot function as a body without all of the members.

3. Diversity in Talents, but Unity of Purpose.

God has dispersed different talents and abilities among the members of the local church for the benefit of the whole (Eph. 4:11-16). The church is to work together, making use of every member's talent, for the equipping of the saints, the work of ministry, and the edifying of the body. Through these efforts, the entire church is to grow to a level of maturity, to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.

This necessary growth is only possible when the whole body participates. When **every** joint supplies the love that joins every part together (Col. 3:14), and when **every** part does its share in working effectively, the body grows and edifies itself in love. We all benefit when we all work together in this common goal.

Conclusion

The disciple's place is as an active member in the Lord's church. He can not receive the edification and support that he needs unless he makes himself a part of a local church. This requires more than just "getting our name on the church roll." We must involve ourselves in the work of the church and in the lives of the members.

God has designed the local church just as He has designed the human body – every part has its place and function. Only when each part is joined to the rest of the members can they contribute to and benefit from the body.

Questions

1. Describe the difference between the "universal" church and the "local" church. _____

2. How does one become a member of the universal church (Acts 2:47)? _____

3. What are some benefits of being a member of a local church?
Heb. 10:24-25 _____
James 5:14-16 _____
Eccl. 4:9-12 _____

4. Describe the spiritual danger of one who purposely distances himself from other disciples (1 Pet. 5:8-9). _____

5. What role does God played in the creation of the local church (1 Cor. 12:18, 24)? _____

6. How does Paul describe the closeness of the relationship that should exist between members of the local church (1 Cor. 12:25-26)? _____

7. List some things that disciples are to show toward one another as they endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12-15). _____

True or False

- ___ 1. Some members of the church, by virtue of their race, gender or social status, enjoy a greater access to God than the other members.
- ___ 2. Christ only has one spiritual body of believers.
- ___ 3. Paul teaches that Peter was the head of the church.
- ___ 4. Preachers, elders, and teachers are more important than other members.
- ___ 5. Love is the bond of perfection.
- ___ 6. The Bible acknowledges that there is a diversity of talents and abilities within every local church.
- ___ 7. The local church should not experience any growth.
- ___ 8. A disciple can best please Christ by staying separate from other disciples.
- ___ 9. Every member is responsible for maintaining the moral purity of the local church.
- ___ 10. The church can function at its best with only some of its members doing their share.

Thought Question

Some Christians have the idea that they can be members at large or can float around from one congregation to another. What does the Bible teach about one's need to be identified as a member of a local church?

"MY BROTHER'S KEEPER"

The Disciple's Support

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25, KJV)

Cain is the first person ever born and is remembered for committing the first murder. God confronted Cain by asking him, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain compounded his sin by lying when he replied "I do not know." Then, in a futile effort to absolve himself of any responsibility that he had with regard to his brother, he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9).

Cain's reply was a protest against God's right to hold him accountable for his brother. Echoing the sentiments of our self-centered world, Cain suggested that he was not responsible for what happened to anyone else. This was not true for Cain, nor has it ever been true for anyone. God's word makes it clear that we are our brother's keeper in many ways.

Who is my brother? In one sense, everyone is my brother. However, in the context of this study of discipleship, this lesson will focus upon the responsibilities that we have towards other disciples – our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are members together in the body of Christ. As such, we have responsibilities towards one another. Let us consider some obligations that we have toward our brethren.

1. Love

There are many different books, seminars, and programs offering to help people get out of debt. Some debts can and should be paid off, but the obligation to love our brother is a perpetual debt (Rom. 13:8-10). Love ensures that we will fulfill God's will towards one another (Matt. 22:36-40). Love fills our hearts and lives with the right characteristics, motives, and actions (1 Cor. 13:4-7). We should never act as if we have loved our brother enough.

Everything we owe our brother can be summed up in the word "love." However, the Bible teaches that this love for our brother is shown in some specific ways. As you proceed through the

We are **members** together in the **body** of Christ. As such, we have responsibilities towards **one another**.

rest of this lesson, give serious consideration to the way love is expressed through the other points that are made.

2. Consideration

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25, KJV).

The Greek word that is translated “consider” means to observe fully, to fix one’s eyes or mind upon. There is a temptation for us to become so focused upon ourselves that we lose sight of the needs of others. Most of us live very busy lives. We have responsibilities towards our families and jobs. However, the Bible tells us that we are to observe our brethren and take notice of the things that they are going through.

We are to think about the needs of others (Phil. 2:4). We need to be mindful of those who are sick and shut-in. We need to show genuine concern for those who are facing challenges in their lives. One of the most basic things that I owe my brethren is consideration.

3. Provocation

The Greek word translated “provoke” in Hebrews 10:24 means to incite or to stimulate. The word can be applied to things that are good and bad. In the context of this passage, it is obvious that we are to provoke or stimulate brethren on to good things.

In sports, teammates often cheer one another on during a game. These cheers are intended to encourage them to do their best. There are times when brethren need to cheer on one another. We are to provoke one another unto love and good works. We are to stimulate one another by our consideration and sincere interest, by our good example, and by our good deeds.

4. Exhortation

The Hebrew writer goes on to tell us to exhort one another (v. 24). The word “exhort” is translated from a Greek word that literally means to call to one’s side. This word calls for a greater involvement on our part than the words “consider” and “provoke.” Instead of observing or cheering one on, we are to go to their side and put an arm around their shoulder, doing what we can to prop them up and keep them on track.

Exhortation may be expressed in a variety of different ways, depending upon the needs of a given situation (1 Thess. 5:14). We exhort when we warn the unruly (1 Cor. 4:14), when we console and comfort the fainthearted (1 Thess. 5:11; Rom. 12:15), when we support the weak (Heb. 12:12), when we relieve a burden (Gal. 6:2), when we encourage (Rom. 12:8; Acts 4:36), and when we teach (Tit. 1:9).

5. Restoration

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). To restore means to thoroughly mend or repair. There are times when we find brethren who are so broken and beaten down that they are in a spiritual state of emergency. Just going to them will not do; they have to be restored.

Sometimes brethren fall into sin and depart from the Lord. We are to go to them and try to turn them back (James 5:19-20). If we don't, who will? The easy thing to do is to just let them go. However, we are our brother's keeper, which means we are responsible for one another. The Lord taught that we have an obligation to leave the ninety-nine and to go after the one who is lost (Matt. 18:12-14). It is well worth the effort of going after the one who is lost. When one is falling away, he is dying spiritually. None of us would stand by and watch someone die physically. Love demands that we try to stop the spiritual death of a brother in Christ.

6. Good Works

Sincerity and good intentions are commendable, but they do not meet urgent needs (Tit. 3:14). Love is an action. The needs of our brethren are not satisfied by feelings, but by actions (1 John 3:17-18). Pure and undefiled religion is not identified by claims and confessions, but by charitable actions shown towards those who are truly in need (James 1:27).

The Lord is described as one who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). The early church is characterized by good deeds (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). We are told that as we have opportunity, we are to be ready and willing to do good to all people. However, the needs of our brethren should especially get our attention and our response (Gal. 6:10).

7. A Good Example

All of us are examples to others. The apostles are examples (2 Thess. 3:9). Evangelists and elders are to be positive examples (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3). Paul said that all faithful Christians are examples and patterns to be followed (Phil. 3:17).

The power of our influence and example cannot be denied or disowned. God holds us responsible for the way we influence our brethren (Matt. 18:6-7). Strong Christians are to be mindful of the fact they are being watched and have an influence upon their brethren (1 Cor. 8:7-13). Being their brother's keeper, they are to be conscious of how their actions will be interpreted by weaker Christians. Paul stated that he was willing to go so far as to deny himself of a liberty for the sake of his brethren.

8. Patience

Patience or longsuffering is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). As such, it is expected in the lives of Christians. There are times when patience must be shown toward brethren.

We may all be members in one body, but we are never at the same level of maturity. Those who are strong and mature in the faith are to be patient with those who are weak (Rom. 15:1-3). It takes time for a baby to grow and develop, and it takes time for Christians to grow and mature. Sometimes new Christians say and do the wrong things. They need their brethren's patience as they go through the process of learning the will of Christ and changing life-long habits.

Also, we are to be patient with one another when it comes to our own opinions and peculiarities. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ. However, God has left some of our decisions up to our own judgment. We are all different, having different likes and dislikes. We come from different backgrounds, have our own ways of thinking about things, and our own reasons for making certain decisions. Such differences can become a source of contention, but that should never be the case for brethren. We are to bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). That phrase literally means "to put up with one another." In matters of judgment we each have the right to our own judgment, but no disciple has the right to destroy the body of Christ for the sake of his judgment.

9. The Benefit Of The Doubt

We are told that love "... believes all things, hopes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). This does not mean that love is gullible. It means that love compels us to give our brethren the benefit of the doubt.

Gossip has the power to destroy one's character and reputation. Sometimes we hear accusations being made against brethren. Other times we see or hear things ourselves. We may be tempted to interpret such situations in the worst possible light, but love will not allow us to do so. We must remember that any story or rumor can sound incriminating until we go to the individual and hear all of the facts (Prov. 18:17). Unless I have the evidence that proves otherwise, I owe my brother the benefit of the doubt. Isn't this what I would want from him (Matt. 7:12)?

10. Forgiveness

The Lord places a strong imperative upon His disciples to forgive one another (Matt. 18:21-35). If we have been forgiven by God, we are obligated to forgive our brethren. When a brother sins against us, we are to go to him about the matter. If he repents, we are to forgive him (Luke 17:3-4; Matt. 18:15-17). When an erring brother returns to the Lord, we are to forgive him (2 Cor. 2:6-9). We are to be quick and ready to forgive one another, knowing that we stand in need of God's forgiveness ourselves (Col 3:13).

Conclusion

Disciples draw strength from their Savior, just as the branch draws strength from the vine, the athlete draws strength from his training, and the soldier draws strength from his armor. However, our strength also comes from another important source. God has seen fit to join disciples together into one body for a reason. We are connected to Christ, but we are also

connected to one another. We are to strengthen and support one another as we serve Christ together. We need one another; thus, we are our brother's keeper.

Questions

1. Why should we "owe" our brethren our love? Consider Romans 13:8-10 and 1 John 4:10-11 in your answer. _____

2. Why is it hard for some to consider others? _____

3. What do Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:4 teach about our attitude towards others?

4. How can we provoke or stimulate our brethren on to love and good works? _____

5. The word "exhort" is translated from the Greek word **parakaleo**. What does this word literally mean? _____

6. Describe some ways that we can exhort our brethren. _____

7. Who is responsible for restoring erring brethren (Gal. 6:1)? _____
8. What does Jesus teach about the worth of our brother's soul (Matt. 18:12-14)? _____

9. How is love to be shown (1 John 3:17-18)? _____

10. As they have opportunity, Christians should be especially willing to do good to those who are of the _____ (Gal. 6:10).
11. Why do we need examples (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12)? _____

12. What should mature Christians keep in mind regarding their weaker brethren (1 Cor. 8:7-13)? _____

13. Identify some times when patience must be shown among brethren. _____

14. How does patience help the body of Christ to remain strong? _____

15. Why must we be willing to forgive our brother when he repents (Matt. 18:35)? _____

16. What are we to do when an erring brother comes back to the Lord (2 Cor. 2:6-9)? _____

Lesson 9

A SERVANT

The Disciple's Greatness

"...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27)

Children are often asked what they want to be when they grow up. We have a reason for asking this question. As parents, we want the best for our children. We want them to get the best education they can get and have opportunities to make the most of their lives. However, we are somewhat powerless to help our children until they first decide what they want to do.

What if God asked us as His children, "What do you want to be when you grow up (spiritually)?" How would we answer that question? What would God want us to be? Perhaps an elder or elder's wife? A gospel preacher? A song leader or Bible class teacher? While our minds may naturally go to such important roles within the local church, Jesus taught that the greatest thing we can hope to be is a servant to our brethren.

A Unique Role For A Servant

A servant's primary obligation is to his master. A good servant respects the authority of his master and seeks to be faithful, obedient, and useful to his master.

Disciples of Christ are servants of Christ, submitting to His authority and obeying His will (Luke 6:46). However, Jesus taught that a disciple's role as a servant is more inclusive than that of any other type of servant. Not only are we to serve Christ (our Master), but we are to also serve one another (our fellow servants).

In Matthew 20:20-23, the mother of James and John came before Jesus seeking places of prominence in His kingdom for her sons. After telling them that such was not His to give, the Lord then had to deal with the negative effect their request had upon the rest of the disciples (v. 24). These men were often arguing about which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom, and they resented James and John for taking this action.

... our **Master** was a **servant**. The greatest thing that we can ever hope to become is a **servant like Jesus**, and the way that we serve Jesus is by **serving one another**.

Jesus took advantage of this opportunity to teach about true greatness in His kingdom. He said that in the kingdoms of men, greatness is shown by the ability to exercise authority over others (v. 25), but in His kingdom, things would be different. Greatness would be demonstrated by a willingness to take on the role of a slave and serve other disciples (vv. 26-28).

Why a Disciple Should Be A Servant

Being a servant is going to challenge the way most people think. Many of us battle our pride, which seeks to elevate self over others. Also, we are conditioned by our world to be self-centered and self-serving. The Lord's call to servitude contradicts everything the world says we should be. So why should we consider taking on the role of a servant?

1. Greatness in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:26-27). The Lord says the servant has the highest ranking position in His kingdom. This is not because the servant is striving to achieve greatness, but because he is putting others before himself. The world may not think much of servants, but the Lord says that no one is greater than the one who serves another.

2. Following Christ's Example (Matt. 20:28). Jesus did not come to this world to be served. As Creator, He has every right to exert His authority over this world and to expect those in the world to serve Him. Instead of demanding these rights, Jesus came to this world as a servant and gave Himself for others.

On the night He was betrayed, in the confines of the upper room, Jesus got up from the table, laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel and went around the room washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:3-17). This was a task that was customarily performed by the lowest-ranking house servant. After He washed their feet, Jesus told them that He had given them an example that they should do to one another as He had done to them (v. 15). Jesus was not instituting foot washing as a church ordinance. He was responding to their quest for greatness by showing them how to humble themselves in their service to one another.¹

A disciple strives to be like his master (Luke 6:40). We are like Christ when we are giving ourselves in service to others.

How To Be a Good Servant

It is not enough to just be a servant. In serving Christ, we want to do our very best. What does it take to be a good servant?

1. Attitude. We must begin by looking at our own heart. We cannot do the good work of serving others until we have the right attitude in our heart (Matt. 12:35). I am to serve out of **love** – a love for God and for my fellowman (Matt. 22:36-39). I am to serve with an attitude of **meekness**, showing **kindness** and **gentleness** towards others. I must serve

1 The gospel of Luke indicates that, after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the disciples were once again disputing among themselves as to which one of them would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). Perhaps this is what prompted the Lord to rise from the table and give them this incredible and lasting example of humility and servitude.

with **humility**. The people of the world may arrogantly exert their authority over others, but Jesus wants His disciples to act differently than the people of the world. We are to lower ourselves to the point that we can serve at our brother's feet, looking upon them as objects of our service, not as opportunities to be served.

2. Awareness. A servant's life requires alertness and diligence on our part.

We must be aware of our own **talents** (Rom. 12:6-8). As we have seen in a previous lesson, we are all different. We have unique talents, abilities, and opportunities. We need to know where our talents lie, and make the best use of our opportunities to serve others.

We must be aware of our **task**. Good servants do not need to be reminded that there is a job to be done. They know what their task is and are ready to serve (Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14).

We must also be aware of the **needs of others**. Jesus saw and responded to the needs of others. We must follow His example. A servant does not think of himself. We must see the needs of others and consider them to be important (Phil. 2:3-4).

3. Action. The word "serve" is a verb. Good intentions and kind words do not make us servants (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:18). Serving makes us a servant. As we have opportunity, we are to do good to all, especially to our brethren (Gal. 6:10). Exactly how can we serve our brethren?

There are times when we need to meet their **physical needs**. Jesus said that we serve Him when we feed, house, clothe, and visit brethren who are in need (Matt. 25:35-40). Pure and undefiled religion involves our helping those who need help (James 1:27). We are to share the things that we have with those who are in need (Eph. 4:28).

There are times when we need to meet their **emotional needs**. We need to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). We need to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). We need to comfort the fainthearted and uphold the weak hands that hang down (1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 12:12).

There are times when we need to meet their **spiritual needs**. Babies in Christ need to be established in the faith (1 Pet. 2:2), those who are struggling need to be exhorted (Heb. 3:12-13), those who are unruly need to be warned (1 Thess. 5:14), those who are backsliding need to be restored (Gal. 6:1), and those who are unfaithful need to be rescued (James 5:19-20).

In the kingdom, **greatness** is not found in those who demand the most from others, but in those who **give** the most of themselves.

4. Availability. Serving others requires our **time**. Unfortunately, in our modern world, time seems to be the one thing that we are unable to give to others. However, the reality is that we make the time to do the things we want to do. Jesus understood the importance of taking the time to serve others. He said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Serving others requires our **personal involvement**. Jesus was found among the people: in their streets, in their homes, in their synagogues and marketplaces. He responded to pleas for help, and took people aside to aid and comfort them. We must respond personally to the needs of our brethren if we are going to claim to be their servant.

Serving others requires a **sacrifice**. Unlike the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan made himself available to a man who was in need (Luke 10:30-37). He sacrificed his safety, his time, his property, the comfort of riding on his animal, and his money to meet this man's needs. There may be times when we will have to make similar sacrifices to meet the needs of others.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the greatest man the world has ever known. He was not a political leader or military commander. He was not the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. He was not a champion athlete, trend-setting celebrity, adored performer, successful lawyer, or life-saving doctor. He was not one of the many things to which this shallow world attributes greatness. He was a humble servant, yet in serving others He gained the name which is above every other name (Phil. 2:5-11).

Jesus calls those who would be His disciples to follow Him. A disciple is like His master (Matt. 10:25; cf. Luke 6:40), and our Master was a servant. The greatest thing we can ever hope to become is a servant like Jesus, and the way that we serve Jesus is by serving one another.

Questions

1. What role does Jesus take when He came into this world (Matt. 20:28; Phil. 2:7)? _____

2. Contrast the standard of greatness in the world with the standard of greatness in the Lord's kingdom (Matt. 20:26-27). _____

3. What is the primary obligation of a servant? _____

4. How does Jesus expand the role of His servants? Who are they to serve? _____

5. Why is it difficult for some people to take on the role of a servant? _____

6. What does Jesus say about the individual who does his good deeds in order to be seen by men (Matt. 6:1-4)? _____

7. What powerful illustration does Jesus use to set an example of humility and service before His disciples (John 13:3-17)? _____
8. When are we most like Christ? _____
9. What kinds of attitudes does an effective servant need to possess? _____

10. What is to characterize the people that Jesus has redeemed and purified (Titus 2:14)? _____

11. What kind of attitude should we have towards the needs of others (Phil. 2:3-4)? _____

12. Why must a disciple's service with include more than just words and good intentions (James 2:15-16)? _____

13. How does Jesus say that disciples serve Him (Matt. 25:35-40)? _____

14. Why is it important that we meet the emotional needs of our brethren? _____

15. How are we to meet the various spiritual needs of our brethren? Provide Scriptures to support your answers. _____

16. List some sacrifices the Good Samaritan made in to help the man who was in need (Luke 10:30-37). _____

17. Why is Jesus given the name which is above every name (Phil. 2:5-11)? _____

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

The Disciple's Walk of Faith

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13)

Becoming a disciple of Christ is very exciting. We have a new life with a new Master who loves us and teaches us how to live. We have a new spiritual family who will help us to grow. All of these new things are great blessings, but many disciples struggle with the question of how to properly handle the "old things" in their life.

Disciples have chosen to leave this world and its sin behind in order to follow Christ. However, we are still in this world. As a follower of Christ, what kind of relationship are we to have with this world? How would the Lord have us view our place in this world?

What Are Strangers And Pilgrims?

The New Testament refers to followers of Christ as strangers and pilgrims. We have our own idea of what these words mean. To us, a "stranger" is someone we don't know, and a "pilgrim" is someone who came to this country on the Mayflower. However, if we are going to understand what the Lord would have us to be, then we need to understand what the Holy Spirit means when He uses these words.

The word "stranger" is translated from the Greek word **xenos** which literally means "a foreigner." Thus, a stranger is one who is out of his own country, someone who is in a foreign land. The word "pilgrim" is translated from the Greek word **parepidemos**. This word refers to a resident foreigner, one who lives among a people who are not his own. This person does not have the rights of a citizen, nor is he seeking a permanent residence. He is sojourning in a place for a time.

These words certainly applied to Abraham and Sarah. They left their home and family in Mesopotamia and traveled to a land that God would show them. They dwelt there among the people of that land in tents as those who were not residents.

Disciples must **walk** by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We may **live** in a physical world, but we **operate** by spiritual realities, standards, and promises.

We are
strangers
in this world
because we
are strangers
to the world.

Although he had lived in that place for over sixty years, Abraham considered himself “a foreigner and a visitor” at the time of Sarah’s death (Gen. 23:4). He realized that he was not one of them, and he never tried to become one of them.

The Bible calls us as disciples to have this same attitude towards our relationship with this world. We are out of our own country in this world. We are not citizens; we are not seeking a permanent place to call our own, nor are we looking to fit in with those around us. We are passing through, seeking a homeland after this life is over.

What Makes Us Strangers And Pilgrims?

What makes disciples of Christ foreigners in this world we have known since birth?

1. Disciples Have Been Called out of This World and Made Citizens of a Heavenly Kingdom (Col. 1:13). Our citizenship is now in heaven (Phil. 3:20), not in this world. When we chose to follow Christ we made a choice to come out from the world. We are now identified with and loyal to a spiritual kingdom. People around us call this world their home, but it is not our permanent abode. We realize that we are here for a while, seeking a homeland and looking to a city that has been prepared for us.

2. Disciples are Following One Whom the World Has Rejected. Jesus said the world would hate His followers because it hates Him (John 15:18-21). The whole world lies under the influence of Satan (1 John 5:19). When we identify ourselves with Christ, the world around us suddenly becomes “enemy territory,” and we become outcasts. We should not be surprised when the world treats us the same way it treated our Master. The world does not know us because it does not know God (1 John 3:1). We are strangers **in this world** because we are strangers **to the world.**

3. Disciples No Longer Think Like the People of the World. In a previous lesson, we discussed how the Lord is the Potter and disciples are the clay. The Lord fashions and molds us through His teaching: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Becoming a disciple of Christ changes the way we think. No longer conforming to the way the world wants us to think, our minds are transformed or changed to thinking the way Christ wants us to think. Since we no longer

use worldly wisdom, philosophies, priorities, values, and goals, we no longer fit in with the people of the world. We are like strangers in a strange land.

What Does It Take To Live Like Strangers And Pilgrims?

Faith. Disciples must walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We live in a physical world, but we operate by spiritual realities, standards, and promises. To have a relationship with God, we must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Abraham and Sarah walked by faith as they lived as strangers in a foreign country (Heb. 11:13-18). Consider the different ways their faith was shown.

1. Trusting in God's Promises. Abraham and Sarah did not receive all of the promises in their lifetime, but they saw them afar off, were assured of them, and embraced them. They trusted that God would keep His word (Rom. 4:20-21; 2 Tim. 1:12).

There is an aspect of uncertainty in living as a pilgrim. We have no stake in this world, no rights, no place, etc. Our faith must be shown by trusting in God to take care of us, to see us through this life, and to reward us in the end.

2. Obeying God's Instructions. By faith Abraham obeyed God (Heb. 11:8). If Abraham had not obeyed, we would not know anything about his faith. Walking by faith does not mean that we just believe in God. Walking is an action. Walking by faith means we trust God enough to do what He says. Saving faith is a faith that moves us to be obedient unto God. Faith is made known by its works (James 2:18-26).

3. Coming out from the World. We may be **in the world**, but we are not to be **of the world**. Our faith is shown in the way we conduct ourselves during the time of our sojourn here in this world (1 Pet. 1:15-17). We are to be holy as God is holy.

As sojourners and pilgrims, we are to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage a war against our souls, pulling us away from Christ and causing us to forfeit our home in Heaven (1 Pet. 2:11). We are not to love the world, or the things in the world (1 John 2:15-17). If we fall in love with this world, and become attached to this world, we will perish with this world. A desire to be friends with the world will make us enemies with God (James 4:4).

We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, knowing such associations pose a threat to our faithfulness unto God (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:33). Instead, we are to come out and be separate from the sinful thoughts and actions of the world around us. Only then will God claim us as His children.

We know we are to come out from the world, yet how many disciples of Christ act as if they are at home in this world? When one gives more time, energy, and attention to laying up treasures on earth than to exercising himself in godliness, he shows where his heart truly lies (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 4:7-8). A love for the world is seen in the way some disciples choose to act and dress (Prov. 4:23; Luke 6:45). Choices in the area of entertainment and recreation can portray one's true love for the world. When one takes his family away from worship assemblies for things like tournaments, competitions, reunions, hunting trips, vacations, etc., he demonstrates that he has a greater attachment to the world than to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

4. Delaying Gratification. Abraham and Sarah never received the fulfillment of all of God's promises during their lifetimes. They saw them through faith, and longed for them, but never enjoyed them in this world. The same is true for us. While there are some temporal blessings in Christ, we know that the best is yet to come (Heb. 4:1, 11; 1 Pet. 1:4). We are not to be like Esau who sold his birthright in order to fulfill an immediate desire (Heb. 12:15-17). He regretted his choice when it came time to receive his inheritance, and so will we.

5. Commitment (Seeing It Through to the End). "These all died in faith" (Heb. 11:13). This means that they walked by faith until the very end. They could have given up on the Lord and gone back home (v. 15), but they did not. We can give up on the Lord. Some have (Demas – 2 Tim. 4:10), and others still do. However, when we do, we forfeit our home in Heaven. God has prepared a city for those who seek a homeland, who look toward the heavenly country and embrace it until the end (Heb. 10:34-36; Rev. 2:10).

Conclusion

Jesus was a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. It may have been His creation, but it was not His home. He was not seeking an abode while He was here (Luke 9:58), nor was He seeking to establish an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). He walked by Heaven's decree and looked to return to its glory. Jesus calls us out of this world to follow Him to that same heavenly country for which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob longed. Heaven can be our home if we will live as strangers and pilgrims in this world.

Questions

1. What does the word "stranger" mean? _____

2. What does the word "pilgrim" mean? _____

3. How does Abraham view his relationship with the citizens of Canaan (Gen. 23:4)? _____

4. How does our becoming a disciple of Christ change our citizenship (Col. 1:13; Phil. 3:20)?

5. What kind of treatment does Jesus say His disciples could expect from the world? Why? (John 15:18-21) _____

6. Why should a disciple consider the world to be "enemy territory" (1 John 5:19)? _____

7. Why does Peter say that the world will think we are strange (1 Pet. 4:1-4)? _____

8. What does it take to live as a stranger and a pilgrim in this world (2 Cor. 5:7)? _____

9. Abraham and Sarah did not receive all of God's promises during their lifetime, but they _____ them afar off, were _____ of them and _____ them (Heb. 11:13).
10. By faith Abraham _____ God (Heb. 11:8).
11. What admonitions does Peter give to sojourners and pilgrims (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11-12)?

12. What are the consequences of loving the world (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4)? _____

13. Upon what condition will God receive us as His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:17-18)?

14. Why does Esau lose his birthright (Heb. 12:15-17; Gen. 25:29-34)? _____

15. What do followers of Christ need in order to receive the promise (Heb. 10:36)? _____

SALT AND LIGHT

The Disciple's Influence

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14)

Jesus concluded the Beatitudes by revealing the world's rejection and persecution of His disciples (Matt. 5:10-12). We will be reviled and persecuted. Then Jesus spoke of the positive impact these same disciples would upon the world. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (vv. 13-16).

Influence is the power we have to affect others. Everyone has an influence upon others (Rom. 14:7). All of us may not have the same kind of influence (good or bad) or the same amount of influence upon the same number of people, but we all have influence.

Disciples follow a Master who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He was often criticized because He associated with sinners (Mark 2:16-17), but these sinners saw His love and concern, heard His invitation to come and find rest (Matt. 11:28), and many responded.

Jesus used two common objects to illustrate the need for disciples to exert a positive influence upon the world. Every house in Palestine had salt and a lamp.

Salt

Salt literally has hundreds of uses. Let's consider some of the qualities that apply to being a disciple of Christ.

1. Preservative. Most scholars believe this is the primary lesson Jesus intended with this illustration. In the absence of refrigeration, salt is rubbed into meat to preserve it. This process is still used today. Disciples exert a similar preserving influence upon the world. When we follow Christ in doing what is good, and actively opposing evil, we are helping to prevent the moral decay of our society.

Jesus intends for His **disciples** to have an **important**, though often unappreciated, **relationship** with the **world**.

The presence of righteous people also preserves the wicked from God's wrath. Sodom would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous people (Gen. 18:22-33). Judah was spared during the days of good king Josiah (2 Kings 22:16-20). Jerusalem would have been pardoned if one man could have been found who executed justice and sought for truth (Jer. 5:1). No man stood in the gap to prevent God's wrath (Ezek. 22:30-31).

2. Salt Gives Flavor. Salt is used to enhance the taste of food (Job. 6:6). Its presence in food cannot be ignored. Likewise, there is to be something about disciples that makes them stand out to unbelievers. Our presence in the world is to be distinctive.

Followers of Christ are to provide a pleasing "flavor" to the harshness of life. Our speech is to be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:5-6). We are to lighten burdens (Gal. 6:2) and provide comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-6) by weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

3. Salt Creates Thirst. Salty snacks make us thirsty. Some people create a spiritual thirst in others simply by the way they live. The world is watching us. When some people see the way we are able to weather the storms of life with peace, hope and joy, they see something they want for themselves. Our faithfulness, which is criticized by some, is desired by others. It creates a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Disciples are called out of the world, yet the Lord intends for us to practice our discipleship in the midst of the world. Salt must come into contact with a substance in order for it to influence that substance. We are set aside, but not shut off. We are sanctified, but not secluded.

Light

Light is a very important symbol that is used in the Bible. God is light (1 John 1:5). Jesus' entrance into this world is spoken of as bringing light unto mankind (John 1:4-9; 8:12; Matt. 4:15-16). Light is associated with truth and understanding (Ps. 119:130; 2 Pet. 1:19), while darkness is associated with sin, ignorance, and the power of Satan (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).

Jesus said that His followers are the light of the world. However, this light does not originate within us. We are light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun upon the side of the earth that is turned away from the sun, so also disciples reflect the light of the Son of God in a world that has turned its back away from God.

What are some properties of light?

1. Light Reveals and Illuminates. A light reveals what is concealed in the darkness. God's word will reveal the truth to a world lost in darkness (Eph. 5:13).

2. Light Drives Away Darkness. The sunrise causes the darkness of night to disappear. Light and darkness cannot coexist. Likewise, sin and righteousness cannot coexist. The light of truth exposes the works of darkness and drives them away (Eph. 5:11; John 3:19-20). The appearance of a disciple will sometimes clean up dirty language, silence the dirty joke, or cause the TV channel to be changed.

3. Light Gives Guidance. Light is needed to see in the darkness. There were no street lights in ancient times. Every man took a lamp as he walked at night. Lighthouses mark the

shoreline for sailors. God led the children of Israel at night by a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21).

God's word gives us light and guidance as we travel through this dark world of sin and error (Ps. 119:105). We are to walk in the light (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:8). The lives of faithful disciples are lighted paths for others to see and follow (Prov. 4:18).

4. Light Warms and Comforts. "Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccl. 11:7). A little sunlight is good for those who are sick. Dark clouds and rainy days bring the "blues," but a little sunshine drives away these feelings. Disciples are to live in such a way that others can find comfort, kindness, and warmth.

5. Light Draws Those Who Want to Come out of the Darkness. Jesus said that while those who practice evil are repelled by the light, those who do the truth are drawn to the light (John 3:19-21). Sin-sick souls will be attracted to faithful disciples because they find in us something that they desperately want for themselves.

Maintaining Our Influence

Jesus spoke of the salt losing its flavor (Matt. 5:13). It is possible for salt to lose its distinctive properties due to contamination, and it is possible for a disciple to lose his good influence.

A disciple must maintain his distinctiveness as a follower of Christ at all costs. Disciples represent Christ, His word, His work, His church, His religion, and His Father to the world. The things we do as disciples reflect upon the world's view of Christ. We are not to live in such a way as to validate the world's unbelief and continued rebellion against Christ.

One way a disciple loses his influence is by failing to practice what he preaches (Rom. 2:17-24; 2 Cor. 8:21). The hypocrite has no positive influence upon anyone. Such behavior causes the name of God to be blasphemed among unbelievers. Good influence is also lost through compromise with sin and error (Gal. 2:4-5; 2 Cor. 6:14). The one who compromises his faith has blended in with the world and cannot be taken seriously. Good influence is also lost when one shows his love for the world over his loyalty to Christ (2 Tim. 2:19; James 4:4). When the world sees us involved in their activities (drinking, dancing, immodest dress, ungodly entertainment, etc.), they know that we are really one of them.

If we allow the distinctiveness of our character to be polluted with compromise and involvement with sin, we lose our good

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(Phil. 2:15).

influence. Once this influence is lost (salt has lost its flavor) it cannot be restored. Jesus says that it is "good for nothing but to be thrown out." Even when it has lost its flavor, salt is still dangerous to vegetation. No farmer would allow salt to be discarded on his property. The worthless substance was thrown into the street where it could not harm anything.

Some disciples lose their good influence in such a way that they are actually harmful to the cause of Christ. Their presence is counterproductive to evangelistic efforts and disruptive to the local church. In refusing to repent, some embolden others to sin while driving sincere truth-seekers away from God's people.

Jesus also said that we must let our light shine before men (Matt. 5:14-16). A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. The light of our influence must be visible and unmistakable to those around us. It is foolish for one to go through the trouble of lighting a lamp only to hide it under a basket. A lamp must be positioned so that it benefits all who are in the house. The disciple must illuminate those around him with God's truth.

Our light is to shine before men. They are to see our good works and glorify God. Notice that the world is to see the works, not the worker. A captain driving his ship at night sees the light, not the lighthouse. God gets the credit for our good influence, not us.

We cannot hide our light, but we can tarnish our influence to the point we are no longer capable of reflecting the radiance and purity of Christ and His word in the world. Our influence is maintained by abstaining from those things that tarnish our light and ruin the distinctiveness of our good character. We are to be "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

Conclusion

Jesus intends for His disciples to have an important, though often unappreciated, relationship with the world. The world may hate followers of Christ (John 15:18-20). They may try to blame all the tragedies and injustices of human history on those claiming to follow Christ. They may even persecute followers of Christ. However, the reality is the people who the world hates the most are actually the ones to whom it owes the most. This sinful world continues to exist because of the faithful disciples of Christ scattered across the rotting landscape who continue to shine forth as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Questions

1. What is influence? _____

2. How does Peter describe Jesus to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:38)? _____

3. Describe how disciples are to act as preservatives in this sinful world. _____

4. Describe the kind of "flavor" that disciples are to provide to the world (Rom. 12:15; 2 Cor. 1:3-6; Gal. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:16; Heb 13:16). _____

5. What does Proverbs 22:1 say about the value of our influence? _____

6. Describe some ways that a disciple can lose his good influence. Use Scriptures to support your answers. _____

7. What does Jesus say about the salt that loses its flavor (Matt. 5:13)? _____

8. How do faithful disciples create a spiritual thirst in others and draw them out of spiritual darkness? _____

9. Explain how the life of a faithful disciple is like the "shining sun" (Prov. 4:18). _____

10. What do men do when they see our good works (Matt. 5:16)? _____

11. What do men do when they see us commit sin (Rom. 2:21-24)? _____

Lesson 12

AN APOLOGIST

The Disciple's Answer

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"
(1 Peter 3:15)

The epistle of First Peter was written to help Christians who were about to undergo an immense amount of suffering and persecution (4:12). As these Christians maintained their faith in the face of such trials, it would only be natural for some unbelievers to ask why they were remaining faithful. What was it about their faith that made it worth losing their life? Peter told these Christians they needed to be ready to answer these kinds of questions.

An Apologist

The apostle Peter said they were to be ready to give a "defense" (or an answer – KJV). The word "defense" is translated from the Greek word **apologian**, from which we get our English word "apology." This Greek word, however, does not convey the idea that Christians are to apologize for their faith. It means to give a verbal defense, or a speech in one's defense, as in court. This Greek term is also found in our English word "apologetics," which is a branch of theology devoted to defending the evidence that supports Christianity.

The apostle Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16-17). Acts 17:2-3 says Paul went into a synagogue of the Jews, "and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and **giving evidence** that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (NASV, emphasis mine – HR).

This work of defending the gospel is not just given to the apostles. The Bible teaches that all disciples are to be ready to defend the faith. Jude calls upon his readers (and all disciples today) to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The word "contend" means to fight or struggle for something as a combatant. "Earnestly" is translated from an athletic term which means to agonize,

This work of **defending** the gospel was not just **given** to the apostles. The Bible teaches that all disciples are to be **ready** to defend the faith.

With
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defending.

describing the extent to which we must go in our efforts to defend the truth. People mock, twist, and pervert the truth of God's word. When they do, disciples are to be ready to stand up and give a defense.

Peter's admonition applies to us today. Although we may not be facing fiery trials for our faith, we are asked questions about our beliefs and practices, and every disciple needs to be ready with answers to such questions. In this lesson, we will study 1 Peter 3:15 and determine what is involved in being an apologist.

Sanctify the Lord God In Your Hearts

The first step in being ready to defend our faith is sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts. To sanctify means "to consecrate or set apart." The New American Standard Version renders this phrase: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." We are to set aside Christ from all others, and set Him above all others in our heart. He is to be given the position of Lord and Master (which is a part of being a disciple). With Jesus seated upon the throne of our heart, we will respond to Him in obedience (John 14:15) and confidence (Heb. 13:5-6), believing that His teaching is worth defending.

Always Be Ready

The apostles were told not to give any thought as to how they would answer (Matt. 10:19, Mark 13:11). The Holy Spirit would speak through them. However, no such instruction is given to us. Instead, we are told to be ready with an answer.

Readiness requires preparation on our part, which is achieved in different ways. We are to study the Word of God so we will be prepared to explain and defend our beliefs (2 Tim. 2:15, 2 Pet. 3:18, Heb. 5:12-14). In addition to studying the Bible on our own, we are to prepare for Bible classes and attend every worship service. Gospel meetings provide additional opportunities to hear the Word of God. We can read debates and other literature which places an emphasis upon defending the truth of the gospel. There are no short-cuts to preparing ourselves to be ready with answers.

The time we spend in such efforts is helpful in several ways. First, it gives us confidence by strengthening our faith (Rom. 10:17) and removing our doubts (Eph. 4:14). Our confidence helps other disciples to have confidence (Phil. 1:14). Finally, our confidence helps those who are lost. Those who are searching

for the truth are not only looking for answers to their religious questions, but they are also looking for people who are confident in their beliefs.

To Give A Defense

Peter tells us to be ready with a defense. As we have already pointed out, this term is translated from the Greek word **apologian**, from which we get the English word "apology." "Apology, as used in this context, does not mean 'saying you are sorry,' but rather a 'formal defense' of what you believe. Peter was urging Christians to be ready to give a reasoned, intelligent explanation of their faith to anyone who might ask about what Christians believed and practiced" (King 16).

The only proper defense for our faith is the Word of God. Matters of right and wrong are not determined by a disciple's ideas, opinions, or personal experiences. Those who challenge our faith and practices have their own opinions and experiences as well. Saying things like, "Well, I think..." or "My preacher says..." are not adequate answers. Truth is defended by going to the source of truth – the Word of God (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17).

To Everyone Who Asks You

Peter said that we must always be ready. We must have an answer whenever the occasion presents itself. We are not to be annoyed or offended when people ask us questions about our beliefs. Instead, we are to welcome and appreciate the opportunities to defend the gospel and to help others come to a knowledge of the truth.

While it is true we must always be ready with an answer to everyone, we must recognize the fact that the Scriptures elsewhere teach there are some questions which are not deserving of our time, as well as some people who are not deserving of our attention (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; Titus 3:10-11; Matt. 7:6). Wisdom must be exercised in knowing when one is sincerely looking for the truth or when one is looking for an opportunity to argue and quarrel.

A Reason For The Hope That Is In You

Some unbelievers were amazed as they watched Christians willingly suffer and even die for their faith. When approached by such people, Christians needed to be able to explain their hope was in Heaven and was firmly established in the mercy of God and the resurrection of His Son (1 Pet. 1:3).

While we may not be called upon to explain why we are willing to suffer for Christ, we need to be ready to explain what we believe and why we believe it. How many disciples of Christ are prepared to give a defense for their most basic beliefs and practices? Among these would be...

- The existence of God
- The deity of Christ and the validity of His resurrection
- The inspiration of the Bible
- Why we believe in Heaven and Hell

- What one must do in order to be saved
- The purpose and method of baptism
- Why we reject denominationalism
- Why we do not use instrumental music
- Why we partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday

Disciples of Christ are to have a good grasp of the basis of their faith and a thorough knowledge of the basic doctrines of the New Testament (Heb. 5:12-6:2).

With The Proper Attitude

Not only are we to be ready with a proper answer or defense, but we are to present it in the proper way. The way we handle ourselves as we give our defense is an important part of our defense. Peter said that we must do so with meekness, fear, and a good conscience (vv. 15-16).

Meekness: This admonition has reference to our attitude towards those who are asking for the reason for our hope. We are not to be arrogant or resentful in our answer. We are to be meek.

"The word meaning 'gentleness' or 'meekness' is rendered 'strength under control.' It is used to describe horses who are broken to the bit and bridle, and so are disciplined enough to be useful. The meaning is therefore that we are to bring our emotions, especially anger and malice, under complete control, so that they do not spoil the effectiveness of our presentation" (King 16-17).

The apostle Paul said, "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). He admonished the Colossians to "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6). It is important we remember such admonitions, not only as we answer people verbally, but as we engage in written exchanges. It can be difficult to defend the truth in writing without appearing harsh and hateful.

Fear: This admonition has to do with our attitude toward God. A deep reverence and respect for God needs to be shown in the way we give our defense. Unbelievers need to see we take God, His Word, and His ways seriously. Also, we need to remember that we will give an account for the way we respond to such opportunities (Rom. 14:12).

A Good Conscience: Suffering for our faith does not give us a license to sin. Not only are people looking for confidence, they are also looking for consistency. Hypocrisy has a devastating effect upon our influence. Our life must back up our profession of faith.

Conclusion

This command to give a defense is not optional. If we are followers of Christ, we are also defenders of His teachings. In our first lesson, we noted the fact that a disciple of Christ is more than a student of the Lord's teachings. A disciple is a follower and a supporter of Christ. When the truth is attacked, disciples are to be ready with a defense. When our faith is questioned and challenged personally, we are to be ready with a defense. We cannot be

ready to do so until we have sanctified Christ as Lord in our hearts, devoted ourselves to a study of His word, and determined that we will meet every challenge and opportunity with the right attitude.

References:

King, Dan. "Ready Always To Give A Defense." *Truth Magazine*. 20 March 1997:16-17. Print.

Questions

1. What does Peter tell suffering Christians to be ready to do (1 Pet. 3:15)? _____

2. What is Paul appointed to do (Phil. 1:16-17)? _____
3. What do the words "earnestly contend" mean (Jude 3)? _____

4. What does it mean to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts? _____

5. Referring to the previous question, why is this the first step in preparing ourselves to give an answer for our faith? _____

6. What problem is addressed in Hebrews 5:12-14? _____

7. What kinds of things can we do to prepare ourselves to defend our faith (2 Tim. 2:15)? _____

8. How should we harmonize the instructions in 1 Peter 3:15 with passages like 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 2:16-18, and Matthew 7:6? _____

9. What is meekness, and why is it important when giving a defense of our faith? _____

10. What instructions does Paul give in Colossians 4:6? _____

11. Why is it important that disciples of Christ maintain a good conscience? _____

Lesson 13

FISHERS OF MEN

The Disciple's Task

"Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17)

Many people followed Jesus while He was upon the earth. From these followers, Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles. Two of these men were Peter and Andrew. These brothers were fishermen by trade. Jesus approached these men as they were casting their net into the sea and said, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

Jesus called these men to a spiritual work using language that they would understand. The work of winning lost souls is much like that of fishing. Fish are caught out of the water. Lost souls are caught out of the sea of sin and sorrow, evil and error, guilt and greed, darkness and death. Fish are caught with a net. Lost souls are "caught" with the gospel – not with gimmicks, food-fun-frolic, worldly philosophies and pop psychology, feel-good stories, bait and switch tactics, etc. Fishermen have to know how to use the net, and where and when to catch the fish. Soul winners learn the most effective ways to reach men with the gospel.

Peter and Andrew knew the work of catching fish, but Jesus would teach them the work of catching men (Luke 5:10). Disciples have to be taught how to "become fishers of men." It does not come naturally to everyone. However, every disciple must learn how to win souls and follow Jesus in this important work.

Disciples are to be made (Acts 14:21). One of the responsibilities of discipleship is to make more disciples. Before Jesus left this world, He commissioned His apostles to go into the world and make more disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). These new disciples were to be taught to observe all things that Jesus had commanded them. The last thing that He had commanded them to do was to go and make disciples.

Why should we be fishers of men? Why should disciples of Jesus be concerned about making more disciples? What is our

The **work of winning** lost souls is much like that of fishing. Fish are caught out of the water. **Lost souls** are caught **out of** the sea of **sin** and sorrow, evil and error, guilt and greed, darkness and death...

motivation? If we understand and appreciate why we need to save the lost, the question of "How?" will take care of itself.

1. Because We Are Following Jesus

Disciples are followers. We are to follow the teachings and examples of Christ. We are to be like our Master. What did our Master do? If Christ is living in us (Gal. 2:20), what would He have us do?

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). If we are truly following Jesus, we will be found where He was found, doing the important work He was doing.

2. Gives Us A Sense Of Purpose

Jesus called Peter and Andrew for a purpose: "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." When they "fished for men," they were fulfilling the purpose of their calling and training.

Disciples are to be made. It is the Lord's will and design for His kingdom that disciples make more disciples.

Many people are longing for a sense of purpose in their lives. The true disciple of Christ has no greater purpose than to be involved in his Master's work, especially that of saving the lost.

3. It Will Please Our Master

As disciples of Christ, who are we trying to please in our lives? We are not trying to please ourselves, because the first step of discipleship is to deny self (Matt. 16:24). We are not trying to please our family, because no one is to come before Christ (Matt. 10:37). We are not trying to please people in the world, because we are not to love the world (1 John 2:15).

We are to do those things that please Christ (2 Cor. 5:9). As a soldier of Christ, we are to please our Commander (2 Tim. 2:4) by faithfully executing His orders to go and make disciples. We are to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him by being fruitful in every good deed (Col. 1:10). Being entrusted with the gospel, Paul sought to please God with his words, not men (1 Thess. 2:4).

God does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9; Ezek. 33:11). He wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Thus, God is pleased when we are involved in this important work.

4. Because There Is A Great Need

Jesus felt compassion for those who were lost in sin (Matt. 9:35-38). He was touched by their plight. He had created them, He loved them, and He was aware of the possible fate that awaited them.

As followers of Christ, we are to look upon the lost as He did. The masses of men we see are not mere mortals who are involved in worldly endeavors. They are immortal souls on their way to judgment! Jesus lamented the shortage of workers in the great harvest for souls. Indeed, the harvest is plentiful, but the amount of laborers is pitiful.

There is a need for those who have the truth to share it with the lost. Those lost in sin are not laboring in the harvest. Those promoting error are sabotaging the harvest. Lazy and indifferent Christians are ignoring the harvest. Will we respond to the Master's call for laborers in the harvest with the words of Isaiah, "Here am I! Send me" (Is. 6:8)?

5. Because It Is The Right Thing To Do

2 Kings 7:3-10 tells of four lepers who wandered into the deserted camp of the Syrians and found their "salvation." These men were dying outside the gate of the city. They could not enter the city because of their leprosy. Instead of sitting and waiting to starve to death, they decided to surrender to the enemy. However, when they came to the camp, they found that it had been deserted. They entered a tent, ate and drank, and started carrying away the treasure. They had their "salvation," but in the midst of their joy, they remembered others needed to hear about this discovery they had made.

"Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household'" (v. 9).

After receiving their "salvation," these lepers realized the right thing for them to do was to let others in the same condition know about it.

Those who have received the forgiveness of their sins know how precious this gift is (Ps. 32:1-2). Such individuals are obligated to let others know this gift is available to them as well.

6. Because It Is Our Duty

Disciples have duties (Luke 17:10). One of these duties is to make other disciples.

The prophet Ezekiel was made a watchman over the house of Israel (Ezek. 33:1-9). The watchman has an important duty – he warns of approaching danger. When he makes the warning, the

The Anatomy Of A Soul Winner

A **mind** that understands the importance of winning souls.

Eyes that see lost souls.

Ears that hear the "Macedonian Call."

Feet that are ready to take the gospel to the lost.

A **heart** that cares about the plight of sinners.

people may ignore it and perish, but he has done his duty. However, when he fails to sound the warning, the blood of the people is on his head.

Those who are lost in sin are in danger of losing their eternal souls (John 8:24, Rom. 6:23, Rev. 20:15). They must be warned and rescued. We are the ones who know about the danger. Thus, it is our duty to warn them (2 Cor. 5:9-11).

7. For The Joy Of Saving Souls

The work of making disciples should not be viewed as an undesirable duty, but as a blessing and a privilege. There is great joy when those who are lost have been found (Luke 15:7, 10, 32). Disciples in the first century rejoiced over the salvation of souls (Acts 15:3). There can be no greater joy for a disciple of Christ than to know he has helped someone find his salvation.

Conclusion

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. He calls us to join Him in this important work. A true follower of Christ can be found following in the work of His master – winning souls. We know our soul is worth more than the entire world (Matt. 16:26), but we must realize every soul is equally valuable. Among other things, a disciple is a fisher of men. Let us busy ourselves in the work of casting the net of the gospel upon the sea of humanity and bringing a harvest of great souls upon the shore.

Questions

1. Why did Jesus come to this world (Luke 19:10)? _____
2. Why does Jesus call Peter and Andrew to follow Him (Mark 1:17)? _____

3. Who does a disciple seek to please (2 Cor. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:4)? _____
4. How can one walk "worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10)? _____

5. What does God want for mankind (1 Tim. 2:3-4)? _____

6. What dilemma does the Lord discuss in Matthew 9:37-38? _____

7. Why do the four lepers feel compelled to tell others of the good news that they had found (2 Kings 7:9)? _____

8. Name one of the duties that disciples have (Matt. 28:19; Acts 14:21). _____
9. What happens to the watchman who fails to warn of approaching danger (Ezek. 33:6-8)?

10. Why is Paul innocent of the blood of all men (Acts 20:26-27)? _____

11. Why does the father rejoice when his prodigal son returned home (Luke 15:32)? _____

12. Peter and Andrew used a net to catch fish. What are we to use to catch men (Rom. 1:16)?

Thought Question

Do you know someone who needs to hear the gospel? What can you do to help bring that person unto Christ?