

Call to Obedience #230
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Discipleship is abandoning our schedules to get on God's schedule in everything!

The Meaning of Discipleship

By Reimar Schultze

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus came into the world to make disciples. Before he went on his first mission to do his first miracle, Jesus called men to discipleship. On the first day of his public ministry, which was the day after his baptism, Jesus was joined by John, Andrew, and Peter. On the next day, he was joined by Philip and Nathaniel; and on "the third day there was a marriage in Cana..., and both Jesus was called, and his disciples..." (John 2:1,2).

There you have it! Jesus did not begin his ministry without disciples. By the time of this miracle, he had already several believers, but Jesus was looking for more than plain believers. Jesus would do his work only with disciples! (Please observe that in this article, I shall refer to believers as those who fall short of following Jesus. I refer to disciples as those who have abandoned their schedule to only do what Jesus wants.) So, believers in Christ were all over Israel, but only disciples followed him and obeyed him.

It is a sober fact of history that Jesus did all his work through disciples and none through believers. It was through, and with, his disciples that he ministered to the believing and unbelieving multitudes. And when our Lord departed, he gave this command to his disciples (not to the believers who had not entered into discipleship), "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit " (Matt. 28:19 ASV).

Believers have no authority to teach obedience because they themselves do not obey. Believers cannot make disciples because they themselves are not disciples. Believers are not called by Jesus to become missionaries, pastors, evangelists, or church workers of any kind -- only disciples.

Jesus did all his work on earth with, and through, disciples. He commanded his disciples to carry on his work until the end of the age, and he said that only disciples should be baptized.

How Does a Believer Become a Disciple?

In considering this question, let us take note of the prerequisites for discipleship:

1. We must first confess our sins, repent of our sins, and receive Jesus into our hearts. We must, in short, "be born again" (John 3:3,5).
2. We must come to the point of "blessed dissatisfaction." Jesus said, "Blessed [or happy] are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness..." (Matt. 5:6).

We will not draw nigh to God if we are satisfied with our religious state. We will not become mighty in prayer unless we are dissatisfied with our prayers. We will not become holy unless we are dissatisfied with our state of sanctification. We will not become more compassionate unless we become painfully aware of the hardness of our hearts.

Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark..." (Phil. 3:13,14).

Satisfied believers are the headaches of pastors, the grief of the Holy Spirit, and a shame to the kingdom of God. You cannot feed them because they are not hungry. You cannot change them because they have settled into a rut; and you cannot move them because they are dead.

Hence, one of the common characteristics of the first five disciples was a "blessed dissatisfaction." This caused them to be on a constant lookout for something better, greater, and holier, that when found, they would follow without one tinge of procrastination, disregarding any cost to themselves.

What Is Discipleship?

Discipleship is not something you grow into eventually. It has nothing to do with growth! Discipleship is a radical decision of the will coming out of a blessed dissatisfaction of the heart that understands that nothing in the world matters but the will of God. This will lead that person to deny himself and to take up his cross daily to joyfully follow Jesus.

And since this is not a matter of growth, but of a decision, you can become a disciple the same day you are born again. That is exactly what the first Christians did. Before the sun had set on them that first day, they had decided to steadfastly continue in Bible study, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, in prayers, having also decided to sell all their possessions and goods! No one had to plead with these first Christians to give ten percent of anything, for they, from day one on, gave one hundred percent of everything (Acts 2:44,45). My friend, that is the pattern of discipleship laid down by the Holy Spirit on the birthday of the church.

Discipleship Is Abiding in Christ.

The believer's only salvation from spiritual dehydration, from becoming a walking religious corpse is discipleship. Only disciples abide in Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5,6). The Self-life cannot and will not abide in Jesus! There is no life outside discipleship, but only certain death and impending, everlasting disaster.

Discipleship Means Enthusiasm for Jesus.

You cannot find a dried up disciple any more than you can find a dried up grape on a healthy vine, relatively speaking.

Notice in John 1 that all the first disciples began witnessing about Jesus the same day they met him. This pattern is also repeated in the early church as you can tell by these words, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Our witnessing stops when we lose our enthusiasm for Jesus, when our intimacy with him ceases.

Discipleship Means That We Abandon Our Schedules.

At the wedding of Cana, Mary wanted Jesus to solve the problem of the wine shortage at once. But Jesus said, "...mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4; see also 7:6).

Taking the cross up daily means our giving Jesus our time -- all of our time. Time is life. If you give Jesus your time, you give him your life. Life is time and time is life. To take up one's cross daily means to give Jesus 24 hours each day, and each hour consists of 60 minutes, and each minute consists of 60 seconds. Dying daily means giving Jesus every second of every day!

Disciples never say to Jesus, "I have other plans...; I have prior commitments...; I don't want to disappoint my father, my wife, or my friends, etc...." Jesus took care of all that when he said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

A disciple will never do anything but that which is on God's schedule, and getting on God's schedule means giving up ours. If watching television is not on God's schedule, a disciple will not watch TV. If going to a ball game is not on God's schedule, a disciple will not go to a ball game. If shopping is not on God's plan, a disciple will not go shopping. If attendance at a wedding of a brother is not on God's schedule, a disciple will not go.

To get personal, I left my home country of Germany at age 19. Three times people have offered me the finance to go back to visit my country, but it was never on God's schedule until 41 years after I left Germany. But, oh, what a wonderful time God gave us when it was on his schedule!

Dear one, to take up the cross daily means to go for Jesus, to be on his schedule 60 seconds of every minute. Anything less is not discipleship. But, oh, what a blessing to have his constant fellowship.

Discipleship Means Blessings and Persecutions.

After Jesus told his disciples how hard it was for a rich man to be saved, Peter said to him, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" (Mark 10:28).

To this, Jesus responded, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (vv. 29,30).

If the rich man had forsaken all, if he had sold his property and given to the poor to follow Jesus, he would have received houses a hundredfold in this life and everlasting life in the world to come. But what blinded the rich man to see what Jesus had for him was a greater love for money than for God. If we have a greater love for anything than for God, we are visually impaired or blinded to see what God has for us and how much he really loves us.

Discipleship gives us all these things mentioned plus persecutions, lest we become overly exalted. And why are disciples persecuted? It is because the moment they sign up for discipleship, they become nonconformists, and that always causes division and persecution. Every disciple is a nonconformist. He will not conform to the world: its dress, its food, its entertainment, its music, its scheduling, its value system (Rom. 12:2). And disciples will experience persecution because the same Jesus who brought a sword of division is now living in them (Matt. 10:34).

Discipleship Means That We Are on the Way to Sanctification.

We cannot become sanctified prior to discipleship, even as we cannot cross an ocean prior to getting into a boat or aircraft. The process of sanctification only begins in discipleship. The disciples, all the apostles that Jesus had called, were unsanctified apostles. They had envy, hardness of heart, cowardice, and a revengeful spirit -- yet, they obeyed Jesus in everything (John 17:6)! And that led to their sanctification not many days hence.

Dear one, are you a disciple? Don't expect to grow into it. Make that conscious decision today to take up your cross, let Jesus take over your schedule, and you shall enjoy his fellowship forever!