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THE TESTS AND PRIVILEGES OF DISCIPLESHIP.

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." – Luke 14:33.

TO be a disciple of Christ signifies much more, both in the way of responsibility and of advantage, than many seem to think. Our Lord's words are very explicit in defining the terms of discipleship to be nothing less than a full, complete consecration of [R2072 : page 287] all that we have and are to him who has bought us with his own precious blood. It must be a consecration to daily crossbearing and to following in the footsteps of Christ, even unto death. Hear the terms: "If any man come to me, and hate not [love not less] his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters; yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple;" and "whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

The terms are too plain to be misunderstood. They signify nothing less than, as Paul expresses it, the presenting of our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. (Rom. 12:1.) No one of those failing to do this is recognized of the Lord as his disciple, or enjoys the privileges of that relationship; and, further, only those who do this intelligently and freely are accepted of him.

That the Lord would not have any one take upon himself the responsibilities of this relationship without due deliberation and forethought, is shown by his reasoning on the subject, saying, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he hath sufficient to finish it? lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to

meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand. And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassage and desireth conditions of peace." – Luke 14:28-32.

Again, when the two brethren, James and John, desired to be very near the Lord in the coming Kingdom, the Lord endeavored to impress upon them the consecration [R2072 : page 288] that such a proposition would involve; and from the few recorded words we gather the drift of the more extended conversation. "Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask." At that time they could form no idea of the blessedness of being joined with Christ in his Kingdom and glory, to sit with him in his throne and to reign with him as his bride and joint-heir. They only knew that they loved the Lord, and that it would be blessed to be forever in his immediate presence and favor. "Are ye able," said he, "to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" That baptism signified the complete surrender of self to God at any cost of privation or suffering, even unto death. And, with this understanding, they replied, – "We are able." So great was their faith in and love for the Lord that they were willing to follow in his footprints of suffering. Then the Lord accepted their consecration, saying, – "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand and on my left [to be associated thus intimately with me in my throne] is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matt. 20:22,23.) From his subsequent teaching through the apostles we learn that this position is reserved of the Father for the overcomers of the Gospel age then beginning; and therefore, at that time, it yet remained to be proved whether these would be faithful to their covenant.

While the terms of discipleship are thus explicit, the advantages are none the less so. To the disciples belong the special teaching, training and discipline of the holy spirit given unto them as the seal of divine sonship, and all the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel. While our Lord did much public teaching, his special attention

was always given to his consecrated disciples. Of this class were the twelve apostles and others, but few of whose names have come down to us. Such, for instance, were the company present in the mount of prayer where the Lord solemnly set apart the twelve to be his apostles (Luke 6:13); also the seventy whom he sent out two and two before his face, and who returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name, and to whom the Lord replied, "Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because *your names are written in heaven.*" (Luke 10:1,17,19,20.) Such also apparently were Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and the women who were last at the cross and first at the sepulcher, and Joseph of Arimathaea (Matt. 27:57), and the five hundred brethren of whom our Lord was seen after his resurrection. – 1 Cor. 15:5,6.

These disciples all had the Lord's special love, fellowship and instruction; but the twelve apostles were the more constantly under his instruction in view of the work that was to be specially committed to them for the benefit of all the other disciples, both of that time and subsequently.

Notice also that the several apostolic epistles as well as the revelations of the Apocalypse are addressed in harmony with these conditions of discipleship.

It is for this consecrated class alone that the gospel feast (Isa. 55:1-3) is spread – the children's table. To this class the Prophet Isaiah (8:16) also refers, saying, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples." Yet from the children's table some crumbs of comfort may and do fall to others. Aside from this disciple class in our Lord's day was a great multitude who marvelled at his words, who believed, and who said, This must be the Christ, Hosannah to the Son of David! When Messiah comes will he do greater works than these? – whose sick were

healed, and who were fed by the miraculous loaves and fishes in the wilderness. Yet these multitudes were weak in faith and fickle-minded. They were not committed to a definite purpose as *disciples* of Christ, and consequently they were swayed back and forth by the stronger wills of their leaders. They feared to trust fully to the divine testimonials of Christ when their leaders taught them to the contrary. But in their hearts many hoped this might be the Messiah, and several times they were on the point of taking him by force to make him their King. Yet they never came to the positiveness of conviction and trust in Christ which would lead to their espousing his cause fully at all hazards and thus becoming *his disciples*. Consequently, such never had the privileges of discipleship, and soon they became partakers in the national sin of rejecting Christ, either openly, or by that silence which implied consent.

What, we may inquire, was the Lord's attitude toward this great multitude whose faith had not brought them to the point of discipleship, but who nevertheless believed on him? Matthew (9:36) says he had pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were sheeplike in many respects, but they were not yet *his* sheep: they were not yet fully persuaded to follow his leading, though they liked his voice, and some said, "Never man spake like this man." They followed him afar off, with uncertain steps and crooked paths, not fully determined to walk by faith, but desiring the (to them) stronger evidence of sight concerning his Kingdom and general teachings. Yet they had for a time some benefits from following Christ, even thus afar off: they had some faith, and consequently [R2072 : page 289] some hope, some love and some of the joy and peace that naturally flow from these. They also witnessed and realized some of the healing and teaching and many of the loving ministries of the blessed Lord. But because they did not improve these advantages and follow on to know the Lord, but weakly or indifferently followed their prejudice-blinded guides, not turning to the law and to the testimony of the prophets to see if they spoke according to that word, it was not long before they were all involved in the sin of their leaders, and with them they stumbled into the ditch of unbelief and of great tribulation, and were blinded to the privileges and

blessings of the gospel, and lost them. But, nevertheless, the Lord will yet have mercy upon them, and his favor will return to them after the full number from among the Gentiles shall have come in to the chief place of favor which Israel failed to obtain through unbelief. – Rom. 11:1,2,23.

In like manner also many sheep from among the Gentiles may lose their high privileges, if they walk not by faith. The Apostle Paul warns them against a similar stumbling through unbelief, saying, – "Be not highminded, but fear." A similar class all through this age has been brought under the influence of the gospel, and has similarly responded to it, and yet failed of discipleship. They have believed in Christ and have followed him afar off, and have been variously swayed by other influences than the Shepherd's voice. They have had some crumbs of comfort from the "children's table" – some faith, hope and love and some joy and peace in believing in the redemption provided for all in Christ Jesus. They have enjoyed some of the healing influences of the gospel as it has enabled them to cast off many of the old sins, and they have had some of the teaching and loving ministries of the saints, the Lord's body. They, like the multitudes in Christ's day, are not unbelievers; nor are they believers in the full sense, in the sense of that implicit confidence that freely ventures a full consecration – the sense of *discipleship*. They are not anchored and steadfast, but are easily swayed by leaders and by their own unstable minds. They like to company with the saints for the crumbs of comfort they receive, and also because they appreciate the righteousness of the saints, although they do not walk wholly with them; and they often [R2073 : page 289] give them the cup of cold water (some word or look or act of encouragement) because they are the Lord's disciples and are self-sacrificingly engaged in his service.

Such are not the enemies of the Lord, nor can they be regarded as his disciples in the full sense. Yet, in so far as they have advanced toward Christ, they have not been repelled by him. So also the true disciples of Christ do not repel even the weakest inquirers and feelers

after God. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye," says the Apostle, "but not to doubtful disputations:" receive such to do them good. And "him that cometh unto me," said Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out." Again it is written, "A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench." If there be but a little kindling of the fire of true devotion to God and to his truth and righteousness, the spirit of God will operate upon it and endeavor to fan it into a flame as long as such continue to come under the influences of divine grace by companying with the full disciples of the Lord.

That there is, and always has been, quite a large class of such as these, companying with the saints, the full disciples of Christ, is manifest. And not only so, but such were the disciples also before they came to that fulness of intelligent consecration which meets the requirements of full discipleship. Indeed, the first coming to Christ is infantile in every respect; and not until we have passed the infantile stage and have been developed somewhat in Christian character can we intelligently comprehend and comply with the Lord's terms of full discipleship.

When, by the grace of God, we have been led of his spirit to a clear apprehension of the privileges and terms of full and continued discipleship, if we draw back and fail to go forward, we lose our standing as disciples. But if, notwithstanding the difficulties that seem to obstruct our way, we meekly bow to the will of Christ, being constrained by the love of Christ to follow on, we shall receive more and more of the fullness of his grace, until, like Paul, in a blessed consciousness of the all-sufficiency of that grace, we can say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me."

Happy and blessed, indeed, is he who thus follows on in the course of a true disciple of Christ; who, in love and faithfulness, quietly takes up the daily cross and bears it without complaint, remembering that the servant is not greater than his Lord, and esteeming it a privilege thus to have fellowship with him now in his sufferings and to be disciplined

and trained thereby for the higher fellowship with him in the glory that shall follow.

Such faithful disciples the Lord declares to be, even now, the very salt of the earth – a healthful, cleansing, preserving element in the midst of a world of moral decay and sinful pollution. In reference again to the same symbol and its peculiar fitness to his true disciples, Jesus here, after describing the terms of discipleship, adds, "Salt is good; but if the salt should become insipid, how shall it recover its savor?" "It is thenceforth *good for nothing*, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men." – Luke 14:33-35; Matt. 5:13. [R2073 : page 290]

Good-for-nothing, unsavory salt! castaways from divine favor, and left to be trodden under foot of men! branches cut off from the vine to wither and dry for the burning (destruction)! – such is the picture which the Lord gives of the sad end of those who draw back from their discipleship in the school of Christ. Paul also expresses the same thought, but in plain, non-symbolic terms, saying, "If any man draw back [not if he merely slip through weakness of the flesh under the power of temptation, which may indeed be followed by a godly sorrow that worketh repentance, but if he wilfully and deliberately draw back, loving sin and doing despite to the spirit of favor, – returning again like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire – if any man so draw back] my soul shall have *no pleasure* in him." The Apostle then shows what all such draw back to, when, encouraging all to faithfulness, he adds, "But we are not of them who draw back *unto perdition [destruction]*, but of them that believe *to the saving of the soul.*" – Heb. 10:38,39.

Beloved called ones, hearken to the Master's words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" You may indeed be weary in well doing because of the reproaches of them that are without the pale of discipleship; temptations, violent or subtle, may press hard upon you; trials and cares may sorely afflict you; but we bring you these blessed words of cheer from the Word of the Lord: – "Have faith in God;" "This

is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God [the divinely appointed Redeemer, Leader and Teacher of his people]?" "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." "In your patience possess ye your souls." "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," said Jesus; and Paul adds, "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Therefore, "let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap *if we faint not.*" "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." – Mark 11:22; 1 John 5:4,5; Heb. 10:35,36; Luke 21:19; Psa. 27:13,14; John 16:33; Heb. 2:18; Gal. 6:9; Luke 12:32.

Let us, then, in view of these precious promises, "gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" – at the establishment of his Kingdom and his revealing in glory and power. God will work in us to will and to do all his good pleasure, if we patiently submit to the transforming influences of his grace. The tests of discipleship come to us every day, saying, This is the way: walk ye in it. It is the narrow way of self-denial, of cross-bearing, and of diligent, patient, faithful service to God. But who that has trod this narrow way has not been made to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory in realizing the presence and favor of God and in communion with our Father and our Lord and with the faithful in Christ Jesus? – truly a joy which the world can neither give nor take away.

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