

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Message #10

“EVIDENCES OF DISCIPLESHIP”

Theme Verse: *“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* (Luke 9:23)

The servant girl asked Peter, “Are you one of this man’s disciples?” (John 18:17) A Christian disciple evidences, by lips, lifestyle and labors, the model of the Master. Once again, let us be clear about the definition of a disciple. John Stott, one of our prominent theologians, defines discipleship as follows: “Discipleship is a constant focus on duplicating the lifestyle of Jesus Christ as nearly as we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit.”

George Barna, the most well-known religious pollster of our day puts it this way: “True discipleship is about a lifestyle, not simply about stored-up Bible knowledge. Often, churches assume that if people are reading the Bible and attending church, then real discipleship is happening. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Discipleship is about passionately pursuing the lifestyle of Jesus Christ.”

A disciple of Jesus Christ is a student who learns in the classroom of life as he follows his Mentor. The words, disciple, discipline and discipleship share a kinship. Broadly speaking, of course, every Christian is considered to be a disciple of Christ until proven otherwise. When Peter warmed himself at the enemy’s fire, there must have been some flaw in his life that prompted the young girl to ask: “Are you this man’s disciple?” The question was deliberate, and disturbing. What evidences identify us as learner-followers of Jesus Christ?

It is not difficult to distinguish the genuine disciple from the counterfeit, for there are certain distinguishing qualities that are readily observable. Let us look at the life of Paul and note the several conspicuous evidences of his commitment to a life of discipleship. After his dramatic conversion on the Damascus highway, no one doubted who his Guide was. What are some of the major evidences in the life of Paul that prove his commitment to Christ as His follower?

I. THE EVIDENCE OF A DEATH.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Previously, Paul had written to the Christians in Rome these words, “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom.6:11)

The first evidence that a person is a disciple of Jesus Christ is that he identifies himself with the death of Christ. He considers that when Christ died upon the cross, he was likewise participating in His death. “I am crucified with Christ.”

There are three types of crucifixions mentioned in the New Testament, one literal and two figurative. Let us review them as follows:

A. The Crucified Savior.

“And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink. Then they crucified Him....” (Matt. 27:33-34)

That account is repeated in all four of the Gospels. An unknown poet penned these descriptive words:

“There He hung, reproached, derided,
There His garment was divided
Amongst the mocking soldiery;
There endured He grief unspoken,
There His loving heart was broken
As He died for you and me.”

The death of our Savior was literal. It was the most horrible form of death that the Romans could inflict. The Apostle Paul identified himself with Christ in His death.

B. The Crucified Self.

I repeat Paul’s statement to the Galatians for closer analysis: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Notice that the personal pronoun “I” occurs four times in the above statement:

- There is the crucified “I” – “I have been crucified with Christ.”
- There is the dead “I” – “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”
- There is the living “I” – “And the life I now live....”
- There is the faith “I” – “I live by faith in the Son of God.”

In my view, there is no single verse of scripture, in the New Testament, that explains better who and what a disciple of Jesus Christ is.

C. The Crucified System.

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

- Paul is not speaking here about the world of *matter*.
Genesis tells us that God called His creation “good.” (Gen. 1:10,12)
- Paul is not speaking of the world of *mankind*. “God so loved the world....” (John.3:16) That is, the world of mankind.
- Paul is speaking of the world of *materialism*. “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world....” (I John 2:15-17)

Paul said he was crucified, that is, dead, to the things of the world and the world was dead to him. What did he mean? He was saying that the lures, lusts and lifestyles of this world, which attracted the worldly persons all around him, had no appeal to him.

They were accounted as dead to him and he to them. His interests and energies were focused on “things that are higher, things that are nobler,” these had allured his attention. If the world has a hold on you, it is not dead to you; if you have a hold on the world, you are not dead to it.

How can I experience this truth in my life and thereby evidence that I am a true disciple of the Lord Jesus? The answer is in Romans chapter six as well as other places. Here is what is recorded:

1. *Recognize a past accomplishment.*
“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (v.6)
2. *Reckon upon a present association.* (“reckon” = “to count as having been done.”)
“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (v.11)
3. *Refuse to accommodate sin.*
“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin.” (v.12,13a)
4. *Respond by presenting yourself to God.*
“But present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (v.13b) Also v.19 - “For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”
5. *Refuse to permit sin to dominate.*
“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (v.14)

Illust. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus came out of the tomb wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus said, “Loose him and let him go.” (John 11:44) A disciple of Jesus is one who no longer tries to follow, wrapped in the grave clothes of the old life! The Apostle Paul, having experienced death to sin, self and the systems of this world, sheds the grave clothes and is free to live the new life in Christ. He is encouraging us to do the same. Is there clear evidence that you have put off the old and put on the new? (Eph.4:22-24)

The evidence of a death is just one evidence of discipleship. There are others:

II. THE EVIDENCE OF A DESIRE.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death....” (Philippians 3:10)

One of the most notable and noble desires ever expressed is captured in those words. This threefold desire should be the desire of every disciple of Jesus Christ. His threefold desire is expressed as follows:

A. Paul's Desire Was To Learn Christ.

"That I may know him..." (v.10a) This is certainly in keeping with Christ's desire for His followers as He expressed it in Matthew eleven: "Take My yoke upon you and *learn from Me*, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt. 11:28)

Peter admonishes us in the same vein: "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:18)

B. Paul's Desire Was To Live Christ.

"and the power of His resurrection." (v.10b) Resurrection means life. Paul wanted, not merely to live, but to live a life of power – a life empowered by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. To walk the path of discipleship requires a power not of ourselves.

C. Paul's Desire Was To Be Like Christ.

"being conformed to His death..." (v.10c) The ultimate goal of every true disciple is to be like his [Master. To](#) think as he thinks, speak as he speaks, to walk as he walks, to live as he lives – to be molded into His image.

This is the same emphasis Paul articulates in Romans 12 in writing to the Christians in godless Rome, "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) Everyone is conforming to some example, some model or mentor consciously or unconsciously. Who is your model? Is it from earth or from heaven?

Paul sets before us the ultimate, the perfect Model in Romans chapter eight in these words, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." (Rom. 8:29). God has predetermined that all genuine disciples will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. If you are not being fashioned into Christ's likeness, you would be well advised to check up on your relationship with Him!

Illust. There was a young painter studying under the famous painter Raphael in Rome, many years ago. This young man had unusual talent and his friends predicted for him great success, fame and wealth. They urged him to leave Raphael and to establish his own studio. He replied, "No, I have found my master. I want to paint like [Raphael. To](#) do that I must be near him so that I can study his every movement, hear his every word and catch his spirit. I have no other desire than to be like him."

That story captures the meaning of discipleship. That painter's desire should be the desire of every true disciple of Jesus Christ: to follow Him that we might be like Him.

Illust. Thomas Chisholm wrote the words of the song that expresses this desire:

"O to be like thee: Blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer:
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art!
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness:
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart."

In addition to the discipleship evidences of death with Christ and the desire for Christ, there is:

III. THE EVIDENCE OF A DISPLAY.

"...so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil.1:20-21)

Let us examine this unique statement that Paul made. First, consider:

A. The Magnified One. "Christ"

Paul wanted to magnify Christ. A disciple not only models his Master but magnifies his Master. He so highly reveres and esteems his Master that he wants Him to be reflected for others to see and imitate. That is seen throughout the scriptures. Some examples are:

- Psalm 34:3 "O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together."
- Psalm 40:16 "the Lord be magnified."
- Luke 1:4 "and Mary said, my soul doth magnify the Lord."
- Acts 19:17 "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

Paul is in mighty good company. He is in concert with God's holy people of all eras when he speaks of magnifying the Lord. Like Paul, every true disciple of Jesus Christ should have, as his purpose in life, to clearly reflect his Lord and Savior. How about us? Is there any evidence that Jesus Christ is being magnified in our lifestyle? This is the day of self-magnification. We are bombarded with humanistic concepts of behavior. We hear much about projecting a "good self-image," but there is little about projecting Christ's image. The display that Paul wanted others to see was the display of deity in his life. When others looked at him he wanted them to see the likeness of his Lord.

In addition to the Magnified One, there is another matter to consider.

B. The Magnifier. "Christ shall be magnified in my body...."

His instrument for magnification: "my body." The body is the magnifying glass – the showcase in which Christ is displayed. He does not say, "my body shall be magnified." The body is that in which we live and move and have our being. People see us in our bodies.

What does a magnifying glass do? Does it make the image larger? No! The image seen through the magnifying glass is unchanged. Does the magnifying glass make the image come nearer? No! The image hasn't moved any closer than it was before. What, then, does the magnifying glass do? It makes the image clearer! Paul was conscious of the fact that he was on display and that as people saw him, they should see clearly displayed in him, Jesus Christ.

Illust. It has been a long time since I heard the following song, but the words linger in my mind:

"Let others see Jesus in you,
Let others see Jesus in you;
Keep telling the story,
Be faithful and true,
Let others see Jesus in you."

May I whisper to you, that in some cases, in order for Jesus to be magnified, the glass needs to be cleaned!

C. The Magnification. "whether it be by life, or by death."

If Christ is to be magnified and my body is the magnifier, what is the process of magnification? There are two processes that Paul mentions:

1. *Death.*

Christ can be magnified in the death of my body. Jesus said Lazarus' death was for "the glory of God." (John 11:4) "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of of his saints." (Psalm 116:15)

2. *Life.*

Christ can, and should be, magnified in our bodies while we are living. We should be "living sacrifices." (Romans 12:1) Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ." He also said, "They glorified God in me." (Gal. 1:24)

Why are believers left here in this world after we have come to faith in Christ? Answer: so that we can, in our lives, magnify and glorify our Savior! Therefore, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt.5:16)

CONCLUSION

We have briefly studied three conspicuous evidences of discipleship seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. No one can question whether or not he took the matter of discipleship seriously. The evidence is there in the scriptures that we have perused as well as many others.

Eugene H. Peterson, in his book on discipleship titled "A Long Obedience in the same Direction," states: "Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim."

What about us? What evidences do we offer that we are full-fledged disciples of Jesus Christ? Do we reckon ourselves to have died with Christ? Is there a controlling desire to “walk as He walked”? (1 John 2:6) Is Christ displayed in the behavior I demonstrate in my body?

Illust. Years ago, a well-known tight rope walker was about to walk across Niagara Falls on a wire that had been stretched for the purpose. He paused before beginning and asked the crowd if they thought he could accomplish the feat. They responded with a resounding “Yes!” He repeated the question, “Do you really believe I can do it?” Their shouts, again, were positive.

Then he said, “Since you believe that I can successfully walk across this chasm to the other side, will someone volunteer to ride on my back?” He waited, and then repeated the invitation. The crowd was silent. No one was willing to volunteer.

Most Christians give mental assent to God’s Word. They believe that the life of discipleship is life on the highest plateau; they *want* to live such a life. However, a true disciple *will*s to live such a life. Wanting is not enough. We must *will* to do His will!

Remember our theme verse: “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The word “desire” in this verse is the Greek word “*thelō*” and means, “to will, to be resolved or determined, to purpose.” Those who will to follow in the footsteps of the Savior will have demonstrable evidences of that resolve.

Illust. When Garibaldi, the great Italian Liberator, was setting out to deliver his country from an invading horde, he met a group of idle young men and asked them to follow him. “What will you offer us?” they demanded. Garibaldi replied, “Offer you? I offer you neither pay, nor quarters, not provisions. I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battle and even death. Let him who loves his country in his heart, not with his lips only, follow me.” And they followed him!

If mere human liberators can gather a band of followers who are willing to suffer deprivation and even death for an earthly cause, how much more noble and eternally rewarding is the call to follow the Son of God? “Are you one of this man’s disciples?” (John 18:17)

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