

TEXT SERMON – Discipleship Series

Message #3 **“THE ESSENTIALS OF DISCIPLESHIP” Part 1**

John 8:31

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

John 13:35

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 15:8

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

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In the above statements the Lord Jesus gave three essentials for discipleship. They are:

- John 8:31 - A Learner Who Is Receptive
- John 13:35 - A Love That Is Reflective
- John 15:8 - A Life That Is Reproductive

**These essentials I will address in three different messages, beginning with John 8:31 and the subject: “The Essential Of A Learner Who Is Receptive.”**

**“A LEARNER WHO IS RECEPTIVE”**

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (Jn.8:31)

Jesus is not looking for followers who can walk on water - He is looking followers who can walk on dry land in the manner that He did! That is a normal New Testament disciple. The normal Christian life, according to the New Testament, is a daily, deliberate and delightful application of the discipleship principles that Jesus Christ taught His disciples and modeled before them.

Contrary to the popular opinion of many, discipleship is not an above normal Christian life - It is the norm. It is not living a perfect life either, although that should be our aim. How then, do I live as Christ lived? The answer is contained in the three essentials of discipleship in the above three verses and we begin with the first one which is recorded in John 8:31 – “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

To live as Christ did we need to have the mind of Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.2:5) “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Rom.12:2) How do we acquire the mind of Christ? How do we renew our minds? By exposing our minds to God’s Word and absorbing its truths.

The Greek word for disciple means: “A learner-follower; one who is learning as he follows.” The word “apprentice” conveys the same meaning in our culture. If we are to understand

discipleship, we must understand that a disciple is a pupil, a student, a learner in the School of Christ – a learner who is receptive. There are at least three things that a school will have: (1) a Teacher; (2) A Textbook; (3) and A Test. Think first about:

### **I. THE TEACHER OF THE LEARNER.**

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (John.8:31) Note the emphasis upon “my Word” – “my disciples.”

If Jesus were visibly standing before us, we would all be at His feet worshipping and eager to learn. He is present, although unseen, and we bow in worship and tune our ears to His words. In Matt. 11:28-29 He invites us to do just that: “Come unto me .... learn of me.....” When on earth He was recognized as the Model Teacher. Mark’s Gospel records that “the common people heard Him gladly.” (Mark 12:37) However, as today, there were those who did not accept His teachings.

#### **A. The Teacher Challenged.**

In John 8 Jesus confronts the Pharisees and they rejected His testimony saying, “Who are You?” (v.25) In other words, “From where is Your authority to speak to us in such a manner?” Then in verse 33 they said, “We are Abraham’s descendants” and in verse 39 they said, “Abraham is our father.” They appealed to Abraham as their authority and were questioning Jesus’ credentials, saying, “Who do You think You are?”

In answering the Pharisees Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” and added “He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.” (John 8:47) That really set the pot to boiling!

“Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (John 8:52,53) Throughout their confrontation with Jesus the Pharisees were questioning Jesus’ credentials.

Teachers are sometimes asked, “What school did you attend?” They asked the same question of Jesus although in a different way. When Jesus taught in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Matthew reports: “When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? ...Where then did this Man get all these things?” So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.(Matt. 13:54,57)

Even Jesus’ siblings, at the time, did not acknowledge His credentials. They did later but initially they did not. Albert Barnes comments: “they took offence at his humble birth, and at the indigent circumstances of his family. They were too proud to be taught by one who, in family connections, they took to be their equal or inferior.”

Neither the Pharisees or the members of Jesus’ hometown synagogue were learners with a receptive spirit. Consequently, they forfeited the privilege of learning from the lips of God

Incarnate. What a sad commentary, what a missed opportunity, what ignorance and blindness!

### **B. The Teacher's Credentials.**

Now listen as Jesus declares His credentials: "I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak." (John 12:49)

The learned Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, perceived and proclaimed correctly Who Jesus is: "Rabbi, we know that You are a Teacher come from God." (John 3:2) Nicodemus recognized that Jesus had the highest authorization – "a Teacher come from God." That sets Him apart from all other Educators.

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest discourse ever spoken upon earth's soil, the people's response attested to the authenticity of the Messenger and the message. It is written, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (Matt.7:28,29)

Jesus defends Himself with these words: "if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." (John 12:47-50)

He is the certified, credentialized, authorized God-In-The-Flesh Teacher at whose feet all who have a receptive spirit sit for schooling. Genuine disciples hear Him gladly.

"*My Word*" – "*My disciples*" - Jesus Words, being the very Words of God, are to be revered and received as no other words we ever read or hear. One essential of discipleship is to be a learner who is receptive to the Master's message. What a Teacher! Are you a student in the School of Christ, a receptive learner?

At the feet of Jesus,  
Is the place for me;  
There a humble learner,  
Would I choose to be.

## **II. THE TEXTBOOK OF THE LEARNER.**

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

That the Bible is the textbook for the disciple of Jesus Christ is without question. Other books may be helpful but none should take precedence over Holy Scripture. The writer of Psalm 119 prayed, "Teach me from your textbook on life." (Ps.119:124 *The Message*)

**Illust.** I was the guest speaker in a church service when the pastor of the church led a testimony meeting as part of the service. He asked for people to give their favorite Bible verse.

One fellow stood and said, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." I looked at the pastor and could see clearly that he was embarrassed. But the worst was yet to come. One lady stood and said, "I don't know where it is found but my favorite verse is: "Every tub sits on its own bottom." Of course, neither statement is in the Bible.

I am convinced, after over 50 years of ministering in various churches, conferences, etc. that the majority of Christians in this country do not really know their Bibles. Why is that? It's because they are not disciples!

**Illust.** A young boy noticed a large black book covered with dust lying on the top shelf of the book case. His curiosity was aroused, so he asked his mother about it. Embarrassed, she explained, "Oh, that's a Bible. That's God's Book." He thought for a moment, and then said, "Well, Mom, if that's God's Book, why don't we give it back to Him? Nobody around here reads it anyway!"

I toured evangelist Billy Sunday's museum in Winona Lake, Indiana and saw there several of the Bibles he used in his evangelistic campaigns. One Bible was lying open in the display case and in the margin he had written these words, "Dust on the Bible; sin in the life." That, confessedly, is my own experience and it is my observation after many years in the ministry of the Word.

Why is the Truth Textbook so very important to a life of discipleship? For several reasons. One of the paramount reasons is because of its nature.

#### **A. Its Nature Is Seen In It's Authorship.**

It is the "Word of God." (I Peter 1:23)

That the Word of God is not of human origin should be evident to any Bible reader. Think this through: "A good man could not have written the Bible, and a bad man would not have written it." (Adam Clark).

In other words, man could not have written the Bible if he would, and would not have written it if he could. Why? There are two self evident propositions in those two statements: First, a good man could not have written the Bible, because it tells us over 2,000 times that God is the Author! Therefore, if a mere man claimed that he wrote it, he would be a liar, and consequently could not be a good man! Second, a bad man would not have written the Bible if he could, because it tells how bad he is, and he would be unwilling to write the truth about himself!

The Bible's Author is the Almighty, Eternal, All-Wise God Himself! It is indeed "the Word of God" as I Peter 1:23 states.

"The Holy Book, unparalled it stands,  
Its Author is God, its truth divine,  
Inspired in every word and line  
Although recorded by human hands.

**B. Its Nature Is Seen In Its Authority.**

Being called “The Word of God” (I Peter 1:23) and “The Word of The Lord” (I Peter 1:25) the Bible therefore is authoritative. Many man-written textbooks used in educational institutions contain a fair amount of speculation, theorizing and supposition, depending upon the subject addressed. The Holy Scriptures do not speculate, theorize or engage in supposition. They speak authoritatively upon every subject they address. The Bible is the only absolute and sufficient guide in all matters of faith and practice because it has God’s authority upon it.

500 times in the first 5 books of the Bible we read the phrase, “the Lord said” or “the Lord spoke.” 300 times again in the historical books we find the same phrases. 1,200 times in the prophetic books we read the same phrases or these words: “hear the Word of the Lord” or “this is what the Lord says.” The Bible is authoritative because it is God Who is speaking!

**C. Its Nature Is Seen In Its Agelessness.**

It “lives and abides forever” (I Peter 1:23) and it “endures forever.” (I Peter 1:25)

The books of men are for time – God’s book is for eternity. Generally, a book is produced by a writer in their own generation – but God’s Word took at least 1,500 years to write, spanning 30 generations of the world’s history. Books that were a rage a few years ago are forgotten today. The older a book is, the smaller its chances of surviving.

However, the Bible, recorded by men who died two to three thousand years ago, is not only still in existence today but is the most widely circulated book even though century after century opponents have banned, burned and berated it. But against the attacks of cynics, critics and skeptics, the Bible endures!

The Bible’s authorship, authority and agelessness reveal the nature of divine revelation in the book that we call the Bible. An anonymous writer wrote this about the Bible: “The holy scriptures are shallow enough for babes in Christ to swim in without drowning and deep enough for theologians to dive into without ever reaching bottom.” What a textbook!

“Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine,  
With jewels rich and rare,  
Hidden in its mighty depths,  
For every searcher there.”

**Illust..** Mahatma Gandhi, the famous Hindu leader, knew that the Bible was powerful — he stated: “You Christians have in your keeping a document with enough dynamite to explode civilization, to turn society upside-down, to bring peace to this war-torn world. But you read it as if it were just good literature, and nothing else.”

The Holy Bible is the textbook in Christ’s School of Discipleship. Are you learning it, loving it and living it?

### III. THE TESTING OF THE LEARNER.

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32)

The disciple’s Teacher does the testing and the grading. Let us, however, take a “self graded” test. Sort of a “straw poll” to see how we would do on an actual test.

#### A. **Question Number One: Do I Appropriate Truth?**

Jesus said, “If you abide in My word.” (John 8:31nkjv); “If you continue in My word.” (nasb); “If ye dwell in my word.” (Wycliffe) Abiding is to continue, to dwell in the Word, to live a Bibliocentric life. If we do that as a day-by-day routine we cannot but absorb, assimilate, appropriate truth. To appropriate the Word of God is to take it in, receive it, ingest it, digest it.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, “He who is of God hears God’s words.” (John 8:47) The authentic disciple “hears God’s words.” Mary of Bethany recognized His worth and “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word.” (Luke 10:39) Eight times in the Gospels and eight times in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matt.11:15)

Jesus is not referring to the physical appendages on the sides of our heads when He refers to “ears.” He is referring to the spiritual perceptive and receptive apparatus, imparted by the Holy Spirit at the time of the new birth, to every child of God. It by these spiritual “ears” that we hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit witnessing to us through the Word. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, translates Matthew 11:15 as follows: “Are you listening to me? Really listening?” The Amplified Bible treats Matthew 11:15 as follows: “He who has ears to hear, let him be listening and let him consider and perceive and comprehend by hearing.”

Appropriating spiritual food is done, not through the mouth, but through the spiritual ears that God gives us. A mother may daily prepare the most nutritious meals but if the family does not daily appropriate the food it will do them no good whatsoever. God has provided the Bread of Life and Water of Life in His Word. When His children do not appropriate His soul food it is insulting to God and injurious to the abstainer.

**Illust.** A lady that I know very well, has for many years, been a faithful student of God’s Word. Years ago she determined that she would read the Bible through one time for every year that she lived. She has now surpassed that goal and is approaching 100 times that she has read the Bible through. She not only reads but studies using various helps as she moves through the scriptures. She arises very early in the morning to spend time in the Word. I know that to be factual – she is my wife!

#### B. **Question Number Two: Do I Apply The Truth?**

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)

Learning that applies truth to life results in freedom. Knowing the truth and living the truth are two different matters. Appropriating truth and applying truth requires two different

attitudes and actions. The dictionary defines “knowing” as “Having information; awareness, understanding; to be acquainted with facts; to perceive with the mind; to be enlightened; to learn.”

Knowing should lead to doing. James writes, “Be doers of the Word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22) There are those who can quote “thou shalt not steal” but steal; who can quote the Sermon on Mount, “Blessed are the meek” but are arrogant; who quote, “blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness” but who have no hunger for God’s Word and right living. It is not the recitation of truth but the application of truth that Jesus is talking about.

The Pharisees of Jesus day knew the Scriptures thoroughly, but what Jesus so severely condemned them for was that they did not apply what they had appropriated and He called them “hypocrites.”

Jesus spoke a parable about two types of hearers in Matthew chapter thirteen when He was teaching about the seed, the sower and the soil. He said, “The one who received the seed (the Word of God) that fell among the thorns is one who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the one who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop.” (vs.22,23)

So, the test is a receptivity that replicates! It is not just knowing truth in the mind but showing it in the life. Many student/disciples in Jesus’ School cannot not pass the truth test. The writer of the book of Hebrews writes a scathing rebuke to those who fail to practice truth as follows:

“There is much more I would like to say along these lines, but you don't seem to listen, so it's hard to make you understand. You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others, but instead you have dropped back to the place where you need someone to teach you all over again the very first principles in God's Word. You are like babies who can drink only milk, not old enough for solid food. And when a person is still living on milk it shows he isn't very far along in the Christian life, and doesn't know much about the difference between right and wrong. He is still a baby Christian! You will never be able to eat solid spiritual food and understand the deeper things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing right.” (Hebrews 5:11-14 TLB)

**Illust.** I heard of a Missionary who went to a remote African village in the early days of the modern missions movement. He walked into a village deep in the jungle and there, in the middle of the village, a large crowd had gathered. The men of the village were playing marbles with diamonds! The village was located near a diamond mine and not knowing the value of diamonds on the world market, they had become so familiar with them that they were playing with them.

Some Christians play with the diamonds of truth. They collect them – making notations of them - fondle The Book - but fail to utilize truth in their daily lives. May that not be the

extent of our acquaintance with the truths of Scripture. Let us be learners who are receptive to divine Truth – reproducing it in our day to day lives! That is the first essential for a would-be-disciple of Jesus Christ.

**Illust.** A young lady finished reading a book and remarked that it was not very interesting. In the course of time, she became engaged to be married. One evening as they were walking together she said, “I read a very dull book one time written by a man with the very same name as yours. Isn’t that a coincidence?” “Not at all”, he replied. “I am the author of that book! That night, the young lady sat up until the early hours of the morning reading the book again. This time it seemed the most interesting story she had ever read. The once dull book now held her fascinated because she knew and loved the author!

So it is with Jesus and His Word! If we know and love Him we will be receptive learners, reproducing in our lives the lifestyle of the Lover of our souls!

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