

THE CALL TO . . . DISCIPLESHIP

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This may be one of the most important studies you will ever read. Most of the material is not new. Most Christians have been exposed to such teaching. However, I want to present what I believe to be a “fresh perspective,” which I hope will be helpful to you. The term disciple appears in the New Testament about 250 times, the term believer about 12 times, and the term Christian only 3 times. So we can see the importance that Jesus and the early church placed on discipleship. As we take a Scriptural look at this subject, the following outline will be followed:

1. The Perspective of Discipleship
2. The Position of Discipleship.
3. The Purposes of Discipleship.
4. The Priorities of Discipleship.
5. The Proofs of Discipleship.
6. The Prize of Discipleship.
7. The Placement of Discipleship.
8. The Posture of Discipleship.

The Perspective of Discipleship.

First, we want to view discipleship from the perspective of the importance that Jesus placed upon it. Jesus began his ministry in the flesh by **calling disciples** (Mt. 4:17-24), and ended His ministry by commanding these disciples to “go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:19-20). Notice, that He did not tell them to just make converts -- to get people saved, but rather to “make disciples” and to teach them all He had commanded. The Greek word for disciple means a “learner” or “pupil”: one who has placed himself under another to be taught and disciplined by him in a **way of life**. I will say more about this later, but let me make it clear right now, that there is no Scriptural grounds for being a disciple of anyone except Jesus Christ. We are not to be disciples of men.

In Mark's account of the great commission, Jesus is simply quoted as saying. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mark 15). Tragically, **this “gospel” word**, which in the original Greek means “good news” or “glad tidings,” has been limited by the traditions of the churches to just the message of initial salvation. But what “gospel” did Jesus preach? It is repeatedly stated that He preached the “good news” of the **Kingdom** of God (and/or “heaven”) (Mt.4:17, 23, Mark 1:14, Luke 4:43). Surely, the “good news” of the Kingdom of God is more than that there is an “entrance gate” (initial salvation). I cannot go into detail here or document with Scripture, because the subject is too vast. But to summarize briefly: what about the ineffable beauty and glory of the **king** of this Kingdom, whom to know is to **love**, and which, in time, begins to so captivate the “lover” so that only infinite wisdom could possibly comprehend the extent to which that love would **sacrifice** for the King, the interests of the Kingdom, and the ultimate welfare of **all** (or every last one) of its citizens.

But lest we get things out of their proper order, what about the LOVE of the KING (who “beget” His love IN us), and His ULTIMATE, and ABSOLUTE sacrifice on the cross, whereby He bore the full weight of man's sin with incredible suffering, but also sealed an everlasting covenant (He. 13:20-21) which ESTABLISHED His KINGDOM of LOVE (He has no other kingdom, for He accepts only those who are willingly obedient out of love), and also made available to every citizen all the INCREDIBLE BENEFITS OF THAT KINGDOM. And, beloved, ALL of the blessings, rights, privileges, authority, power, purposes, responsibilities, sonship, future destinies, as well as present day provisions--yes, even miracles, whenever necessary. What a glorious “gospel” (good news) of the KINGDOM we have to declare and to be a part of. Let's take a look at what Paul says.

After rebuking the Corinthians for their sectarian preferences for certain preachers, and likely different aspects of truth they were emphasizing, Paul shows the foolishness of such “picking” and “choosing”; for, he declares: “Therefore let no man glory (boast) in men. **For ALL THINGS are yours**; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; ALL are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

A very important distinction needs to be made here, however. As citizens of God's Kingdom, **what is ours legally or positionally, must become ours experientially** (actually become a part of our experience, incorporated into our lives as a “living reality,” so that we can say that we “possess” it). This takes time, and also depends upon the degree of our diligence, and the eagerness of our response to God and the truth of His Word. This is where Discipleship comes in. But before I further develop that theme, I want to illustrate from two other perspectives the difference between positional truth and experiential truth.

Suppose that a young man came from another country to the United States as a **legal immigrant** with a view to becoming a citizen. He rents an apartment in New York and in due time, after completing the requirements, he becomes a citizen of this great country. But because of language barrier (he doesn't put forth the effort to learn English very well), as well as fear of venturing out and a desire to be left alone, other than frequenting the stores to secure the necessities of life, he never goes beyond two or three blocks of his apartment, having secured employment in a store within that area. He spends the rest of his life never experiencing the wonders of the great city of New York, let alone “taking in” the vast “richness” of the beauty and glory of all 50 states of the country that he is now a citizen of, even though he has the “right” and “privilege” to travel where he pleases. Contrast this man with another immigrant becoming a citizen of this country in his youth. But his desire and “drive” is entirely different. He diligently studies the English language, goes to school and gets a good education, which lead to a well paying job. On his weekends and vacations, he travels as much as possible and “takes in” much of his new country. He diligently seeks to please his employer and rapidly advances in his company, making more money, having more time off and traveling to more parts of the country. After accumulating considerable wealth, he is able to retire early and spend many years traveling to virtually every state to enjoy the beauties, wonders and blessings of this great country. But how vastly different is their experience. Potentially, of both it could be said of the vast expanse and “treasures beautiful” of this country: ALL THINGS ARE YOURS. But one is just content to be a citizen and incorporate very little

into his experience. But the other, through a life-time of diligent effort and application takes the potential and turns it into actual experience, vastly “enriching” himself with what this country has to offer.

Now keep in mind the above is only meant to be an illustration. I'm not trying to get you interested in the natural things of this life or nation. But spiritually there is a parallel. **Few Christians have grasped the great spiritual potential that is theirs to claim, “press into” and incorporate into their experience as they grow in their knowledge of Christ and “go deeper” INTO Him in a personal and intimate love relationship. But it will never happen without a commitment to DISCIPLESHIP**, which will become clear as we progress in this study. But let me illustrate further the difference between what is ours positionally (and potentially), because of our citizenship in God's Kingdom, and what can become ours personally (in experience).

After God had brought **Abraham** into the land of Canaan, He said to him: “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou see, to you will I give it, and to thy seed forever” (Gen. 13:14-15). But then God gave Abraham a command as follows: “Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto you”(Gen. 13:17). It was one thing for Abraham to view from a distance the land that God promised as a part of the covenant position which was his. It was quite another thing for him to put **forth the effort to walk throughout that land and make it a part of his personal experience**. After the commandment to “walk through it,” we read in Gen. 13:18: “then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.” As Abram continued to move through the land, every place he went, he built an altar unto the Lord, which speaks to us of a fresh dedication to the will of God. And we need to realize that our personal possession of our FULL “inheritance of Christ” can only become a reality through a daily “ALTAR, experience” (see Ro. 12:1).

Later, when Abraham's seed was ready to actually take possession of the promised land, God reemphasized the same truth as portrayed through Abraham. Speaking to **Joshua**, who was to lead the people in, He said: “go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses” (Josh. 1:2-3; see also Duet. 11:24). Although the land was theirs by covenant right, only that portion which they were willing to go in and take and put their foot upon would become their personal possession. This not only requires time and effort, it required WARFARE against the inhabitants of the land. Although God promised to fight for them and drive out the inhabitants of the land before them, they still had to be willing to “take up the sword” and do battle, so that God could defeat the enemy THROUGH them. He also said that he would not drive out the enemy all at once, but rather He declared: “By little and little, I will drive them out from before you, until thou be increased, and inherit the land”(Ex. 23:30). The lesson for us is that we do not possess our inheritance in Christ all at once, but gradually, as we are willing to take our commitment to Christ seriously and become His disciples, as we shall see later.

This very matter of “**inheritance**” illustrates further positional and experiential truth as we apply it to the Christian who has been born into the family or Kingdom of God. Consider a natural family. Any

child born into that family immediately has certain legal or positional rights (inheritance) just by being in the family. As he grows, he is able to begin to actually experience increased measures of that “inheritance” as he is able to enjoy and benefit from the things his parents provide for him, know and experience their love and care, and as he gradually broadens his scope and number of activities which “enrich” his life. In addition through growth and knowledge, he is required to assume greater responsibilities as a part of enjoying his inheritance. Eventually, along with any other children in the family, he is destined to be a joint-heir of all that his parents have to offer. Actually, from the point of “positional truth,” he is a “joint-heir” the moment he is born into the family; but he will not actually experience the **fullness** of it until time, growth, experience and responsibility have come to pass in his life.

Since the **Jewish customs** of inheritance in Bible days differed somewhat from ours, let me briefly outline the process required of a Jewish boy. When a Jewish boy reached the age of 12 (some say 13), a special religious ceremony was held for him. Through this ceremony, the boy is recognized as beginning his adult life, has reached the age of accountability whereby he becomes accountable for his own actions. At this time he entered the business of his father as an apprentice so that he might learn his life's occupation. At the age of 20, he entered the military service of his country and was subject to call to battle whenever necessary. At the age of 30, having been released from active military duty, the Jewish man reaches the age of full maturity. It is usually in his 30th year that he goes into business for himself, no longer working with his father. And at the age of 40, he should be able to enjoy the fruits of his labors. It was at the age of 30, when it was time for him to launch out on his own, that the father gave him his portion of the family inheritance. It was not at the time of the death of the parents that the inheritance was divided up, as is our custom. We can see this Jewish custom in the story of the “prodigal son” as given in Luke 15:11-32. In vs. 12, one son says: “Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.” And the Father divided his wealth between them. (NAS Bible). At that time the Father obviously did not know what the son was going to do with his portion. He probably thought the son was eager to get started “on his own” to make his living.

It is interesting to note that this practice was followed by the Heavenly Father's dealing with His own Son, Jesus. Jesus did not leave his natural family to “launch out on His own” until He was 30 years old. It was at that time, with the Heavenly Father's approval — “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Mt. 3:17). The portion of the “inheritance” given to him to accomplish the “work” he was to do on the earth was the “Spirit without measure” (John 3:34), leading to the Spirit-powered ministry” (Luke 4:14), which enabled Him to “finish the work” which the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4). When He performed His first miracle at Cana of Galilee, we read that He “manifested forth his glory” (John 2:11). He was not only the Divine Son of the Heavenly Father, but He was also humanity's **FIRST** manifested (unveiled) son,” walking in the pristine glory of restored immortality which was lost by the first man, Adam. This “manifest sonship” was later raised to a higher level when His physical body was **GLORIFIED** (after His death for our sins, and **AT** the time of His resurrection.)

When a Jewish man, at the age of 30, was given his portion of the family inheritance, he became a “joint-heir” with His father, being officially **PLACED** by the father in his **FULL** inheritance. What had been his legally and positionally even at his birth, was now his experientially. But between the two were

years of learning, discipline, growing experiences, and incorporating truth into his life. With this natural illustration in mind, I want to comment on a portion of Paul's writings in Romans, chap. 8, as we consider our spiritual inheritance "in Christ." (Be patient, for all of this preparatory "perspective" will eventually lead us to understand the importance of DISCIPLESHIP). The following is taken from Ro. 8:16-19: "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; IF so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature (all creation) waits for the manifestation of the sons of God."

First, notice that we are "children," which is translated from the Greek word *teknon* (which means "a child"--as produced). This would indicate one spiritually immature--yet, as Paul says, "an heir" (positionally and potentially). But then in the last verse, Paul speaks of the expectation (future) manifestation of the "sons" of God. The Greek word translated "sons" is *huios*, which is usually used to denote a matured son. And such, Paul says, are to be "manifested" (unveiled or revealed). This "manifestation" would correspond in our illustration of the Jewish custom when the age of 30 had been reached and the Father was ready to "reveal" to his friends and neighbors, and other family members, that a certain son was ready to assume the status of full manhood, receive his portion of the family inheritance, and be officially "placed" in the presence of those called to witness the occasion in the position of a full "joint-heir" in the family.

But take note that Paul places a qualification between being "children" and "manifested sons": he says, "IF so be that we SUFFER WITH HIM (Christ)". The word "suffer" is a translation of the Greek word *sumpascho*. The "sum" part is a preposition which denotes "union"— "together with" (in association or companionship), and can also connote the idea of "Completeness." The rest of the word means to "experience a sensation or impression" (sometimes painful). It is the same word that is used of Jesus in He. 5:9, where it says that He "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." The English word "suffer," as we use it today conveys a too "narrow" and "specific" meaning to give us the full meaning of the Greek word, which simply indicates any or all of the impressions or sensations (mental, emotional or physical) which make up an experience or all experiences of life. This is one of the drawbacks of using the King James Version, which was translated in 1611 A.D. In any "living language," over a period of time, words tend to change their meaning. However, the Greek word does convey the idea that these experiences can be painful; thus implying "suffering" (either to the "inner man" of the heart, or to the physical body). It's like a child growing up who must go through many experiences to come to maturity. For various reasons (which you can obviously figure out), some of those experiences are going to be painful and involve some suffering.

With the above explanation, go back and read again the passage from Ro. 8:16-19, and I believe you will better understand the qualification stated by Paul for those who aspire to be among the manifested sons who will be "glorified together" with Christ to "reign" with Him, namely: "IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM" (8:17). Just as Jesus placed Himself under the instruction and discipline of the Father, that He might learn to be obedient in every situation and experience to the Father's will, so must we place ourselves under the instruction and discipline of Christ for the same

reason. This is the essence of DISCIPLESHIP as we shall see. Another pertinent scripture is found in He. 2:10 where we read: "For it became him (Jesus), for whom are all things, and by whom are all things in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The Greek word translated "sufferings" here is *pathema*; it is slightly different than the other word we were discussing, but is similar and can be traced back to the same root: it means "something undergone (possibly a hardship or pain; or an emotion or influence). But again, we are dealing with the varied experiences of life. The Greek word translated "perfect" in this passage is *telos*, and indicates the reaching of a set goal, and can thus be variously translated "complete," "finish," "conclusion," "mature," "perfect"--as indicating the "ultimate" arrived at. If you will read the rest of He., chap. 2, you will see that Jesus was, through the experiences of this life, being prepared for that ultimate "role" He was to fulfill as a "merciful and faithful HIGH PRIEST"...for in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (He. 2:17-18). But, remember, that as a KING-PRIEST ("High Priest"), He is not to fulfill this "role" or "function" ALONE in the coming Kingdom. There are those who are going to rule as "kings" and "priests" WITH Him (Rev. 1:6, 5:10). That is why He. 2:10 says that He must "bring many sons to glory" (the same glory that He has.) Notice that it is sons (*huios*), that He will bring to glory; not "children" (*teknon*).

There is one other word that I must bring to your attention before going to Jesus specific teaching on Discipleship. It is the Greek word *hiothesia*, translated several times in the King James Version as '**adoption**.' The Greek word means "the placing as a son." It has nothing to do with "adoption" as we use that English word in our day. According to the Scriptures, we are "born" into the family and kingdom of God; not "adopted." John 3:3-7 & 1 Pet. 1:23. The problem comes from not understanding Jewish customs. The "*thesia*" part of that Greek word comes from another Greek derivation which can mean to "appoint," "commit" or "ordain," "give," or "set forth." We are dealing here again with that specific time when the son of a Jewish father reaches the point in his life (around the age of 30), when the Father, usually in a special ceremony, "appoints" to that son his portion of the family estate or inheritance, and "places" him in the position of a FULL joint-heir in the family. With this understanding, then Ro. 8:23 makes sense: "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Notice that this "placing as a son" is something that we are "waiting" for; and it comes only when it is time for the "redemption" (and glorification) of the physical body. Then the "joint-heirship" with Christ will become a reality in the experience of those who qualify. I will not take time to deal with the other passages where this Greek word *hiothesia* appears.

Just one more remark. I am sure that when Paul uses the expression "we," he was not thinking of anyone less than a born-again, spirit-baptized, sanctified, cleansed, maturing and "overcoming" Christian--namely the 100-fold category. I believe I can prove this by other references in Paul's writings, but that is beyond our scope in this particular study. Great confusion comes from not recognizing the different categories of Christians, and our foundation for this is provided in the teachings of Jesus, although I believe such are alluded to in Paul's writings IF we first get the right understanding from Jesus' teachings. Great confusion has also come from trying to build foundational doctrine from the writings of Paul. The foundation must come from the very words of Jesus. Writings beyond that provide amplification and additional insight.

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