



*The Cost of
Discipleship*

Louis Rushmore

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Table of Contents

PREFACE	4
CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP.....	5
CHAPTER 2: FORMULA OF DISCIPLESHIP	10
CHAPTER 3: TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST #1	16
CHAPTER 4: TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST #2	26
CHAPTER 5: ACTS AND THE EPISTLES #1.....	30
CHAPTER 6: ACTS AND THE EPISTLES #2.....	37
CHAPTER 7: THE EARLY CHURCH	43
CHAPTER 8: LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT	50
CHAPTER 9: BLESSINGS OF DISCIPLESHIP	58
CHAPTER 10: SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY.....	65
CHAPTER 11: CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING DISCIPLESHIP	72
CHAPTER 12: MILITANT DISCIPLESHIP.....	81
CHAPTER 13: THE VALUE OF A SOUL.....	86
WORKS CITED	93
GOD’S REDEMPTIVE PLAN.....	94
ADDITIONAL LITERATURE.....	95
MAGAZINES.....	96

Preface

The Cost of Discipleship was formerly published by Quality Publications of Abilene, Texas. It appeared as a paperback and has been out of print now for some time. However, orders for *The Cost of Discipleship* kept coming. Finally, orders could no longer be filled even from copies that I reserved for personal use. The print run was exhausted. Only one uncirculated copy remains in my possession. Subsequently over the years, I made *The Cost of Discipleship* available in various forms. Happily, once more it is available in paperback.

The Cost of Discipleship is a motivational study. I am personally uplifted again each time I prepare to teach this material. It is my sincere desire that all who use *The Cost of Discipleship* will be incited to a greater enthusiasm and commitment for daily discipleship. This is my hope and would be to me a more satisfactory remuneration for my efforts than mere money can provide.

As before, I certainly owe acknowledgments to others as well. I am mindful of the congregation in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia with which I labored when these lessons were first written and used. Some brethren there were especially encouraging toward this end. Other brethren before and after those years have contributed, at least indirectly, to this and my other literary efforts.

Finally, I hope that everyone who studies this volume will more enthusiastically march along the pilgrim pathway toward the heavenly horizon. In addition to our own determination to make our way relentlessly toward the city whose Builder and Maker is God, let each of us resolve to reach down into the ditches of sin on either side of the pilgrim way to rescue someone who then will trudge alongside of us heavenward. Furthermore, if we observe a Christian who has stumbled, please help him to his feet rather than to step over or on him as we go onward; someday, it may be you or me who needs such a helping hand and encouragement. **Let's go to Heaven together and take as many with us as we can persuade with the Gospel!**

Louis Rushmore

Chapter 1: Definition of Discipleship

(Luke 14:25-35)

Disciple Defined

Both English and Greek definitions for “disciple” lend insight to the meaning and proper application of Christian discipleship. According to *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, “disciple” means, “One who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another” (237). Two other sources further define the word thus: “A follower of a particular teacher: an adherent of the principles of some leader of thought” (*Living Webster* 284) and “One who professes to have learned certain principles from another and maintains them on that other’s authority” (M’Clintock 815). Greek definitions of disciple include, “to learn, be taught, to learn by practice or experience, acquire a custom or habit” (*Analytical Greek* 257) and “to learn, to understand, to know, to be informed, to comprehend” (Berry 62).

“Disciple(s)” appears in the Old Testament once (Isaiah 8:16) and about 221 times in the New Testament. A biblical portrait of a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ is depicted by Scripture to include adherence to the Lord’s teaching and practicing the same until it becomes a daily habit. To be a disciple of Christ is to understand and to be informed of His divine will in order to present one’s body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2) and to disciple the nations (Matthew 28:19 ASV). True discipleship is maintained only by the divine authority of Christ (John 8:31) and not by the authority of men (Matthew 15:9). Furthermore, effective disciples of the Lord are fruitful workers (Matthew 7:15-20; John 15:1-8) and good stewards (Matthew 25:14-30), who have anticipated and acknowledged the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-35).

Cost Defined

“Cost” is also variously defined: (1) “That which must be given to acquire, produce, accomplish or maintain anything” (*Living Webster* 230), (2) “The outlay or expenditure (as of effort or sacrifice) made to achieve an object. Loss or penalty incurred in gaining something. To stand firm, constant. To require effort, suffering or loss” (*Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* 189) and (3) “To devour, hence expense, as something which eats up resources” (Vincent 381). “Cost” appears in the New Testament once (Luke 14:28).

Discussion

The Cost of Discipleship by definition intimates a fuller, deeper meaning than one might expect from a casual or a passing consideration of the same. That many Christians never carefully examine the ramifications of faithful discipleship is self-evident from the absence of fruitful activity among large numbers of our brethren. It is commonly estimated that about 25% of any congregation are the most upon whom the church and the Lord can rely for both financial support and physical activity in the work of the church. Excepting those who may lack either financial or physical capacity to do otherwise, many brethren assemble regularly but do not even take any active role in the worship services. They do not attend the business meetings; they have no time for Christian activities such as taking food to the needy or distributing Gospel literature. Many are the Christians who neither lend themselves to the church to teach nor even vocally participate in a Bible class or work around the church house. Unfortunately, some brethren are unaware of the difference in definition between deadwood and discipleship. Contrary to the condition of many brethren, **there will be no driftwood in Heaven!**

Generally, the word “disciple” could be applied to the follower of any man or doctrine. Hence, disciples of Karl Marx are styled communists; disciples of Darwin are called evolutionists; and disciples of Jesus Christ are Christians (only). Disciples of denominationalism, though, **are not** Christians. They follow (or are disciples of) human doctrines, methods and men. Therefore, they are Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, etc. There are hundreds of

different denominational bodies and thousands of contrasting religious faiths in America alone. Denominations are not only different from each other, but every denomination is different from the Christianity about which one can read upon the pages of the New Testament. **Ask of one's religious affiliation and his response will most often show of what or whom he is a disciple.**

Christian discipleship is **not without its cost**. *The cost of discipleship* mandates the investment of effort, labor, money and time in the service of our Lord and Savior. This is most easily and properly accomplished when Christians first give themselves fully to the Lord as the Macedonians did (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Further, one is not a fruitful disciple who professes discipleship without actively assisting in the spreading of the teaching of Christ (Mark 16:15; Acts 8:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). True discipleship is maintained by faithful service (1 Corinthians 15:58) and is governed by the authority of Christ alone (John 8:31). It should be a habitual part of life and must be practiced (Luke 6:46). Discipleship does not simply happen, but it is learned (Hebrews 5:12-6:2; 1 Peter 2:2). The basis upon which Christian discipleship rests and is built must be an intense familiarity with the Christ and His Word. This familiarity occurs as the calculated result of earnest study of the Bible (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15) and imitation of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1 ASV; 1 Peter 2:21).

Fanaticism, however, is the consequence of excessive zeal that overshadows the authority of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18 ASV), the apostles (Matthew 18:18; 19:28) and the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Cultic tendencies, for instance, even within our fellowship, constitute extremism that has gone beyond divine authority. Whenever and for whatever reason men go beyond the authority of the Bible in their teachings, it is both sinful and displeasing to the Lord (Matthew 15:9).

On the other hand, the zeal with which first-century Christians practiced their discipleship would be today, if it was not then, considered extreme or fanatical. It is this zeal, though, that the early Christians demonstrated which is the object and recommendation of this current study.

“Disciple,” though employed in both testaments referring to God's people, is in the New Testament equivalent to “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), which itself is the fulfillment of

Old Testament prophecy in which a new name for God's people was promised (Isaiah 62:2).

Disciples of Christ or Christians, however, may faithfully serve Jesus Christ or err (sin). An erring disciple or Christian may be guilty of sin through either commission of wrong or the omission of doing what is right (James 4:17). The more overlooked sin among us is probably that of omission, the **dilution of our discipleship** (James 1:22). The apathy and indifference, which for many brethren has replaced dedicated discipleship, is the sin for which the Laodicean church was condemned (Revelation 3:15-16). Probably more of the church in this generation will be lost, not for overt commission of sin, but for omissions in Christian duty and **careless discipleship**.

Individual, self-examination of personal discipleship now (2 Corinthians 13:5) can save souls from the perils of an individual, divine examination (judgment) in which unprofitable disciples will be cast into hell (Matthew 25:30, 41, 46). The lessons herein are dedicated to the hope that readers will make the appropriate self-examination and ensure that they do not enter into eternity with a deficient or **defective discipleship**.

Thought Questions

1. Considering the definitions of "cost" and "disciple," describe the characteristics that you would expect true and faithful disciples to possess who were active in any organization.
2. If the organization cited above were to call an assembly, describe the probable differences between the following people in that audience: disciples, members at large, former members, visitors, curiosity seekers and reporters.
3. Of those in attendance at the above assembly, on which ones could the organization rely for financial and active support of its causes? From which group(s) might that organization be able to gain only moral support? Which group(s) probably would have no or little interest in serving the interests of the organization?
4. What were some of the costs of discipleship incurred upon Christians of the first century (Matthew 10:17, 21-22; Acts 7:58-60; 12:1-2; 16:23; 22:4; Revelation 17:6)? What were some of the costs of discipleship incurred upon Christians in the Restoration Movement?

5. What are some of the costs of discipleship that Christians today may incur from outside the church? Also, list some of the costs (responsibilities) that disciples or Christians incur as members of the church (2 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; James 1:27; Luke 24:47).
6. What basic ingredient of discipleship if lacking results in either a deficient discipleship or extremism (Matthew 28:18-20 ASV; Mark 1:27; John 8:31)?
7. Of what real value is the discipleship of one who professes discipleship, but has neither the willingness to invest his money and time nor primary interest in that of which or of whom he professes to be a disciple? Name some of the things that, if we allow them, have a tendency to interfere with Christian discipleship (1 Corinthians 7:32-34; Matthew 6:24, 31-33; Luke 14:26-27).
8. Who ultimately will determine the usefulness of our discipleship (Matthew 25:23, 31, 34, 41), and what alternatives do Christians have to waiting for the final judgment (2 Corinthians 13:5)? When is it no longer necessary for disciples to practice discipleship (2 Peter 3:11-15; Revelation 2:10)?
9. What does Christian discipleship promote, and what are some of the things against which it is opposed (Romans 6:16-18; Galatians 5:19-23)?
10. Where does the authority on which true discipleship is based reside? Does it reside in the church, in its leaders or in some other source (Matthew 28:18 ASV; 18:18; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 4:11)? Compare your answer with popular beliefs about authority held by the religious community.

Chapter 2:

Formula of Discipleship

(Romans 1:16)

Why Become a Disciple of Jesus Christ?

Without exception, all men are sinners (Romans 3:9-10; 3:23; 1 John 1:8). Sin constitutes a barrier between man and God (Isaiah 59:1-2), the consequence of which is spiritual death or eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). To remove the barrier of sin from between man and God, Christ died upon Calvary's cross even while man remained in the pleasures of sin (Romans 5:8). Not only did Christ come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10), but only through the blood of Christ can man be saved (Romans 5:9). Jesus Christ alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). The words of Christ will judge all men (John 12:48). Those who love Jesus Christ will keep His words or commandments (John 14:15, 21). Jesus is also the Author of eternal salvation to all them that **obey** Him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Sufficient are these considerations to cause thoughtful men to desire to become disciples of Christ. The application of the Lord's blood to the souls of sinful men is the only means through which the barrier of sin between men and God can be removed. Without coming in contact with the blood of Jesus Christ one can neither be saved nor be a disciple of Jesus Christ. One who remains outside the blood of the Lord chooses for himself an eternity away from the presence of God.

Definition of Formula

"Formula" means, "A set form of words for use in a ceremony or ritual; a conventionalized statement intended to express some fundamental truth or principle; recipe or prescription" (*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* 329) or "A prescribed form or method; a written confession of faith or doctrine" (*Living Webster* 384). These

definitions variously apply to discipleship both as it should be and as men have sometimes fashioned it.

Formula of Discipleship

When asked, “What must I do to be saved?” we may recite a formula or a plan of discipleship consisting of five steps without ensuring that the prospect fully understands the divine plan he is prompted to accept. Lack of thorough teaching and understanding results in weak and unfaithful disciples. However, it is readily granted that a prospect for discipleship need not know all the counsel of God to be converted (Acts 8:26-39; 20:27). Further, it is acknowledged that new disciples are babes in Christ and thereby weak (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2).

The five steps to discipleship or salvation are: (1) hearing the Word of God exclusively (Romans 10:17), (2) a resulting Bible faith (Mark 16:16), (3) repentance (Luke 13:3), (4) confession of Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9-10) and (5) baptism (immersion) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Would a mere outward observance of these make one a Christian? A disciple? Saved?

Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life, which when taught will produce faith—the foundation upon which the whole of Christianity is based (Hebrews 11:6). Faith involves belief in the divine Son of God and all that He has commanded man to do. How is faith produced? “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Repentance is produced by and is a direct result of faith. To repent is to turn from the practice of sin because of godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) and toward the performance of righteousness or the bringing forth of “fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Repentance is not merely feeling sorry for sins; Judas did this much but hanged himself instead of repenting. Repentance is a change of heart to do righteousness (God prescribed rightness) by which one’s conduct is also ultimately amended accordingly.

Confession of Christ indicates the willingness to become His disciple and to obey Him in whatever He commands. Additionally, confessing Christ is the same as accepting the cost of discipleship regardless of the pain or sacrifice required, even death (Revelation 2:10). Romans 10:9 represents the initial confession unto salvation

that must be characteristic of the remainder of our lives (Matthew 10:32) to maintain discipleship. The failure to do the will of Christ is to deny Jesus Christ and to make void any confession of Him previously made (Matthew 10:33; Luke 6:46).

Baptism is the point at which sins are washed away (Acts 22:16) through contact with the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7) and the time at which an alien sinner is saved (1 Peter 3:21). When baptism is reduced to a mere formality by which one can enter or **join** a church, it becomes void of salvation and as impotent toward salvation as a bath. As repentance and confession are outgrowths of faith, so is baptism. A failure to be baptized is a failure to believe (Mark 16:16) and a failure to attain the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Hearing the Word of God, believing, repenting and confessing Christ are all in vain unless they lead one to be baptized or born again (John 3:3). Man cannot legitimately hope to see Heaven without being born again.

Mere Formula Deficient

Although there is a divine formula that when observed will result in salvation, a formula **alone**, regardless of how divine in origin, will not save man. Recitation of a formula absent of conviction, dedication and verity will not result in true discipleship. God has not discounted His scheme of redemption nor dare mere mortals cheapen the cost of discipleship.

When the God-given plan of salvation is made nothing more than a ritual or a ceremony void of understanding and meaning, it can be no more acceptable to God than pagan and heathen rites. Israel offered feasts and sacrifices that God ordained, but because the outward form did not reflect the hearts of the people, they were rejected (Amos 5:21-27).

The recipe for salvation is deficient when it is missing any of the ingredients or when it is not followed absolutely. In addition to the five steps commonly cited, there are several other elements to which the Bible attributes saving power. Either each of these various elements works together for the salvation of souls or the Bible contradicts itself and is false. The Bible is inspired of God, infallible and true. Therefore, we know assuredly that God's recipe for salvation includes all the ingredients to which He has through His

Word said will save sinful men. The following items illustrate that there are several things by which souls are saved and that both Deity and man participate in the salvation of souls.

God's Part

Love (John 3:16)
Grace (Ephesians 2:8)
Mercy (Titus 3:5)
Gospel (Romans 1:16)

Christ's Part

The Blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)
Our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)

Man's Part

Bible Faith (John 8:24)
Repentance (Acts 17:30)
Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)
Obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9)
Purity (Revelation 22:14)
Faithfulness (Revelation 2:10)
Love (1 John 2:10)
Hope (Romans 8:24)
Works (James 2:24)
Endurance (Matthew 10:22)
Confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10)
Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)
Laying Aside Evil (James 1:21)
Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21)
Calling on the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:14)
Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)

These represent the formula and the cost of discipleship, and they constitute the recipe to acquire and to maintain true discipleship. There are no shortcuts by which one can attain or

maintain discipleship. Each aspect of the plan of salvation must be taught, learned, believed and lived continually. Salvation is not attributed to any formula or equation apart from the complete adoption of God's will for us. Men are to direct their entire lives by His divine will. God's plan for saving man is not a magical incantation that when spoken mystically turns one into a Christian. Instead, His plan demands of men **a different way of life** that is only characteristic of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thought Questions

1. What are the alternatives (now and eternally) to becoming a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ? Name some of the blessings inherent in discipleship of Christ.
2. Is there a way(s) by which men can decline discipleship and yet avoid the consequences of not becoming disciples of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Matthew 12:30)? Fully explain your answer and support it with Scripture.
3. Is there a definite recipe or formula (pattern) in the Bible for becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are there several different but biblically valid patterns for discipleship within God's Word? Does it matter what one believes and does concerning the salvation of his soul?
4. List some of the divinely prescribed ingredients to which God's Word has ascribed saving power. Be sure to note other elements that possess saving capacity besides the five steps of salvation commonly cited. You may be able to improve upon and expand the list provided in this chapter.
5. What would lead a Bible student to conclude that God is not only interested in ritual and an outward observance of his divine will?
6. In what way(s) could one appear to observe man's part in God's scheme of redemption and still be lost? Are all immersed persons necessarily saved? Who is a fit candidate for baptism?
7. What relationship do repentance, confessing Christ and baptism have to a Bible faith? Of what could one repent if he had no faith (or conviction) in the Gospel? Further, what would one confess or for what purpose would he be baptized without faith?
8. Define repentance and tell in what order it must occur. What is repentance not? Give biblical examples of penitence (Acts 19:18-20) and impenitence (Matthew 14:3-12).

9. How seriously should prospective disciples view their obedience to the Gospel? Will the way in which one perceives of his obedience to the Gospel plan likely affect his estimation of the cost of discipleship? How valuable of a disciple to the Lord is one likely to be if he or she fails to fully realize the significance of believing, repenting, confessing Christ and being baptized?
10. When should the cost of discipleship be impressed upon a soul? Is it reasonable to withhold from prospects knowledge about the cost of discipleship, reserving such information for him as a babe in Christ? Fully explain your answer (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 14:25-35).

Chapter 3:

Teachings of Jesus Christ #1

(1 Peter 2:21)

The Authority of Jesus Christ

“For this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus possesses the authority by which both His teaching and His example justly compel humanity to pay *the cost of discipleship*. Since our Lord, the bearer of the Gospel (John 1:17) and the central theme of the same (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), is the second person of the Godhead, those who refuse or neglect to obey His Gospel must suffer eternal doom (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). If Christ possessed no authority, He could neither bless the faithful according to His Gospel nor punish the unfaithful and sinners by the same Gospel.

Ultimately, all authority resides in God. God, however, has delegated to Christ “all authority” (Matthew 28:18; John 5:27), and has made Him to be “head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23). Consequently, Jesus Christ spoke as one who had authority (Matthew 7:28-29), and salvation is dependent on obedience to the words of Christ (Hebrews 5:8-9; John 12:48). Also, Jesus as the Master and Great Teacher has paid the highest possible cost on the cross of Calvary, a greater cost than any disciple could possibly pay. More than suffering agony and death, Jesus bore the weight and the anguish of the sins of the whole world (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1; Hebrews 9:28). Therefore, Jesus Christ is from every consideration well qualified to speak about *the cost of discipleship*. Faithful souls can do neither more nor less than keep the commandments of the Lord; this is our duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13) and love’s proper response (John 14:15, 21, 23).

Matthew 10:16-39

Exposition and Application

These verses are the words spoken by Christ primarily to His disciples who were present with Him then and who were sent on what is usually called the *Limited Commission*. Though some items found in this discourse were strictly limited to the disciples of the New Testament miraculous period, much of the same address applies to Christ's modern day disciples as well. Incidentally, our Lord warned His disciples about *the cost of discipleship* **before** their appointment to the duties described within this context.

Verse Sixteen: "Sheep" is a metaphor revealing the nature of the disciples of Christ in contrast to the world in which they must live, serve, suffer and die. Sheep are inoffensive, harmless, helpless, unarmed and defenseless. The term "wolves" depicts the nature of the world into which the disciples were sent. The world is unfriendly, cold, cruel to and abusive of the disciples of Christ. A wolf in the midst of a flock of sheep is tragic, but sheep in the midst of wolves is sure and utter devastation. Disciples of the Lord are not of the world, but they live in and are sent to preach to the world (John 17:14-18; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). The word "serpents," as here applied to the disciples, represents the cunning and wisdom that the servants of the Lord are called upon to use in a world that is opposed to its own best spiritual interest and often cruel to those who are sent to proclaim the Gospel. The figurative application of "doves" suggests the innocence that must characterize the Lord's disciples.

Jesus Christ made His disciples aware of *the cost of discipleship* ahead of the time in which the projected sufferings occurred. He called upon them to embrace constant labors, though in the face of often fierce adversity. Had the Limited Commission been enacted within the midst of Judaism instead of at the heels and decline of the Jewish economy, the disciples would have doubtless been instructed to: (1) annihilate the "wolves" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) or (2) announce impending physical destruction upon spiteful hearers of the Word of God (Jonah 3:1-4). The church, then soon to be inaugurated, marked a change in the nature of the kingdom of God in which it no longer defended itself and spread the Word of God through carnal warfare (Isaiah 2:1-3; Micah 5:1-3). The disciples of the Lord today do not engage in carnal conflicts for the cause of

Christ (John 18:36), but use spiritual weapons instead (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4) to fight a just as fierce spiritual war (1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 4:7). The soldiers of Satan, though, use both spiritual and carnal weapons against the disciples of the Lord, for which cause exhortations to persevere in spite of physical abuse or death dot the New Testament (Matthew 10:28; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:16; Revelation 2:10).

Verse Seventeen: The “councils” here probably refer first to the great Sanhedrin and then to any judicial tribunal of any village. To “scourge” one meant to whip him with a device made of three leather thongs (sometimes with metal and glass attached thereto) on the end of a rod. Customarily, the criminal was compelled to lie face down upon the ground to receive 13 blows to equal 39 stripes. “Synagogues” were not only places of Jewish worship but were equally noted for the exercise of the Jewish courts of justice. The appearance of “synagogues” also identifies the source of the anticipated opposition to the Limited Commission as Jewish. Besides any fulfillment that may have occurred under the Limited Commission, this verse was further fulfilled later when the apostles and other brethren continued to preach the Gospel (Acts 5:17-18, 21, 26-40; 6:9-7:60; 22:19-20; 26:11-12). Since then, especially in the Reformation and Restoration periods, those who would turn the hearts of people to the Word of God were relentlessly persecuted and sometimes killed. Often, the persecutions and executions were performed by religious people in the name of God!

Verses Eighteen through Twenty: Clearly, these verses teach that the early disciples enjoyed the promise of divine inspiration. However, upon the completion of the written revelations from God, miraculous powers, including divine inspiration, ceased. Partial inspiration was replaced with perfect (or complete), written revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-14). Throughout this context the Lord continued to warn the disciples about the impending peril that they would face as His servants.

Verse Twenty-One: Kinsfolk are no barrier by which the disciples of Christ are shielded from the persecutions and death inflicted by the ungodly forces of darkness. Often soldiers of Satan’s kingdom are found even within the families of the saints, whereby family members have actively participated in the persecution and murder of their close kin. Christians were tortured to death in a

variety of ways in the first few centuries. They were crucified, thrown in boiling oil, burned at stakes, roasted slowly over coals, made to drink melted lead and covered with pitch and set on fire, to name a few examples (Fox 5ff). Torture employed against Christians was more frightening than the thought of death alone. Hence, many disciples were led to renounce Christ in the hope of preserving their lives and avoiding torture.

Verse Twenty-Two: The expression “of all men” indicates that opposition to the Gospel would arise from all classes of men, not that “all men” without exception would or even now do have disdain for the Word of the Lord. God’s people have always been and doubtless always will comprise a minority of humanity (Matthew 7:14-15). Therefore, persecution of the Lord’s disciples has always been fierce, but it was most intense anciently. In spite of the intensity or the degree to which Christians are afflicted for the cause of Christ, endurance is the only faithful course. Whether life is long or short, pleasant or filled with persecution, the Christian duty is simply to be faithful unto death (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Revelation 2:10).

Persecutions persist in the 21st century and range from moderate to very severe. Even rejection and hurting our feelings is a form of persecution when it occurs simply because we are Christians. Or, one’s job application or promotion may be denied because one is a practicing Christian. Judicial judgments—involving significant monetary penalties and the loss of one’s business and personal property—unfairly target people because of their Christian beliefs even in western countries that otherwise claim to be tolerant.

Nations that have state religions especially persecute practitioners of Christianity. Members of the churches of Christ are in prison or are facing tribunals with the likelihood of execution in store for them at the time of this writing. Governments as well as mobs routinely hinder, harm or kill Bible believers among nations primarily populated with Muslims, Hindus or Communists. Indeed, *the cost of discipleship* in our day is much higher for some children of God than it is for others. Nevertheless, we must persevere.

Verse Twenty-Three: The disciples of the Lord are not to be martyrs voluntarily or to bring unnecessary persecutions upon themselves. The instruction is to flee if such can be done without denying the Lord. If necessary, disciples are called upon to die for

the Lord. However, to unnecessarily make trouble for one's self or to lose one's life willingly beyond the call of duty is out of place and out of harmony with the Scriptures.

Verses Twenty-Four and Twenty-Five: The disciples of Christ should expect to receive the same treatment from the world that Jesus Christ received (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 3:17-18). Knowing beforehand that persecutions will come to the children of God, Christians should predetermine to pay *the cost of discipleship*. Christians should neither be surprised nor offended at the lot of adversity that may befall them for the cause of Christ. "Beelzebub" means "the prince of devils" and indicates that the enemies of righteousness will resort to defamation of character in addition to their other means of persecution. If the world made of the only Perfect Man, the Christ, an evil person, why should the disciples of the Master expect to receive more favorable treatment?

Verse Twenty-Six: Though the innocence and the purity of Christ's disciples may not be apparent and may be overshadowed by the deception of wicked men, God knows His faithful children. God is not fooled as are men. Evil often endeavors to make good appear evil and then musters persecution against the good that has been maligned as evil. This is precisely what occurred regarding Christ and His crucifixion. The religious leaders of that day maligned the sinless Son of God as a villain and incited the people against Him. So, Jesus was crucified and a robber was set free. The Jews called good evil and called evil good (Isaiah 5:20).

In our context, Jesus counseled, "Fear them not." Why fear? The disciples could not possibly suffer more than the Master was about to suffer at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. These faithful disciples, appropriately forewarned, were already prepared to suffer to the same extent, if necessary. There is no place for cowards in the Lord's army. The soldiers of Christ volunteer and know well the perils that accompany their gallant fight.

Verse Twenty-Seven: The private and personal teachings of Jesus that the disciples had received they were to proclaim publicly. This message would be the reason for which the world would and has often reacted against the disciples of Christ. What they then and later were to proclaim had been kept silent from times eternal (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9), but in "due times" was to be

broadcast universally (Ephesians 3:5, 9; Colossians 1:26-27; Titus 1:1-3).

Verse Twenty-Eight: The death of the body is a small matter compared to the death of the soul. The death of the body is merely the separation of the soul and body (James 2:26), whereas the death of the soul, spiritual death (Romans 6:23), is the eternal separation of the soul from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Therefore, if the body of a saint should be abused to the extent that he dies, his soul is only separated from his body. However, if to preserve himself from death or torture, the saint renounces the Lord, the spiritual consequences are far greater than the death and torture that men may inflict. (See comments on verse twenty-six.)

Verses Twenty-Nine through Thirty-One: The disciples of Christ cannot be persecuted or killed without God knowing it. Surely, God cares for and will not forget His faithful disciples.

Verses Thirty-Two and Thirty-Three: To “confess” Christ before men can be accomplished in two ways, (1) orally and (2) through one’s conduct. Several oral confessions and at least one allusion to another can be found in the New Testament (Matthew 16:16; Acts 8:37; 9:6; 1 Timothy 6:12). Non-verbal confessions or professions of Christ are especially discernible when Christians are willing to suffer or even to die if necessary for the cause of Christ (1 Peter 3:14; 4:16; Revelation 2:10; Acts 6:9-7:60).

Confessing Christ is a necessary consequence of hearing God’s Word (exclusively) and repenting. Confessing Christ is to publicly acknowledge dependence on the Lord for salvation and to announce to the world that henceforth one’s heart and life will be regulated by divine precepts. Confessing Christ, whether done orally or by one’s conduct, also expresses the intention to endure whatever may prove to be the consequences of worldly spite, to enjoy heavenly blessings, both now and for eternity. The “good profession” (1 Timothy 6:12) is the public exhibition of the heart’s avowal to follow the Master.

Incidentally, the “confession” addressed in this context is neither limited to a verbal expression nor limited to one’s initial obedience to the Gospel. By words and conduct Christians should continually “confess” Christ before men. If we confess Christ before men, Jesus Christ, our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6), will confess or acknowledge his followers before God the Father in heaven.

The denial of Christ referred to in verse 33 can occur in any of at least three ways: (1) orally, (2) by works or conduct (Titus 1:16) and (3) silence. Titus 1:16, pertaining to denying Christ, further shows that confessing Christ is not limited to word only. One reason for which some may deny Christ is being ashamed of Christ, too ashamed to defend Him before peers or have others know they profess to be Christians. If a man is ashamed of Christ, Jesus will be ashamed of him. Denial of the Lord's rightful place in one's life demonstrates an unwillingness to completely surrender self to the Master.

Verses Thirty-Four through Thirty-Six: It is paradoxical that the ministry and mission of the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), through whom His disciples "might have peace" (John 16:33), should result in any void of peace. It is not by divine purpose that "sword" and "variance" should exist instead of "peace" within the families of the Lord's disciples. The variance and strife here addressed is the result of the entrance of the Gospel into the world. The 3,000 of Acts Two depict heavenly peace that may result, whereas in Acts Six and Seven the other possible response is demonstrated in reaction to the preaching of Stephen. The explanation of the strife instead of peace about which Matthew 10:34-36 teaches is two-fold: (1) The disciples of Christ, though necessarily in the world, are no longer of the world (John 17:14-16) and (2) Others, inclusive of many family members, are still of the world.

The conflict between good and evil begins in every heart. Consequently, the Gospel often has the effect of dividing families through the center, separating true disciples of Christ from Satan's children. Many Christians whose parents and siblings are not members of the Lord's church have experienced great family turmoil, and therefore, they do not need any enlightenment about these verses.

When the righteous go forth into a corrupt and ungodly world, the great spiritual war rages (1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Peter 2:11). God and the devil are at war with each other, in which war each respectively commands his armies, and which armies are enlisted from the pool of all humanity and angelic hosts. Neither God nor Satan conscript or draft souls into their armies. Doing nothing is itself an involuntary choice to serve Satan (Matthew

12:30.) This spiritual war is conducted within families, neighborhoods, communities, nations and among all mankind. Often, no greater opposition to one's discipleship can be found outside his family! Naturally, this has proved to be distressing and an occasion for great sadness among many faithful disciples. *The cost of discipleship* truly appears greater for some than for others.

Verse Thirty-Seven: Christ demands that His disciples have no affection for anyone or anything that exceeds our love and devotion to Him. To love Christ supremely is the only correct response to His demonstration of the highest form of love toward us (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:19). Therefore, disciples must seek the kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:33) and refrain from attempting to divide their affections between "masters" (Matthew 6:24).

Love is inseparably tied to obedience (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). Hence, if disciples of Christ love the Lord foremost, to Him, therefore, they will turn first for guidance. Jesus Christ has more authority than the most well-meaning parent, peer or council of men. Concerning things religious and for instruction in Christian living and service, Christians must turn foremost to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Faithfulness to Christ, however, does not dispense with parental authority (Ephesians 6:1) or the civil law under which we live (Romans 13:1-7), except in instances in which such may conflict with the higher law of God (Acts 5:29).

Verse Thirty-Eight: Jesus was compelled to carry His cross to the hill of Calvary where He was later crucified. The disciples of our Lord are called upon to carry their own, though not literal, crosses. The bearing of his own cross by any disciple is the assumption of the duties of a faithful disciple and the acknowledgment that the world may inflict penalties upon him similarly as it did upon our Lord. The cross of discipleship can only be borne willingly; it is not forced upon anyone. Incidentally, the cross that each is called upon to bear is not sickness or anything else that is neither connected with our duty as Christians nor imposed upon us because of our faithfulness.

Jesus Christ is worthy of our imitation (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). Further, He is our example (1 Peter 2:21) and the One Who should be followed. Remember, no one is called upon to carry the cross of Christ; that He did for Himself. Each disciple is called upon to carry his own cross. The idea of carrying *personal crosses* implies

the idea of *the cost of discipleship*. This cost must be borne by each faithful disciple.

Verse Thirty-Nine: He who is willing to risk or dedicate his physical life for Jesus will preserve his spiritual life or soul. The faithful disciple must submerge his life and his will in Christ's will. He must give his life without reservation to the pursuit of God's will (Galatians 2:20). He who at the expense of duty and faithfulness saves his life will lose his soul. Disciples of the Lord must present themselves as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1-2).

Conclusion

Faithful discipleship does not just happen. *The cost of discipleship* must first be counted, and then, it must be forever borne. True discipleship is something that shows itself in daily living (Matthew 5:14-16). It, furthermore, may require of one sacrifice and suffering (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:12). The path of the faithful disciple may be strewn with difficulty and pain as it leads its travelers to an obscure, narrow gate in the distance (Matthew 7:13-14). The road may seem too rugged, the gate may seem too far and the entrance may appear too narrow, but not so! All things can be done through Jesus Christ who strengthens and guides (Philippians 4:13; 1 Peter 2:21). Spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and the hope of eternal joy and rest (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 4:9-11) move the disciples of Christ always closer to the eternal city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10; 2 Corinthians 5:1). As the disciples of the Lord continue their common pilgrimage ever upward, they are pervaded with bountiful blessings and the joyous hope of spending eternity with God.

Thought Questions

1. In what way(s) is Jesus uniquely qualified to render instruction, especially concerning *the cost of discipleship*? By what authority did the Lord call, teach and commission disciples?
2. In what ways did Jesus apply the terms "sheep," "serpents" and "doves" to his disciples? What is the significance of the "sheep" being in the midst of "wolves"?
3. From what two primary sources did the disciples who were appointed to the Limited Commission receive persecution? Describe the manner in which they were persecuted.

4. What should disciples of the Lord expect from the world in which they live? Why should Christians not be surprised when they are persecuted for the cause of Christ?
5. What did Christ teach, indirectly, about voluntary martyrdom? Under what circumstances should disciples of Christ allow themselves to suffer martyrdom?
6. Define and apply the usage of “fear” in Matthew 10:28. How significant should physical death be to a Christian? Are there more important considerations?
7. What were the disciples to do with the private instructions that they received from the Lord? If those to whom the disciples addressed heavenly things would not receive the same, what were they to do then? What application might present day disciples make in harmony with these observations?
8. In what ways and at what times should one confess Jesus Christ? Also, when and in what ways can one deny Christ? What is the consequence of denying Christ? What will Christ do for those who confess Him? In what capacity can Christ fulfill His promise concerning those who profess Him?
9. Where should the primary affection or love of a disciple lie? What should prompt a Christian to properly direct his highest form of love?
10. In what way is the Prince of Peace responsible for causing discord between family members?
11. When no one knows the true disciple for what he really is, in what should he find comfort and peace of mind?

Chapter 4:

Teachings of Jesus Christ #2

(1 Peter 2:21)

Matthew 16:24-26

Exposition and Application

“Then 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). Though Matthew 16:24-26 and Luke 9:23-25 chronicle the same speech of our Lord, Luke contains one word worthy of special emphasis when added to the account in Matthew. That word is “**daily**.” Following Jesus Christ, with cross slung over shoulder, is a daily, day-long activity in which every true disciple of the Lord not only must, but should gladly participate. The word “daily” implies that there are no granted vacations, leaves of absence or three-day passes from practicing Christian discipleship. It is, however, possible for disciples of Christ to go *AWOL* (Absent Without Leave) from the army of the Lord. Many Christians frequently go *AWOL* without any remorse at all!

Verse Twenty-Four: “Come after Me” equals Christian discipleship. He who would be a disciple of the Lord must, among other things, “deny himself.” The first test and requirement of discipleship is to surrender to God one’s will, affections, body and soul. Disciples of Christ seek not their own happiness as the supreme object of their lives. *The cost of discipleship* begins with self-denial. The Macedonian liberality was for them an easy and pleasant task because they first gave themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

The cross that disciples are called upon to carry is not old age, poverty, taxes or illness, but the deliberate acceptance of Christian responsibility and its consequences. The term “cross” suggests something negative and burdensome that must be borne. Such things Christians are called upon to bear with happiness (Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 3:13-14; 4:13-14, 16).

Verse Twenty-Five: He who would save his temporal life at the expense of faithfulness casts aside his cross of discipleship and loses his spiritual life. Disciples are called upon to “be faithful unto death” to “receive a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Whatever man loses in this life owing to his Christian service will be amply restored in the eternal world (Matthew 19:29).

Verse Twenty-Six: The whole globe on which we live with its accompanying resources and the world society of which we are necessarily apart with its honors and pleasures cannot even when combined outweigh the value of a single soul. The purchase price of a soul lies not upon the face of this earth, but is only to be found in the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The blood of Christ is applied only in the obedience of the Gospel and specifically in immersion for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-5). The only entrance into the death of Christ wherein His blood was shed is through baptism (John 19:34; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

Luke 14:25-33

Exposition and Application

Verses Twenty-Five through Twenty-Seven: (See the exposition and application of Matthew Ten above.)

Verses Twenty-Eight through Thirty-Two: The matter of common sense here portrayed concerning the building of a tower illustrates a spiritual truth about discipleship that is often ignored. *The cost of discipleship* should be first calculated, and once determined, then it ought to be accepted by those who would be disciples of Christ. It is just as absurd and irresponsible to undertake discipleship without counting the cost as it would be to undertake the construction of a building without first considering the cost required to satisfactorily complete it.

Verse Thirty-Three: To avoid a false start in discipleship, discipleship should be sought with a determination that nothing will be allowed to supersede one’s commitment to the Lord (Matthew 6:33-34; 10:37). Christians are no more required to rid themselves of all their possessions to be disciples than are Christians supposed to despise their family members. Compare the readings of Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26. Christians or disciples **may**, however, suffer

the loss of family, possessions and worldly honor while in the service of the Lord (Matthew 19:27-29; Philippians 3:4-11).

Conclusion

Daily discipleship (Luke 9:23) is something that, when once embraced by the child of God, should also be a habitual characteristic of one's Christianity. Neither the Lord nor men or brethren should ever have to doubt where a faithful disciple of Christ stands regarding matters of righteousness or service before God. Daily discipleship will be more easily secured and maintained when *the cost of discipleship* is first considered. Then, carrying one's cross daily will incur no persecutions or difficulties for which preparation has not already been made. The road will be neither too hard nor too long that leads to heavenly habitations if *the cost of discipleship* is first calculated and its costs accepted beforehand. Christians are **not surprised, but prepared** when they may encounter life's often devilish distractions. **Be prepared; count the cost!**

Thought Questions

1. Whose cross is every disciple called upon to bear? Describe this cross, telling what this cross might be and what it is not.
2. Name some ways in which a good disciple of Christ should not endeavor to preserve his life. What incentive does a Christian have for continuing to be faithful even if his faithfulness might cause someone to take his life?
3. If it is forbidden for a good disciple to deny his Lord, what or whom should the Christian deny?
4. Explain the apparent paradox of Matthew 16:25. Is there any difference between the usage of the word "life" between its first and second occurrence in this verse? If so, explain.
5. If the whole world with its immense resources and earthly honors were placed on a scale, what alone would outweigh it all? What is man's most precious possession? Who really owns even that (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Ezekiel 18:4)?
6. Why is it important to count *the cost of discipleship* before undertaking discipleship (2 Peter 2:20-22)? How would the church likely prosper if all disciples first counted *the cost of discipleship* and then diligently undertook the payment of those

costs? In what ways are Christians often unwilling to pay *the cost of discipleship*?

7. List several costs that are either frequently incurred or could be incurred upon Christians for the cause of Christ. Are the costs incurred by modern day disciples different from costs incurred by disciples of the past? Explain your answer, and tell why there may be, if any, differences between present and past costs.
8. List some of the blessings and hopes realized by disciples of Christ. Describe the manner in which these blessings and hopes are exclusively reserved for the disciples of Christ.
9. Considering Matthew 6:24 and 12:30, tell why discipleship of one kind or another cannot be avoided. Describe how that discipleship is a matter of choice and never a matter of conscription. How many spiritual masters are there? Identify those masters.

Chapter 5:

Acts and the Epistles #1

(2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

The Cost of Discipleship Demands Endurance

Consecrated discipleship demands faithful endurance even in the face of often and severe tribulation. The apostle Paul exhorted brethren in the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch concerning their faithfulness as he and his companions returned from the first missionary tour. Paul also warned these disciples "...‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’" (Acts 14:22). However, in spite of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword and death, Christians can persevere with Jesus Christ as their Intercessor (Romans 8:34-39). Not only can disciples of Christ endure, they must, for they are so commanded (1 Corinthians 15:58). Revelation 2:10 further reads: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. **Be thou faithful until death**, and I will give you the crown of life." Several additional passages also affirm the necessity of faithful endurance by the disciple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 16:13; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 4:1). These and the countless other Bible calls to faithfulness indicate the possibility that even the Christian may fall away and be eternally lost (2 Peter 2:20-22). Therefore, all Christians should examine themselves now lest they fail the ultimate examination on the greatest of all test days, the Final Judgment (2 Corinthians 13:5).

One key to endurance is putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13). To this should be added: (1) petitioning prayers, (2) watchfulness and (3) a common concern among the saints for one another's perseverance (Ephesians 6:18). The value of the concern of brethren of "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1) in aiding

one to faithfully endure should not be underestimated (Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 1:10). In addition to this “unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13), one should try to ever increase his knowledge of God and Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). This, too, assists endurance unto the end by which salvation will be extended (Matthew 10:22).

Though God will not arbitrarily save anyone who lives in open rebellion to the Gospel, disciples have great assurance that in response to their faithfulness God will preserve them throughout life (2 Timothy 4:18; 1:12). Concerning this thought, 2 Thessalonians 3:3 reads, “But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and guard you from the evil one.” Perseverance is conditional upon rendering earnest heed to the Word of God, lest letting it slip, Christians should also fall (Hebrews 2:1).

Patience is invaluable to and almost synonymous with endurance. The writer of Hebrews equated endurance unto the end with the type of faith and patience by which Abraham received the fulfillment of divine promises (Hebrews 6:11-15). “And so, after he had **patiently endured**, he obtained the promise.” The inspired writer called upon Christians to manifest the same degree of patient endurance to obtain the eternal promise (Hebrews 10:36). The work of patience is to perfect the child of God (James 1:4). Afflictions that disciples may be called upon to bear **are bearable** through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). Jesus Himself has shown the way of patience by enduring the cross (Hebrews 12:1-2). The sundry tribulations that confront Christians should be considered as the chastisements of God (Hebrews 12:5-11), which when faithfully and patiently endured result in happiness and a crown of life (James 5:10-11; 1:12).

Christians are “kept by the power of God through faith” (a tried faith) unto the ultimate bestowal of eternal salvation at the last day (1 Peter 1:4-7). The keeping or preserving is God’s part, though He has made it conditional upon the successful trial of faith, which trial continues for life or until Christ returns. Eternal life, then, cannot be realized except in prospect until the Final Judgment. This side of the Judgment, the disciple of the Lord can be greatly aided through the trial of his faith by diligently adopting the Christian graces of 2 Peter 1:5-11. In this way can the Christian overcome the world or persevere (1 John 5:4-5; Revelation 2:7).

Paul's life of frequent and harsh persecutions (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) did not dissuade him from enduring in Christ. Near the end of his life, he confidentially anticipated spending eternity in heaven (2 Timothy 4:6-8). It appears that the things that he suffered for the cause of Christ (his cross to bear) did not hinder him, but aided him in his pilgrimage toward glory land. Incidentally, all the faithful children of God can know with the same certainty as Paul that they will spend eternity in mansions above (1 John 2:3-5). The Christian race can be likened somewhat to a marathon in which all who finish are winners. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Cost of Discipleship Demands that Sinners Be Convicted of Sin

God's preachers under both testaments uniformly convicted men of their sins by the authority of God, and by the same authority they demanded repentance. The faithful preaching of God's Word occurred regardless of potential consequences or peril to God's messengers and without regard to the political or social position of those addressed. The desired result of convicting men of their sins is repentance (Acts 2:37-38; 9:6; 16:29-30; 17:30-31). Paul convicted high political figures of sin (Acts 24:24-25; 13:7; 26:1-32). Additionally, Peter, Paul and other disciples convicted religious leaders of sin (Acts 4:5-12; 5:17-33). A negative result of convicting men of their sins was the rejection of the Gospel and often the affliction or death of the preacher (Acts 4:1-3; 5:40; 6:9-7:60; 9:20-23; 12:1-5; 13:44-45; 14:3-5, 19; 16:19-24; 17:3, 5; 19:28-34; 21:26-33). People unacquainted with religion were usually less likely to persecute the messengers of God and more readily received the Gospel than more religious people (Acts 10:1-2, 47-48; 13:7; 19:17-20). Man has no more important duty than obeying the commandments of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13), and now is the time in which all should render obedience to the Gospel and receive salvation from past sins (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Discipleship Demands a Defense of the Gospel

Often the Gospel must not only be defended against the encroachments of the world upon it, but it must be frequently defended as well against the inroads of some brethren. Neither denominational peoples nor weak brethren will (nor can they adequately) defend the Gospel. Therefore, faithful disciples must take it upon themselves to defend the Gospel of Christ against all comers (Philippians 1:17; Jude 3).

The early church orally defended the Gospel and its right to exist before the world (Acts 6:9-7:60; 23:1-26:32). In the second and third centuries, various religious writers undertook a defense of Christianity, and their writings are preserved. These writers are commonly referred to as Apostolic Fathers and Apologists.

The church has always felt compelled to defend itself, especially against “false brethren” (2 Corinthians 11:26; Acts 15:11-32). Abundant warnings appear in the New Testament to alert faithful disciples about false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1). The saints must discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14), have neither fellowship with nor commend sinners (2 John 9-11) and publicly identify and turn from impenitent, erring brethren (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 3:10).

Discipleship Demands Labor and Time

Is it not vain and sinful to petition God to send forth laborers to gather the harvest of souls if the petitioners themselves neglect or refuse to invest their own time and labor in the great harvest (Matthew 9:37-38)? The apostle Paul and other first century Christians were willing to labor day and night to contribute to the expansion of the Lord’s kingdom (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Paul spent himself for the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:15), and the Macedonian brethren gave themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5). Present day disciples should be willing to discount all earthly pursuits to seek first things first (Philippians 3:8; Matthew 6:33). Since Christians are stewards of all things over which they have control (Luke 12:42-43), the time at their disposal should be well used, particularly in taking the Word of God to

unbelievers (Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 5:15-16). Only Christians are stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). What then shall become of men if discipleship somehow fails to produce faithful stewards?

Discipleship Demands Sacrifice

Christians are supposed to be peculiar people, not for the sake of oddity, but in consequence of the fact they are the disciples of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9). On the basis of the consecration of God's people and Jesus as our Example (1 Peter 2:21-24), the context of 1 Peter 2 demands of the saints godly and sacrificial living (1 Peter 2:10-20). According to these passages, sacrificial living may include: (1) Substituting honest behavior in place of fleshly lusts, (2) Submitting to civil law, (3) Respecting fellow men, (4) Revering God and (5) Honoring contracted relationships with other men.

The apostle Paul called upon the saints at Rome to live sacrificially (Romans 12:1-2). This apostle himself lived sacrificially, suffering many things to preach the Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) and putting aside the many advantages and earthly honors that were otherwise his (Philippians 3:4-11). The Macedonians learned about sacrificial living before they contributed to the needy saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Discipleship Demands Obedience

Sonship demanded of Jesus Christ that He obey, and discipleship demands no less of those who seek eternal life (Hebrews 5:8-9) and would become disciples of the Lord. Man must actively participate in his own salvation through his obedience to the Gospel. "Therefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Since Christ Himself demonstrated obedience, when men imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), they also learn to obey.

Christians must be **doers** of God's Word to someday pass through the gates of the eternal city (James 1:22; Matthew 7:21-23; Revelation 22:14). This obedience should proceed out of the heart in direct response to the Gospel of Christ (Romans 6:17). Complete obedience before God includes compliance with the civil laws under

which one lives (Romans 13:1-7), except when civil laws contradict the laws of God (Acts 5:29). Even the faith by which men are justified (Romans 5:1) is only effective through obeying God (Romans 1:5; 16:26).

Conclusion

True discipleship is a durable relationship between man and God. Further, it is useful; discipleship pursues every lost soul with the universal and only pure Gospel, the Holy Word of God. Consecrated disciples willingly spend their energies and time in the service of Jesus Christ and are not opposed to making necessary sacrifices for the Lord. Disciples of Christ hearken to His Word alone and obey Him always without argument or quibbling. Such Christians recognize the distinctiveness of the church for which Jesus died and over which He is now Head. So, the philosophy “We are Christians only, but not the only Christians” is despised by faithful brethren as companion to much of what they repented when they obeyed the Gospel of Christ. Those infected with the above quoted philosophy no longer know discipleship demands that sinners be convicted of sin and that the Gospel must be defended. Such preachers and teachers have numbered themselves with those from whom the Gospel must be defended. Some brethren are no longer willing to endure *the cost of discipleship*.

Thought Questions

1. List at least five passages each that teach the following: (1) Faithfulness and endurance are required of the Lord’s disciples; (2) Disciples of Christ may sin so as to be eternally lost; (3) Tribulation may attend Christian discipleship.
2. What are some key factors that enable disciples to better endure faithfully?
3. Define the perseverance about which the Bible speaks and contrast it with the common denominational concept of perseverance.
4. In what way does patience favorably contribute to the disciple’s faithful endurance? What Bible character(s) aptly demonstrated a patience through which they were better able to endure in the way of righteousness?

5. Old and New Testament prophets of God spoke by the authority of God and so doing, what two specific things did they also do by the authority of God? Will God be pleased with modern day preachers who ignore these two integral components of Gospel preaching?
6. From what two general sources of attack must the Gospel be routinely defended? Why does it fall upon the shoulders of disciples to defend the Gospel? Should Christians cease and desist when some brethren decry legitimate efforts to defend the Gospel? Why?
7. Over what are Christians the **only** stewards and possessors, thereby placing upon disciples a unique responsibility? In what way does the eternal welfare of present and future generations depend on the stewardship of the Lord's disciples?
8. In what ways today might disciples of Christ demonstrate sacrificial living?
9. In what way is the disciple like his Lord when he renders obedience and continues to obey the Gospel?

Chapter 6:

Acts and the Epistles #2

(2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Discipleship Demands Maturity

Spiritual maturity does not occur accidentally, but it is the calculated result of a steady diet of God's Word (1 Peter 2:2). Consequently, when Christians do not properly nourish themselves with the Bible, they are weak, liabilities to themselves and their brethren, unable to adequately discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Mature disciples strive to suppress the sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and attain the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). They further add to themselves what we call the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-11) and don the Christian armor of Ephesians 6:11-17. Only mature disciples are able to digest "strong meat," handle aright the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15 ASV) and concern themselves with more than just the fundamentals of the Christian religion (Hebrews 6:1). Doubtless, in every generation the Lord's church has suffered from an acute case of spiritual immaturity, including the present!

Discipleship Demands Humility, Patience, Godliness and Contentment

"Likewise you younger, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). The proper application of humility lies with properly esteeming others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Some of the most arrogant people are not haughty because they think so much of themselves, but because they think so little of others! Humility before God and man is required of faithful disciples.

Patience must accompany the Christian on his pilgrimage through this world (Hebrews 12:1). It is something for which disciples of Christ should strive earnestly (2 Peter 1:6) and is secured often as the result of trial (James 1:3). “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

The knowledge that God through His divine providence watches over His children (Romans 8:28; Matthew 6:25-32) more easily enables Christians to seek humility, patience, godliness and contentment. To this knowledge is added the understanding that the promises of God (2 Corinthians 7:1-3) and His grace (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) further afford faithful disciples these same qualities.

Godliness, through the application of God’s scheme of redemption, removes men from the sphere of condemnation (Romans 8:1). It further encourages men to turn completely and publicly against their former sins (Acts 19:19). The Gospel calls men to godliness, from which if they turn once they have obeyed it, they are deemed to have despised God (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). Godliness, with other similar virtues like contentment, enhances true discipleship (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

The apostle Paul was one who learned the value of contentment in various circumstances (Philippians 4:11). Discontentment results in sinfulness, beginning with envy (Galatians 5:26). God promises to never forsake His disciples if they will put the love of money from them and seek spiritual things before earthly matters (Hebrews 13:5).

Probably no finer summary direction to faithful discipleship could be found than the inspired instruction of Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Discipleship Must Be Characterized by Prayer

If Christian disciples are to be truly like Jesus their Master, they must learn to pray. Our Lord taught those disciples who participated

with Him in His personal ministry **how** to pray (Matthew 6:5-13). Jesus not only instructed His disciples about prayer, He Himself was a prayerful example to them (Matthew 26:26-27, 36, 39, 42, 44; John 17:1-26).

The context of Matthew 6:5-13 reveals several facts about acceptable prayer. From the first verse of the cited context it is learned that acceptable prayer depends in part upon proper motivation. Prayer is not supposed to be a vehicle whereby men should try to educate either man or God. The public prayers of some men oddly include verbose quotations of Scripture to God and exhortations or even rebukes of people present. Doubtless, the primary motivation of such prayers is not to praise and to petition God.

Matthew 6:7 reflects unfavorably on the published prayers of Catholicism. The same reflection overshadows many denominational prayers and frequently the prayers of brethren also. Though Christians may not transform prayers into widely **read** and **official** incantations, often the prayers prayed in the assembly become too familiar. Many times public prayers could easily be indexed and then scheduled according to a preference for length, content and style. Brethren are known for the way in which they pray. Varied prayers in the worship service are more likely to occur through the varied selection of participants than not. No doubt the private prayers of many Christians have already come dangerously close to being “vain repetitions.” Did you ever pray and wonder either if you remembered to pray for the stated object of your prayer (such as a meal or an ill Christian) or if you have prayed yet at all upon your rise to meet a new day?

The **Model Prayer** is brief. It addresses and praises God. The Model Prayer further acknowledges man’s complete dependence upon God for which the faithful disciple petitions God for the forgiveness of sins and the necessary things of life. It also encourages Christians to express the subjection of the human will to the divine will and asks strength by which future sins can be avoided.

First Corinthians 14:15 agrees with Matthew 6:7 concerning the vanity of repetitious prayers. Prayers should be prayed in sincerity and understanding. The prayers Christians pray should be properly motivated and meaningful. Such prayers should be prayed with great regularity (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and should include statements of

thanksgiving and petitions (Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 6:18). Prayers of the saints further prompt God to effect His providence in their favor.

Incidentally, God answers all prayers, though not always according to the petitioner's will. God may answer a prayer: (1) No! (2) Yes, (3) Maybe later, or (4) Partially according to the petition and altogether according to His will. Also, prayers prayed in doubt that God answers prayers do not have enough postage to arrive at their intended destination; no answer will be forth coming, therefore, to such correspondences with God.

Discipleship Demands Unity

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul...” (Acts 4:32). Discipleship and unity were as one breath at Pentecost forward for many years. There were no denominations, and when other divisions threatened, dissension was quieted by an urging to return to biblical unity (Acts 15:1-32; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 30-31). As then, even more so now, **religious unity can only be attained by an exclusive appeal to the Bible**, which alone is empowered to guide men into the “unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13). Several New Testament passages urge saints to “be of the same mind” (Romans 12:16; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 1 Peter 3:8) as if they were to “with one mind and one mouth glorify God” (Romans 15:5-6).

Furthermore, the church is described in Scripture as being one body, though made of many members (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4). Unity among the disciples of Christ is the calculated result of abiding in “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5; Jude 3) and following “one Lord” (Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:6-7; 1 John 2:6). Unity was the object of the early Restoration Movement. However, when it was discovered that there could be no unity across denominational ties owing to the respective creeds, men and women began separating themselves from denominational bodies and appealing to the Bible only as their exclusive religious guide and creed. It took experience to teach the early Restoration leaders the application of Amos 3:3. **True discipleship demands an exclusive and inclusive fellowship.**

Discipleship Demands Love

Love is uniquely the badge of discipleship. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one for another” (John 13:34-35). When Christians bear this badge, they keep the commandments of God (1 John 5:3). Disciples obey their Master when they love Him (John 14:15, 21, 23). Disobedience is a sign of a void of love for Christ; “He who does not love me does not keep My words...” (John 14:24). Those who do not love Christ are accursed (1 Corinthians 16:22). God knows who truly loves Him, and who does not (1 Corinthians 8:3). Christians must also love their fellow man (Romans 13:8) and especially brethren (Romans 12:9-10; Ephesians 5:2). The providence of God reacts to love for the general welfare of the saints.

Conclusion

What is *the cost of discipleship*? True discipleship is very demanding. The discipleship about which the Bible teaches is distinctive. True disciples still know the difference between right and wrong. They see through new moralities and other rationalizations that would encourage saints to again live in the sins of which they have long since repented. The Lord’s faithful disciples are determined to endure in the way of righteousness. Discipleship implies commitment to the Lord and sacrificial living. It should be the embodiment of love, godliness and humility. Saints pray frequently and know well the God of the Bible. Faithful disciples fully appreciate the authority of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21) and ever speak as “the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

Thought Questions

1. Contrast spiritual immaturity with spiritual maturity. When does a disciple have a right to be spiritually immature; might it ever be sinful to be spiritually immature?
2. Describe prayers that God finds acceptable and cite examples and instructions about prayer.

3. What is the sole basis of successful and God approved religious unity? In what ways could Christian unity be viewed as both “inclusive and exclusive”?
4. When might the true disciples of Christ be willfully disobedient and yet express love for the Lord? What is the biblical relationship between love and obedience? What other definition for love do even brethren sometimes substitute for the divine definition?
5. What relationship does “commitment” have to true “discipleship”?
6. What relationship exists between true “discipleship” and the “authority” of the Scriptures? By what and to what extent does the disciple map his Christian pilgrimage?
7. Name several New Testament characters (1) who showed exceptional loyalty to Christ and (2) others who denied their discipleship.

Chapter 7: The Early Church

(1 Peter 4:16)

The Early Church as Revealed from Bible History

A study of Acts 2 (with special emphasis upon verses 41 and 47) shows that the Lord's church was begun on the Pentecost following the Ascension of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem and in about A.D. 33. Verse 47 is the first passage to address the church as a present rather than a future entity. However, *the cost of discipleship* with the apostles and several other disciples predated the eventful establishment of the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-8; Matthew 10:16ff; Mark 6:21-28; Matthew 19:27-30). Moreover, not long after the inception of the church, *the cost of discipleship* was again incurred upon the disciples of Christ.

The preaching of the Gospel shortly after the beginning of the church (Acts 3) had two results. First, the apostles Peter and John were imprisoned; second, about five thousand men plus women believed and were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 4:1-4). Acts 4:17-21 records that the Jewish religious leaders threatened the disciples and commanded them not to preach Jesus. The apostles, though, undauntedly affirmed before the council that they would continue to prefer God's Word over the commandments of men and that they would continue to preach the Gospel of Christ. Doubtless, the apostles knew that their lives were imperiled, but they were willing to pay whatever costs were necessary to be and to remain faithful disciples of the Lord.

In the next chapter of Acts, one can observe that the cost of discipleship, among other things, requires that the children of God be honest and sincere. Clearly, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, wanted to be viewed as sacrificial disciples, although they were not willing to pay the cost commensurate with the esteem they desired

(Acts 5:1-11). Though they were not required to sell any of their property and contribute the proceeds to the church, selfish motives prompted them to claim that they had been more sacrificial (paid more of *the cost of discipleship*) than they really did. This event served to impress upon Christians and sinners alike the seriousness of discipleship (Acts 5:12-14). Discipleship should be considered with no less seriousness and soberness today than the day in which Ananias and Sapphira died. All men would do well to ponder *the cost of discipleship* carefully with prayer.

Acts 5 also chronicles the further persecution that the apostles suffered as a result of preaching Jesus (Acts 5:17-18). Though captured, they were divinely aided in their escape and directed to resume their public preaching (Acts 5:19-20). Later, the apostles were recaptured, beaten, threatened and released (Acts 5:21-40). The remarkable reaction of the apostles to this *cost of discipleship* (here persecution) with which they were buffeted is recorded in Acts 5:41-42, which reads, “So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing** that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And **daily** in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease **teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.**”

Acts 6 and 7 record the capture, preaching and execution of Stephen (Acts 6:9-7:60). If there ever was a time in which the faithful disciple of Christ could with God’s approval circumvent *the cost of discipleship*, this was the time. Perhaps by denying the Lord Jesus Christ, Stephen could have preserved himself from physical harm and death. However, in the spirit of (then not yet written) Matthew 10:32-33 and Revelation 2:10, Stephen paid the ultimate cost of faithful discipleship in the sacrifice of his life. Without doubt, though his earthly life came to an abrupt end about two thousand years ago, he is yet alive, spiritually (Matthew 10:28). Spiritual life is all that really matters anyway (Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 14:1-3; Matthew 25:46), so he lost comparatively little.

Other disciples were also called upon to pay the same costs (Mark 6:21-28; Acts 12:1-2). Jesus Himself suffered death for us (John 15:13; Romans 5:7-8) and left us an example even for suffering (1 Peter 2:21). It is true that one may never be called upon to pay the cost of death as a disciple, but no one will be called upon to suffer more. If disciples prepare themselves to pay the ultimate cost of discipleship, it is likely that lesser costs can be more easily

paid. If patriotic duty may demand of men even the sacrifice of their lives, should it be thought strange or fanatical that true discipleship may require the same?

Acts Eight depicts Saul of Tarsus as a severe persecutor of the church and one who was present at and consented to the murder of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4). Later when he also obeyed the Gospel, persecution was directed toward him (Acts 9:23-24).

The Jewish persecution of the disciples in which Stephen lost his life was generally applied to the church, causing the brethren to be scattered throughout the known world (Acts 8:1; 11:19). To please the Jews over whom he ruled, King Herod also participated in this persecution; he killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-5).

The scattered disciples and the apostle to the Gentiles in his missionary tours frequently confronted opponents of the Gospel (Acts 13:18; 43-48). They often faced vicious persecution, only sometimes from which they were able to escape. Due to persecution at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium (Acts 13:50-51). Therefore, they also fled Iconium because of persecution and went to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:17). However, in Lystra Paul was stoned (Acts 14:19). In Acts 16, one can read of the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas; Jason was persecuted in Acts 17:5-9. In Athens, the Gospel was largely rejected, and Paul was mocked (Acts 17:16-34).

Acts 18 records an assault upon Paul, but through the intervention of a Roman official he was released (Acts 18:12-17). In the following chapter, several disciples were assaulted, though later released (Acts 19:29-34). Chapter 21 pictures another instance in which Paul was assaulted and captured by a mob (Acts 21:27-31), and then delivered from the mob and arrested by Roman soldiers (Acts 21:31-35). Acts 23 records that when Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin, he was smitten on the mouth at the command of the high priest (Acts 23:2). Later, his murder was plotted (Acts 23:14), for which cause he was moved to Caesarea where he was left imprisoned by Felix for two years (Acts 24:27). Paul remained in prison under the rule of Festus, but later he was sent to Rome according to his appeal, whereupon he was shipwrecked (Acts 27:41).

The Book of Acts is a history of the early church and, therefore, chronicles the costs that came upon it and the members of the

churches of Christ. Additionally, various epistles also refer to the persecutions and general costs of discipleship that Christians then were called upon to pay, sometimes with their lives. The apostle Paul summarized in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 the things through which he was caused to go for the sake of his discipleship. The epistles exhorted their recipients to faithfulness in spite of personal peril (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:16; Revelation 2:10). They also warned of false brethren who would resist them and the Gospel (Acts 20:29-31; Romans 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1; 3 John 9-11). Throughout Acts, *the cost of discipleship* that came upon the church of the first century is clearly depicted, though sometimes, we may think, less than complete. *The cost of discipleship* is easily seen as one godly tenet that was boldly exhibited by early Christians. Present day Christians should obviously not demonstrate less willingness to practice consecrated discipleship and yet expect God's approval to overshadow them!

The Early Church as Revealed from Secular History

The Bible's historical accounts have always been revered as true by all those who completely trust the authority of the Scriptures, regardless of whether secular verification of the same is available. Though the Bible itself is never wrong whether addressing doctrinal matters, historical matters or some other subject, secular histories are fallible and, therefore, subject to human error and interpretation. However, secular histories are not to be totally discounted. Hence, the following references from secular history regarding *the cost of discipleship* in the early church are also included for the consideration of the thoughtful student. Admittedly, some of the following references may not be specifically correct, but the information doubtless accurately depicts the trials and costs generally incurred upon the discipleship of brethren many hundreds of years ago.

Secular history records that the following disciples chose death over renunciation of their discipleship. Philip was scourged, imprisoned and then crucified in A.D. 54. Matthew was slain with a halberd in A.D. 60. James the Less was at the age of 94 beaten and stoned by the Jews, and finally his brain was beaten out of its skull

with a blacksmith's mallet. Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded. Andrew was crucified. Mark was dragged to death. Peter was crucified head down. Paul was beheaded. Jude was crucified in A.D. 72. Bartholomew was beaten and crucified. Thomas was thrust through with a spear. Luke was hanged. Simon was crucified. John died a natural death. Barnabas was executed in A.D. 73.

Fox's Book of Martyrs names many saints and vividly describes the ways in which they were often tortured to death because of their discipleship. A summary of the vicious ways in which early Christians were killed would necessarily include: being sewn into skins of wild beasts and worried to death by dogs; dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, put on poles and set afire for illumination; beaten to death with clubs; devoured by wild beasts; crucified, crowned with thorns, and thrust through with a spear; burnt at the stake; scourged and pressed to death with weights; beheaded; thrown from lofty points; covered with boiling pitch and set afire; scalded; drown; dragged by horses; put into leather bags together with a number of serpents and scorpions, and in that condition thrown into the sea; stretched upon a wheel until all bones were broken and then beheaded; stoning; torn with hooks; feet pierced with nails and other torture induced before being beheaded; starved; hanged; feet attached to the tail of a bull which was driven down the steps of a temple; broiled; shot to death with arrows; poisoned.

The accounts are too numerous and equally too gruesome to detail in a public presentation. Knowing that Christians were willing to suffer such abuse rather than to recant Christ as their Lord and Savior should serve to emphasize the true definition of discipleship and its costs among present day disciples. How much we would be (and someday may be) willing to suffer for the cause of Christ is ultimately the thermometer of Christian discipleship! How much fervent zeal do you exhibit (Revelation 3:15-16)?

Conclusion

Nearly everywhere the early disciples went, they either had a great Gospel meeting or a riot! They were said to have turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). However, while turning the world upside down with the preaching of the Gospel, the disciples often

experienced persecution. Moreover, they recognized in advance that they would be persecuted for the cause of Christ (2 Timothy 3:12).

Christianity became an outlawed or an illegal religion in the Roman Empire once it was generally realized that Christianity **was not** simply another factious sect of Judaism. Therefore, Christians were treated as severely as the worst criminals. The tortures that were inflicted upon the children of God were not discriminatory regarding either age or gender; all Christians were treated alike.

Passages such as Revelation 2:10 and 1 Peter 4:15-16, though applicable to every generation, especially applied to the day in which they were penned and for several years afterward during the Roman oppressions. The former reads, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” The latter says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evil doer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

Many in the early church were prepared to pay the ultimate *cost of discipleship* if necessary, and many did forfeit their lives in the service of the Lord (Revelation 6:9). Whether our discipleship costs us our lives or should less cost be incurred upon present day disciples, only those who pass from life in Christ shall spend eternity in Heaven. “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Revelation 14:13).

Thought Questions

1. What do you think would happen to the church in America if our government banned Christianity and proceeded to persecute those who persistently endeavored to worship in spirit and in truth?
2. Do you know of any countries in our modern day in which religious freedom has been suppressed? Who was responsible for the religious oppression and in what ways were religious people persecuted?

3. Were the early disciples generally surprised that their fellow men reacted to the preaching of the Gospel by persecuting them? Why should have these Christians anticipated persecution in response to the proclamation of the Word of God?
4. Second Timothy 3:12 emphatically declares that persecution will not fail to visit Christians. What, if any, application does this verse have to disciples of Christ today? Does the passage apply to Christians in America; if so, to what extent?
5. Is there any way that the persecutions of the church about which we can read in Acts could have been avoided with God's approval? If so, how?
6. When possible, the early disciples fled from persecution, but sometimes they could not flee. In what sense, then, might it rightfully be said that God **does not** want His children to be voluntary martyrs? Is there another sense in which it could be legitimately observed that God **does** want His children to be willing martyrs? Please explain.
7. What about the preaching of the Gospel by the early disciples turned the world upside down and generated persecutions and riots? Was the message alone the cause of these reactions? Did the way in which the message was declared gender any adverse reactions to it?
8. Is the church today presenting the same message in the same way as the church of the first century did? Why does the lost world today appear to be less stirred by the preaching of the Gospel?
9. Does it appear that the present generation is less receptive to the Gospel plea than former generations or first century people? If so, why? What steps might be undertaken by the church to more effectively evangelize the lost?
10. Obviously Christians are not generally persecuted to the degree about which one can read in the Book of Acts or *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. To what do Christians owe their release from physical persecution for the cause of Christ?

Chapter 8: Lessons from the Old Testament (Hebrews 11:1-40)

The Bible's Hall of Fame

Hebrews 11 is the Bible's Hall of Fame, in which outstanding disciples of the Old Testament are not only for evermore commended, but they are held before all subsequent generations as models of discipleship. Collectively, they paid *the cost of discipleship*, which in doing they (1) saved their souls, (2) participated in the unfolding of God's scheme of redemption (with which we are especially blessed) and (3) serve as approved examples of faithful discipleship. Among the many names that appear throughout the Bible, not a few are the names of the enemies of God and unfaithful disciples. It is, therefore, heartening to know that God really does care and acknowledges the efforts of His children to be good disciples. Furthermore, passages like Hebrews 11 show that it is possible, though we be fallible creatures, to practice faithful discipleship.

Among other lessons, this significant chapter of God's Word indicates that from the relative beginning of man's pilgrimage on earth through all Old Testament history there have been those upon whom Jehovah could depend. Where the Old Testament closes in this regard, the New Testament continues the chronicle of faithful service rendered to God by His true and faithful disciples. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel are specifically named and represent all the faithful who lived upon the face of this globe for about its first four thousand years. Reference is also made to others, such as the Jewish elders and the prophets, who were equally a part of what little good there was of note about humanity in that period. The Gospel Records then speak of John the

Baptizer, his disciples, and our Lord and Savior. The Book of Acts likewise reveals that faithful discipleship did not end with the Old Testament prophets. From the epistles also one can learn more about faithful discipleship in the first century.

Doubtless, there are also many faithful disciples of the Lord today. However, it is equally likely that there are, besides hosts of non-Christians, great numbers of Christians upon whom the Lord **cannot** depend and who **will not** pay *the cost of discipleship*. In every period of man's existence there have been even many children of God who were not long faithful. Additionally, even the ones upon whom the Lord can usually depend sometimes prove their fallibility and at least temporarily absent themselves from their discipleship and its responsibilities. Who truly is willing to endure, come what may, *the cost of discipleship*? The Bible denotes that though great numbers will someday enter heavenly habitations (Revelation 7:9), a greater number will be eternally lost (Matthew 7:13-14). Among the lost in eternity will apparently be the majority of souls to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed (Matthew 13:18-23; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

Outstanding Demonstrations of Discipleship under Patriarchy

As did the writer of Hebrews by inspiration, so must we first mention the name of Abel. No greater price can one pay than with his life. The loss of life was the consequence of faithful discipleship for Abel as he was slain by his enraged brother, Cain (Genesis 4:1-8). Whereas Abel worshipped God according to apparent (though not biblically recorded) instruction and was approved of God, Cain did contrariwise. Therefore, God accused Cain of sin (Genesis 4:7). Abel could neither have worshipped by faith (Hebrews 11:4; Romans 10:17) nor could Cain have sinned (Genesis 4:7; 1 John 3:4) had God not given them instruction by which they were to worship and conduct themselves. Cain is a constant reminder of failed discipleship, but the name of Abel pleasantly reminds the thoughtful of successful discipleship. "...he being dead still speaks" (Hebrews 11:4).

Discipleship is particularly exemplified in the person of Enoch. Of all mankind throughout multiplied generations, only two souls walked with God and according to His will so well that God

exempted them from experiencing the pain of death. Only Enoch (Hebrews 11:5; Genesis 5:22-24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1, 11) avoided the death toward which all other men necessarily look. Yes, especially Enoch, though little may be known about him, belongs in the **Bible's Hall of Fame** along with other faithful disciples. Christians today should be able to learn from Enoch's success story how important it is to be consecrated and holy; the reward for such discipleship is heavenly.

The account of Noah is one case of discipleship that the mind's eye can vividly and easily visualize. The faithful discipleship that he exhibited (Hebrews 11:7) was powerful through God to the extent that he not only built the ark (1 Peter 3:20-21; Genesis 6:14-7:16) and preached righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), but he doubtless endured extensive peer pressure from the men who, impenitent in their sins, ultimately died in the flood. Noah lived several hundred years before God announced His plans to destroy the world, during which time Noah was obviously a faithful disciple. Then, for an additional number of years he labored on the ark and had the opportunity to warn his fellow man. It is not difficult to imagine that Noah was always viewed by his contemporaries as odd and religiously fanatical. Neither is it hard to further imagine that during those 120 years of preaching about the flood and building the ark that he and his family received much ridicule and even the acute disdain from their peers. Not only were Noah and his family the likely butt of much jest, but Noah's insistent preaching about an impending visitation of God's wrath because of sinful men was probably offensive to his ungodly neighbors. It is doubtless true that Noah knew both the mockery and hatred of his fellow man in response to his faithful discipleship. It is likely that Noah knew something about *the cost of discipleship*.

Lesser men than Noah would not have endured mockery and hatred. Lesser men might have replied to their critics with any of the following statements and joined the majority: "No problem! Have it your way," "That's cool, if it feels good, do it" or "I can preach it either way." Other, weaker disciples would not have reared their children in such a way to preserve their souls from destruction, as well as the souls of their children's spouses. Weaker disciples would have encouraged or at least allowed their children to participate in the current fads, social pleasures and distractions from everyday life

that distract from devotion to God. Noah and his children could have reasoned together, “Everyone’s doing it!”

However, despite the noble character and discipleship demonstrated by Noah, even he faltered when after the flood he became drunken (Genesis 9:20-21). All disciples should, therefore, realize that no one is immune to sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Every child of God must carefully and diligently endeavor not only to become, but remain a faithful disciple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:12; 15:58; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

The faithful discipleship of Abraham is unparalleled in modern times (Hebrews 11:8-19). Even our missionaries when contemplating their departure for distant fields of labor can know beforehand somewhat about the same. Abraham was not afforded this information, but he left all with which he was familiar at the bidding of God for an uncharted pilgrimage (Genesis 12:1, 4). Also worthy of special note about the discipleship of Abraham is the way in which he without question or hesitation hearkened to Jehovah’s command to sacrifice his son of promise, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). Abraham, however, also faltered on occasion, for instance, by twice practicing the deception that Sarah was not his wife (Genesis 12:11-19; 20:1-16). This deception was also later practiced by Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26:6-11). From Abraham one learns not only of unparalleled discipleship, but such discipleship can also weaken. Good discipleship as well as faltering discipleship can affect one’s children; Isaac demonstrates both of these points.

Joseph is another Bible character who did an especially fine job of exemplifying faithful discipleship (Hebrews 11:22). His reaction to the several misfortunes that confronted him was without doubt uncommonly godly. Who else would, when sold into slavery by his brothers, later in life interest himself in their welfare? Who else when lifted from the depths of prison to great positions of authority would not likely misuse his power and abuse those who had wronged him? How many men would not forsake the God by whom they doubtless would have believed forsook them if they were to suffer as Joseph did? The crown of Joseph’s life of unblemished discipleship was his confidence in the promise of God to remove the people of Israel from Egypt to the land of promise (Genesis 50:24-26). Truly Joseph knew *the cost of discipleship* and the uplifting and enduring security that were afforded him through his heavenly hope.

Outstanding Demonstrations of Discipleship under Judaism

Moses lived under both patriarchy when God spoke through the fathers of the families and Judaism when God spoke through Moses and the prophets. He was a disciple upon whom the Lord could depend, and yet he too faltered from time to time. Moses was a servant of God for whom Christians should have empathy since we also sometimes serve our God well, although at other times we may serve him poorly.

One of the most important decisions Moses ever made was “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). How many men would instead have chosen to remain in the king’s palace wherein they could have enjoyed every pleasure afforded the rich and the powerful? That highlight in his life signaled to God that Moses was a disciple who was willing to pay *the cost of discipleship*. However, Moses sometimes forgot his discipleship. (1) On occasion he tried to do great and otherwise praiseworthy tasks **without God** (i.e., the liberation of his brethren from slavery, Exodus 2:11-12). (2) On another occasion he endeavored to decline the will of God for him, by which he angered God (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13-14). (3) Moses also sinned for which reason he was forbidden to enter Canaan (Numbers 20:7-12; Deuteronomy 32:48-52).

Are not today’s disciples often like Moses? Do we not sometimes try to do great things **without God’s** help? At other times do we not sometimes ask God to send somebody else to do His will? Is it possible that our actions sometimes anger God? Which disciple does not ever sin? Truly, the strengths and weaknesses that were characteristic of Moses were not unique with him, but they are our strengths and weaknesses as well. Therefore, we should learn from the successes and failures of such notable characters as Moses and his contemporaries (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

Rahab was a remarkable woman who by harboring the Jewish spies saved her household from destruction and death that befell Jericho and its inhabitants (Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2:1-22). In this instance, a heathen woman in a sense chose to become a disciple or a servant to the true God, though in so doing she could have greatly imperiled her life among her people. The religion of her people and

even of her ancestors (mother and father, included), was not good enough for Rahab. Similarly, every accountable soul today should choose to serve the true and living God in spite of personal peril or potential losses (Matthew 19:29) and regardless of in what or in whom his ancestors may have placed their faith (Joshua 24:15). The only way in which one can learn about Almighty God today is to diligently address the inspired, written Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21) through study (2 Timothy 2:15).

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and of Barak and of Samson and of Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets” (Hebrews 11:32). What was true with the inspired writer of Hebrews is also true regarding this study; time and space for the examination of this topic are limited. Remember, though, the often courageous (1 Kings 18:17-40), but sometimes fearful (1 Kings 19:1-18) Elijah. Think also of Jeremiah, a prophet of valor, who proclaimed God’s Word constantly in spite of the frequent persecutions that such preaching brought upon him (Jeremiah 26:8; 37:11-16; 38:6). Reflect for a moment upon Nehemiah from whom even present day disciples can learn to work for the Lord. Many sermons entitled “The People Had a Mind to Work” (Nehemiah 4:6) have been preached from the biblical account to encourage brethren to serve the Lord more actively. Esther also demonstrates effective discipleship and further indicates that the individual child of God **can** make a significant difference (Esther 4:14).

John the Baptizer, along with Jesus Christ and His apostles, though appearing in the Gospel records that are grouped with the New Testament, really lived under the twilight of Judaism. John came in the spirit of Elijah and preached repentance and remission of sins (Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:4; Luke 1:17). He condemned sin, and by the authority of Heaven demanded repentance. It was for such bold preaching to commoner and especially to King Herod that he lost his life (Matthew 14:1-12). Before the Limited Commission, Jesus warned His apostles about the persecution that would be their lot for preaching righteousness (Matthew 10:16-28). Jesus Himself showed disciples of all time **how** and **to what extent** children of God may be called upon by the world to pay *the cost of discipleship* (1 Peter 2:19-24). *The cost of discipleship* may often be less, but it can be no more than the cost incurred and gladly paid by John the

Baptizer, the early disciples and our dear Lord Jesus (Acts 5:40-41; 2 Corinthians 12:15; John 6:38-40).

Conclusion

The Old Testament is by itself an exceedingly wealthy treasury of knowledge about discipleship and its costs. Therein it portrays successful as well as failed discipleship. *The cost of discipleship* is neatly summarized in the conclusion of Hebrews 11. The costs painfully experienced and faithfully endured by Old Testament disciples included:

...the mouths of lions...the violence of fire...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, and yes, of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two...slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented...They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:33-38)

Is it not now an appropriate time to assess our discipleship and evaluate the price that we are willing to pay? Praise God that we are not now called upon to suffer as adversely as our predecessors! Why, then, do Christians often exhibit a lack of willingness to endure the costs of contemporary discipleship? What *cost of discipleship* would be too high to pay by any faithful disciple? Are you willing to pay the cost, come what may, to be a truly faithful disciple of the Lord? Costs will come (2 Timothy 3:12)!

Thought Questions

1. List several Old Testament characters who exemplify faithful discipleship. Parallel to that list, name several Old Testament characters who better exemplify failed discipleship. Circle the names of those in the first list about whom the Bible records moments of faltering discipleship.
2. Describe the circumstances and the effect of faltering discipleship identified in your answer to the above question. What do moments of failure in otherwise faithful discipleship indicate to you? Whose discipleship may falter?
3. List some of the costs of discipleship that were endured by faithful disciples of the Old Testament. Additionally, correlate

the names of some of those Old Testament characters with the costs they had to endure.

4. Describe the occasions for which Old Testament faithful disciples were often buffeted.
5. What has changed between the first four thousand years and the present? Why does *the cost of discipleship* today often appear to be less grievous to the faithful than it was thousands of years ago? Has God changed? Has His attitude toward sin changed?
6. What socioeconomic positions did faithful Old Testament disciples occupy? Were only the poor, itinerant disciples outspoken? Who is supposed to be faithful, though he may suffer personally and lose all his possessions?
7. What is the difference between Patriarchy and Judaism? What is the difference between Old Testament and New Testament times? Is it likely that God would require His faithful disciples to endure less if necessary now than He required of His Old Testament disciples?
8. What do you suppose is the highest expression of God's approval of discipleship ever demonstrated to date?
9. What are some of the most frequent hindrances to faithful discipleship today? What are some of the characteristics or telltale signs of faltering or even failed discipleship in our generation?
10. How are the challenges that affect discipleship today alike or different from the challenges to Old Testament discipleship?

Chapter 9:

Blessings of Discipleship

(Ephesians 1:3)

All Spiritual Blessings Are in Christ

There are blessings in which both the sinner and saint bask, courtesy of the grace of Almighty God (Matthew 5:45). These blessings are physical in nature and come upon all men alike. However, the Christian enjoys additional blessings over the sinner. These latter blessings are spiritual instead of physical and superior to the physical blessings in which all men participate. Furthermore, the extra blessings bestowed upon Christians are given to Christians exclusively. No one outside of Christ can acquire these special blessings from above!

Souls outside of Christ may legitimately attribute their physical blessings to God. All men should realize that the natural blessings in which we all share owe their origin not to chaotic accident but to the design of our Creator. Non-Christians, however, are wrong when they claim to possess spiritual blessings and attribute their possession of spiritual blessings to God! Even brethren saying that non-Christians or denominational people possess the spiritual blessings only attainable in Christ does not make it so! Brethren have neither business instructing denominational churches how to grow nor extending to them open fellowship with the spotless bride of Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 decidedly identifies the location of **all** spiritual blessings. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**.” The “us” of verse three are the “saints” and “faithful in Christ Jesus” of Verse One. Christians or disciples of Christ, therefore, are the exclusive recipients of “every spiritual blessing”; Christians **alone** enjoy **all** spiritual blessings! The beneficiaries of spiritual blessings are further said to be “in Christ.”

Hence, no one who is neither a saint, faithful in Christ Jesus nor in Christ possesses spiritual blessings. Only souls who are saints, faithful in Christ Jesus **and** in Christ truly receive spiritual blessings.

This context also identifies God as the benefactor responsible for the bestowal of spiritual blessings. Since these blessings originate with and are given by God, it is only reasonable that the same be received according to the precise conditions that He may (and did) enumerate. The condition upon which souls receive spiritual blessings is being “in Christ.” Though mortals may try to devise other ways to get “into Christ,” only in two passages does the Bible announce the one way to do so, through baptism (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3). Consequently, the many, even sincere, religious people throughout the world who have not been baptized (immersed) in water for the remission of sins or to have their sins washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16) are not in Christ and are not the recipients of spiritual blessings.

The forgiveness of past sins must be the chief blessing. Baptism is not only the point at which one gets “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), it is also the point at which one’s past sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Additionally, baptism is the point at which one comes in contact with the saving blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 1 Peter 1:18-20). Christ’s blood was shed in His death upon the cross (John 19:34), and baptism places one into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

All blessings indicate a multiplicity of blessings are afforded to the Christian. So complete is the divine package of blessings bestowed upon the children of God that it neither lacks anything nor can it be improved upon. No more blessings could possibly be added to what God has already given the Christian. It is, then, the noble task and lifelong prescription of the disciples of Christ to identify and culture these heavenly blessings that they might better appreciate and more appropriately apply them.

Divine Comfort and Consolation Number among “Every Spiritual Blessing”

In spite of one’s familiarity with the Scriptures, he may feel somewhat unable to comfort even brethren satisfactorily when catastrophe or death buffets them or their loved ones. Truly, of

himself, neither the preacher nor any other man can effectively console the despairing saint when death visits family members. There is, however, a divine comfort and consolation that can do more to uplift the child of God from his sadness than anything an army of well-meaning people could possibly say. This comfort and consolation afforded the children of God is superior to and more effective than all earth's kind intentions and good will.

Second Corinthians 1:3-4 names God as the source and origin of divine comfort. The disciples of Christ further learn from God how to comfort others more effectively. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." The context in which these verses appear deals primarily with comfort and consolation from persecutions and afflictions that are peculiarly incurred by Christians as they earnestly strive to serve the Lord (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

There are, though, also other areas in life in which the children of God are afflicted for which cause they should turn to God for the application of divine comfort. The Lord invites all men to find refuge in Christ, wherein are all spiritual blessings and divine comfort (Matthew 11:28-30). Paul affirmed again in the Roman epistle that our Heavenly Father is the God of comfort or consolation (Romans 15:5), and in the preceding verse he indicated that this consolation is available to Christians through the Scriptures or the Bible.

Divine comfort abounds from the basis of peace with God, which occurs in Christ (Romans 5:1). The peace that Christians know with God, their fellow men and themselves rests upon fellowship with God and the children of God. Hence, there exists unity and single-mindedness among brethren and between faithful brethren and God (Romans 15:5-7). Comfort and peace cause Christians to maintain a valid hope regarding eternity with God (Romans 5:2).

Divine peace is only possessed by those who are spiritually minded (Romans 8:6); to be carnally minded and yet in the world deprives one of this precious blessing. Our Heavenly Father, called the God of hope, is said to fill the child of God with joy and peace

and to cause him to abound in hope (Romans 15:13). The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22) and is portrayed as a worthy acquisition by Christians.

According to Colossians 1:20, the Christian peace is attained through “the blood of His cross.” Recall that the blood of Christ is reached only through being baptized into his death wherein the blood was shed (John 19:34; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). This peace, which when sought leads one to accept the Gospel call, should also continue to rule the Christian’s heart (Colossians 3:15). “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way...” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Hope Is a Blessing in Christ

The unique hope that the child of God knows is inseparably linked with other heavenly qualities; see above. Passages about peace (Romans 5:1-2; 15:13) also address hope. In discussing the Christian hope, the natural relationship between these qualities will become even more apparent.

First Peter 1:3, 13 and 21 show conclusively that Christian hope looks with anticipation and desire for the Second Coming of our Savior. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). The souls who can legitimately cherish within themselves this hope are described thus:

Who by Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls through obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides for ever. (1 Peter 1:21-23)

The Christian hope is effected by the resurrection of Christ and belief in God who raised Him. This hope rightfully belongs only to those who have been begotten of God (verse 3) through their faith in God (verse 21), have purified their souls in obeying the truth (verse 22), have a fervent love for brethren (verse 22; John 13:34-35) and have been born again by obeying the Word of God (verse

23; John 3:3-6). The heart of the Gospel message appeals to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, which believing Christians have hope (expectation and desire) regarding eternity and long for the return of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 19-23; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Hope is something in which Christians are to rejoice (Romans 12:12) and that can be found in the Scriptures (Romans 15:4). Hope is, further, the quality by which faithful disciples can endure unto the end in spite of present tribulations and temptations (Romans 5:2-5). Hope saves or helps to preserve the child of God until his death or the return of the Lord (Romans 8:24; Hebrews 3:6; 6:11). First Corinthians 13:13 teaches that faith, hope and charity (love) are the companions and wise counselors that God determined should accompany the Christian in his earthly pilgrimage to the promised land, instead of the temporary miracles of which the infant church often boasted. Hope, not the miracle, is the anchor of the soul by which the children of God can safely moor themselves and avoid the rocky destruction and death into which Satan would otherwise steer them (Hebrews 6:19).

Christian hope pertains to eternal salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8) or eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7), which is attainable only in Christ (1 Timothy 1:1). Hope of spending eternity with God abides within the child of God and serves to purify or to keep him holy so his heavenly anticipation may someday become reality (1 John 3:2-3; 1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, Christian hope is indispensable to every soul who possesses the aspirations of pleasing God in this life and enjoying the presence of God in Heaven forever.

If it were not for the grace of God, Jesus would never have come to earth and would never have shed His blood for the sins of the world. Had it not been for the grace of God, there would have been no Gospel, which through obeying sinners can have divine comfort and hope of eternity. However, because of God’s love and grace, men may with confidence possess hope (Hebrews 10:19-24) when they obediently comply with the conditions of salvation found in the Gospel. “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and

good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Conclusion

Admittedly, there are likely many more spiritual blessings than have been noticed herein that can be found in God’s Word by the diligent study of the Christian. Each child of God should determine to search them out and enjoy them as only Christians can. Furthermore, spiritual blessings should be more earnestly sought than the physical things of which we all have need and regularly receive of God (Matthew 6:33). Spiritual blessings, like wonderfully pretty flowers, need to be carefully nurtured, for when either are neglected, their delicate beauty withers away.

God wants His children to have spiritual blessings; He has reserved them exclusively for His faithful disciples. Additionally, these blessings can enrich life now and greatly contribute to eternal happiness. Every Christian, therefore, should covet, secure and use the spiritual blessings that God has provided for him.

Thought Questions

1. Describe the blessings that fall upon all men alike.
2. List some of the blessings that are reserved exclusively for the children of God. The suggestion of additional blessings to those mentioned in the lesson is highly encouraged; remember to document them with Bible references.
3. Who is entitled to receive spiritual blessings? Who is excluded from the reception of spiritual blessings? At what point may one pass from the group of souls who are not entitled to spiritual blessings to the group of souls who are?
4. What blessings are men commanded to seek? In what way can men with God’s approval seek blessings? To what source must modern men appeal to find blessings?
5. Which blessings might one receive while living in rebellion to God’s Word? Which spiritual blessings might one enjoy, though he is outside of Christ?
6. Granted that the Bible teaches that spiritual blessings are reserved for those in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), can denominational people possess spiritual blessings? Can one who is neither a member of a denominational body nor the church of Christ

possess spiritual blessings? Can wayward Christians fully enjoy spiritual blessings?

7. Is it necessary for one to be a member of the church of Christ (Romans 16:16) to have spiritual blessings? Thoroughly explain and biblically document your answer.
8. Compare the blessings of discipleship with the costs of discipleship. Do they balance or does one outweigh the other? List some costs and blessings of discipleship.
9. Compare physical blessings with spiritual blessings and describe the extent to which each may affect one's life. Which blessings have the capacity to more greatly affect men?
10. For what reasons do you suppose that men have such difficulty in properly appreciating spiritual blessings over physical blessings? In what ways might Christians more effectively seek, secure and use spiritual blessings? What hindrances if removed would greatly aid the children of God in seeking spiritual blessings foremost and seeking physical blessings afterward?

Chapter 10: Spiritual Immaturity

(Hebrews 5:11-14)

Who Are the Spiritually Immature?

Undefined, spiritual immaturity can only be regarded as abstract terminology with a mysterious, unknown meaning. However, the definition of spiritual immaturity is essential to the topic of efficacious discipleship. Further, it is imperative that once spiritual immaturity is biblically defined that the definition be universally applied throughout the church to identify those who are spiritually immature. For if the spiritually immature do not know they are immature, how can they be expected to mature? If the immature do not mature, how can the church be expected to prosper? This chapter will undertake the establishment of a biblical definition of spiritual immaturity and assess ways in which the disciples of Christ can become more mature and, hence, more useful to the church of the Lord.

The apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for their spiritual immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and identified the primary characteristics of their spiritual deficiency.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food: for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

By their strife, envy and divisions, it was apparent to the apostle that the Corinthians were not properly attuned to spiritual matters. They were acting as though they yet walked in the sin-darkened world, though they had obeyed the Gospel and were supposed to be

walking in the light. Consequently, Paul was only able to convey the simplest of teachings to these saints. The Corinthians were as immature as newborn babies. As newborns are incapable of providing for themselves and unable to contribute to their families' welfare, neither were the Corinthians then a credit to the family of God. Instead, they were liabilities because of their spiritual immaturity.

From this context and Hebrews 5:11-6:2, it is obvious that it is God's will that His children should not forever remain babes in Christ and spiritually immature. The writer of Hebrews penned:

...we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

The epistle of Hebrews was of a general nature and was addressed especially to Jewish Christians. Therefore, it appears that the problem of spiritual immaturity was widespread in the church of the first century. Spiritual immaturity may no less affect the church today. So, the inspired diagnosis and treatment of the problem in the first century should be able to satisfactorily remedy the same problem of spiritual immaturity now. "If not, why not" seems appropriate here.

The context of Hebrews before us does not condemn spiritual immaturity as such, but only spiritual immaturity that persists beyond due time. When one is born again, he becomes a babe in Christ, for which immaturity no condemnation is deserved. One could not be rightfully expected to be otherwise. However, from that time forth, babes in Christ are supposed to nourish themselves regularly with the Word of God. By so doing, immature Christians

can become more mature and better able to nourish themselves with meatier matters of the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, Peter wrote, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Who are the spiritually immature? The spiritually immature are Christians who (1) **are** worldly, envious, factious, divisive, hateful, deceitful, hypocrites and evil speakers (1 Corinthians 3:1-4; 1 Peter 2:1-2); (2) **are not** apt to teach (2 Timothy 2:2, 24; Hebrews 5:12); (3) **are** limited in their knowledge of the Gospel of Christ to the fundamentals (Hebrews 5:12; 6:1-2) and (4) **are not** able to satisfactorily discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). Furthermore, Christians who will not worship God regularly with the saints (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42), are not students of the whole counsel of God (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 20:27), refuse to assist the church in its mission (1 Corinthians 14:12; Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 6:10) or are immoral (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) are also spiritually immature. The spiritually immature are liabilities instead of assets to the church while they remain immature. It is, therefore, needful for the individual disciple and the church that Christians mature in due time.

The Christian Graces Contribute to Spiritual Maturity

The addition of the so-called Christian graces of 2 Peter 1:5-11 to the faith of babes in Christ will greatly contribute to their spiritual maturity. In this context, Bible faith is the basis or the foundation on which other godly characteristics rest. Any faith that has not led one to obey the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel is not a Bible faith and is incapable of satisfactorily supporting the Christian graces.

Christians are here encouraged to add virtue or holy courage to their Bible faith with diligence. Without this virtue one will lack the stamina or fortitude to fight a good fight in the spiritual war that relentlessly rages between spiritual darkness and light (2 Timothy 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Timothy 1:18).

Next, Christians are exhorted to possess a knowledge of spiritual things. Although one may know much among men and have the

degrees to attest to the same, unless he is knowledgeable about the Bible, he is spiritually under educated! Worldly knowledge and wisdom **alone** are useless companions in the earthly pilgrimage (1 Corinthians 1:18-27; 3:18-20).

The disciples of the Lord are also urged to attain temperance or self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7). The Christian graces enable the mature disciple to be fruitful or useful in the church, and if he continues in the same, they pave his way into the eternal, heavenly kingdom of the Lord (2 Peter 5:8-11). Children of God lacking the Christian graces have forgotten the meatier matters of the Gospel and need to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God (2 Peter 1:8; Hebrews 5:12).

The Gospel Armor Contributes to Spiritual Maturity

Ephesians 6:10-18 addresses the spiritual warfare in which all accountable souls necessarily participate. This context instructs Christians how they may serve in the army of the Lord and be victorious over the forces of sinful darkness. Without the Gospel armor, no disciple is mature enough or able to resist the devil's assaults against him. However, wearing the Gospel armor, the children of God can withstand Satan's siege of temptation to sin (Ephesians 6:10-11). "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

To don the Gospel armor, one must first seek it willingly; no one has ever been accidentally or forcefully armed with the armor of God's Word. Too, the entire armor must attire the child of God so that he might effectively and safely do battle for God. The armor described in Ephesians 6 renders no protection from attack from behind; therefore, soldiers of Christ must always fearlessly face the attacking enemy. To retreat is not a valid option for those who salute the Christ as the Captain of their salvation!

The components of the Christian's armor by which he can maturely and confidently stand against the devil summarized are: holy truth, God's righteousness, the Christian's inward peace, Bible faith, true salvation and the Word of God. Which of these, if lacking,

would not detract from mature discipleship? Which of these, if lacking, would the disciple dare engage in spiritual combat?

The Fruit of the Spirit Contributes to Spiritual Maturity

The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) appears in contradistinction to the sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance contribute to spiritual maturity, whereas the sins of the flesh are an affront to Christian discipleship. Interestingly, the fruit of the Spirit appears to be sandwiched between the sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and other ungodly attributes listed in verses 24-26. The fleshly lusts, "...passions and desires...provoking one another, envying one another," are the items by which the apostle Paul was able to identify the Corinthians as spiritually immature (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and about which the apostle Peter warned babes in Christ when he encouraged them to mature (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Mature Christians, then, earnestly try to avoid the sins of the flesh, worldliness, strife, envy and similar spiritual deficiencies or sins. With the Christian graces, wearing the Christian armor and pursuing the fruit of the Spirit, disciples of Christ can more effectively discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14) and resist temptations in the strength of the Lord (Ephesians 6:10-11; Philippians 4:13).

Conclusion

The cost of discipleship includes the painstaking acquisition of the Christian graces, the Gospel armor and the fruit of the Spirit, without which no one's discipleship is complete or mature. However, even the spiritually mature never arrive at a point beyond which it is neither possible nor needful to grow further in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Mature Christians have mastered the rudimentary principles of the Gospel and now studiously ponder meatier matters within God's Word. Immature Christians (babes in Christ) are yet confined to the elementary teaching of the Gospel and are not able to handle properly other Scriptures. Babes in Christ are either those who (1) are newly converted or (2) have stopped feeding on the Word of God and have regressed to their spiritual

infancy. The latter group are the ones that were rebuked in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 and Hebrews 5:12-6:2.

Admittedly, there is no other way in which new converts can begin their Christian pilgrimage than as babes in Christ. No one should expect them to be spiritually mature upon their emergence from the waters of baptism. With the tender direction of fellow, more mature Christians and feasting upon the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2), babes in Christ can grow toward maturity. A real problem, though, arises when either babes in Christ are neglected by other more knowledgeable brethren or when other brethren are themselves yet babes in Christ and, therefore, unable to assist new converts in their growth. When brethren fail to grow to maturity, it is indeed a wonder sometimes that they can even teach anyone the plan of salvation. So, when babes in Christ convert others, there is no one to help any of the brethren grow toward maturity. How can a congregation be strong if the ones responsible for evangelism themselves are not mature Christians?

Spiritual immaturity is a peril that not only threatened the first century church, but it also endangers the church today. Babes in Christ can neither adequately discern between good and evil nor properly defend themselves from the wiles of the devil. Spiritual immaturity may lead individuals or even whole congregations into unfaithfulness, apathy, heresy or inactivity. Being on the church roll alone is itself of no real defense against Satan and sin. Spiritual immaturity in the church has a greater potential for harm than any terminal illness that buffets the bodies of men. Spiritual immaturity may easily prove to be the underlying factor responsible for a great host of souls being eternally lost in Hell.

What can be done? What should be done? Who should do it? The admonitions of esteemed and godly brethren should be heeded with urgency; namely:

We once were looked upon by our religious neighbors as a Bible tot'n, Bible quot'n people, people of the Book. We need again to study our Bibles with such diligence and regularity that again we might be observed to be that Bible tot'n Bible, quot'n people—people of the Book and familiar with the Book, the Chapter and the Verse.

All brethren should concern themselves first with their personal maturity in Christ, and second with the spiritual growth of their

brethren. Put away, therefore, strife and envy and dwell upon the Word of God! “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

Thought Questions

1. Who has a right to be spiritually immature? If anyone has a right to be spiritually immature, how long might this permission or right extend?
2. List some of the possible consequences of being spiritually immature. How can the spiritually immature be protected from the perils of their immaturity?
3. How important is it to identify the spiritually immature? What is likely to happen to the spiritually immature if they are never identified as immature? What may happen to a congregation or the church if the spiritually immature are never identified?
4. By what gauge can spiritual immaturity be determined? List some of the characteristics of spiritual immaturity.
5. How does the question of spiritual maturity (or the lack thereof) affect true discipleship? What bearing does the topic of spiritual maturity have upon *the cost of discipleship*?
6. List some of the biblical remedies for spiritual immaturity. Also, list some practical observations that, if applied, can help solve the problem of spiritual immaturity.
7. Describe the difference between the babes in Christ addressed in Hebrews 5:11-14 and those referred to in 1 Peter 2:2.
8. Why is it sometimes difficult for a preacher or a teacher to instruct his fellow brethren in the Gospel of Christ with much success? (See Hebrews 5:11-12; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.)
9. Describe the first principles of the Gospel, which when once learned enable Christians to go on to meatier matters. (See Hebrews 6:1-2.)
10. Since all human beings are fallible men, why did the apostle Paul rebuke the Corinthians because they were “behaving as mere men” (1 Corinthians 3:3)?

Chapter 11: Consequences of Rejecting Discipleship

(John 5:28-29; Romans 6:23; Matthew 25:46)

Introduction

The consequence for rejecting Christian discipleship is generically the same for either the unbeliever or the erring Christian. Whoever rejects or denies Jesus Christ and His Gospel will also be rejected by the Lord (Matthew 10:32-33). However, Scripture indicates that the circumstances for erring Christians will be worse in eternity than that of non-Christians, though they will also be lost (2 Peter 2:20-22). Generally, then, both unbelievers and erring Christians who in such reprobate conditions arrive at the Judgment Bar will be lost; the loss of erring Christians, though, will be greater! Hence, passage to Hell is confirmed and reserved upon one's rejection of discipleship, if in that spiritual condition one dies or the Lord returns.

Consequences of Rejecting Discipleship by Unbelievers

Unbelievers are those who have never obeyed the Author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9). Simply believing in the existence of God or possessing a purely academic faith does not constitute a Bible, saving faith or make one a believer. Believers must diligently seek God and conform to His Word (Hebrews 11:6; James 1:22-25). Bible faith must be coupled with compliance with the Word of God or “work,” as James put it (James 2:19-20, 24, 26).

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble. But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ...You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only...

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

In the Parable of the Sower, souls characterized as the “wayside soil” rejected discipleship by rejecting the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:5, 11-12). The consequence thereof was for them, and is for all who do likewise, eternal doom (Verse 12). Elsewhere, the Bible portrays the inordinate affection (covetousness) as the reason that an otherwise **good, moral man** with sadness rejected discipleship (Matthew 19:16-26). The Judgment scene, viewed through Matthew 7:21-23, pictures the saddest scene imaginable. Sincere, good, moral people who earnestly believe they served God throughout life will appear in the Judgment only to hear these words of our Lord and Savior: “...I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” No amount of pleading will at that late date change one’s eternity. Doubtless, there will be among that number many souls who thought they were believers because they had acknowledged the existence of God, although they **did not obey** the Author of eternal life! How sad in deed! It is not uncommon for the Bible to use the principles of obedience and faith interchangeably (Numbers 20:7-12). Also compare the KJV and NKJV renderings of Romans 11:30-31.

During one point in His personal ministry, Jesus condemned whole cities because they would not repent of their sins (Matthew 11:20-24). The inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum ignored our Lord’s calls to repentance and rejected discipleship, though Jesus performed many miracles in their midst. Hence, the Lord said that Judgment would be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon and even Sodom than for the cities in which He preached that did not repent. King Agrippa is another example of impenitence and the rejection of discipleship. Though he was taught personally by the apostle Paul and otherwise believed the prophets **and the Gospel**, this king is best remembered for his failure to comply with the same (Acts 26:26-28). “...You almost persuade me to be a Christian.” King Agrippa once rejected Christian discipleship and will, if he never afterward obeyed the Gospel and continued therein, be eternally lost in a devil’s Hell. Hell is the consequence for rejecting discipleship by unbelievers.

Consequences of Rejecting Discipleship by Believers

Believers are those described in Mark 16:16 who, hearkening to the Gospel (Verse 15), are saved. Among other things (enumerated in *Chapter 2, Formula of Discipleship*), true believers have been baptized or immersed in water to obtain the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). These believers are not advocates of “faith only” (James 2:19, 29, 24, 26). Further, these disciples or Christians “...were the servants of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18).

The Bible seems to indicate that there are degrees of punishment and that greater punishment is reserved for erring Christians who enter eternity in such a reprobate condition (2 Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 10:29; James 3:1). At least, one can be assured that the eternal loss of a disciple or a Christian is a greater tragedy than the loss of those who never legitimately entertained the hope of spending eternity with God. It can also be safely noted that Christians and especially teachers will bear heavier responsibilities in the great Judgment of humanity. Therefore, from either perspective, it behooves the children of God to make their “...call and election sure...” (2 Peter 1:10).

There are several ways in which a child of God can reject his discipleship. Verbal denial of Christ and the Gospel is not the only form of rejecting discipleship, though indeed it is one way (Matthew 26:33-35, 69, 70-74). Judas Iscariot uniquely illustrates the blatant rejection of Christ (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-49). In every case of the denial of Christ, Heaven responds in turn with a divine denial (Matthew 10:32-33).

One’s discipleship can in effect be denied by either acts of commission or of omission (James 4:17). In either case, sin not repented of leads to spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Sin, regardless of its origin, separates souls from God (Isaiah 59:1-3) and wrecks faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20). The nature of discipleship demands of one conformity to the decrees of the Master (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 John 2:5-6). When Christians begin to conform instead to the world (Romans 12:1-2; John 17:14-19) and become friends with the world (James 4:4), they jeopardize their discipleship. Whatever sins that

the children of God may tolerate in their lives dim the otherwise gleaming Gospel light that is supposed to radiate through them (Matthew 5:14-16). If not penitent, dimmed Gospel lights may rapidly become obscure or even be extinguished!

Incidentally, whenever one endeavors to alter God's plan of salvation or scheme of things, he is also rejecting discipleship. It is not the honest pursuit of Christian discipleship that leads men to reject the divine plan of salvation which is found in the Bible for a substitute of man's design. Though men try, it is not possible to separate Christ from His church; to proclaim "Jesus yes, but the church no" is a rejection of true discipleship. Neither is it acceptable before God for Christians to try to restructure the church or impulsively add innovations to it. This, too, constitutes a rejection of discipleship!

There is a point beyond which it is extremely difficult or impossible to recover one's discipleship (Hebrews 6:4-8; 1 Timothy 4:2). Therefore, every child of God should be careful not to court sin. "...Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9).

No Reason Modifies the Consequences of Rejecting Discipleship

The most severe test of discipleship may be the threat of personal harm or death. However, not even death is a reason for which the consequences of rejecting Christ are modified or lessened (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 2:10). If death is not a sufficient reason for which one might be excused from his discipleship, neither are even other physical persecutions that may befall the child of God (2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 10:21-22). All other temptations, then, to reject one's discipleship are also without merit in the eyes of God.

The appeasement of family members is not cause to abandon one's loyalty to the Lord; Christians are supposed to love the Savior foremost (Matthew 10:34-38). Further, no vocation is worthy to be placed before serving Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:18-22). Not everyone must give up his present employment to be a disciple of Christ, but no vocation should interfere with discipleship. In most instances one's occupation and discipleship do not conflict. However, in the case of the apostles, though their chosen livelihoods were honest, serving Jesus Christ led them to make their occupations subservient

to their mission as disciples and apostles (Mark 1:16-20; 2:14). Like them, we too must use our abilities, seize our opportunities and develop our potentials lest we appear blameworthy before our Master (Matthew 25:14-30).

The preservation of social, economic or political standing is not an acceptable reason to neglect or to ignore Christian discipleship (John 12:42-43; Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 23:13-24; John 19:12; Acts 26:28). There are no reasons for which any soul will be held guiltless for rejecting discipleship; all those who reject discipleship will be eternally lost! Therefore, every soul should pay *the cost of discipleship* while there is yet time (Ephesians 5:15-17).

A Point of Decision

The reader is called upon to note that this instant (and every subsequent moment of passing time) is the **point of decision!** Each accountable soul must either wholeheartedly accept the discipleship of Christ according to divine terms or reject the same for which God will reject him. To avoid this **point of decision** is merely to decide to reject the Lord; Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30). There is no middle ground, no fence to straddle and no exemption by which a decision about discipleship can be avoided. There are faithful disciples whose souls anticipate a heavenly abode in mansions above. **All** other souls are either unaccountable due to incapacity **or** are lost; which are you, now?

Just as Jesus gave five of the seven churches of Asia an ultimatum (Revelation 2-3), each congregation (and every child of God) faces the same divine ultimatum. Repent or else! Practice faithful discipleship or else! Unbelievers have no less responsibility to become and remain faithful disciples. Even before His earthly ministry, the Lord’s servants had presented similar ultimatums to the world.

Moses said, “**Choose life.**”

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is

your life and the length of your days... (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Joshua said, **“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”** “And if it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Elijah said **“If the Lord is God, Follow Him.”** “...How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him...” (1 Kings 18:21).

The apostle Paul wrote the following about choosing to serve the Lord.

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18)

God has done His part, and so have Christ and the Holy Spirit done their parts. The scheme of redemption and the doctrine of Christ are clearly delineated in the Bible for all to see. All that remains is for man to exercise his free moral agency or will (Ezekiel 18:20; 28:15; Deuteronomy 24:16) and to opt to become a disciple of Christ. Every accountable soul is faced with the choice between Heaven and Hell, life and death, reward and punishment, comfort and torment. Which choices have you made to date? God in a sense votes for us, whereas the devil votes against us. Man casts the deciding vote. With whom have you cast your vote? Have you been elected?

To choose to become a disciple of Christ is the greatest choice a soul can possibly make. The importance of this choice outweighs the significance of the choice of either an occupation or a spouse. To choose to be and to remain a faithful disciple overshadows and affects every other aspect of one’s life. To choose Christ as one’s Master is compatible with the reason for which we were placed upon the earth and the best purpose for which we should live our lives.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

As Christians order their lives after the divine purpose, they should endeavor to bear fruit (John 15:1-8; Matthew 7:15-20). Unproductive disciples will be burned. Similarly, congregations made of withered, fruitless Christians are lost themselves and contribute to the lost state of their fellow man. Every Christian needs desperately to be concerned about the application of the divine cure to a sin-sick and dying world. Each accountable soul is either part of the cure and solution to what most ails this world, or he is part of the problem! By our fruits we shall be known.

All souls have before them choices and responsibilities. If Christians refuse to choose life and congregations no longer follow Christ as head, both dead Christians and dead churches are in grave jeopardy. Seemingly dead Christians and dead congregations disgrace the blood of Christ and give the world reason to mock God. Instead, these Christians and churches ought to embrace the cross. “Then said Jesus to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24).

If we are going to profess Christianity, let's perfect it in our lives, worship and service! If we are not going to practice Christianity, let's not profess it! Let's be 100% Christian or none at all! Let's be 100% the church for which Jesus Christ died or none at all!

A Note of Caution

Though sometimes the church may **not** be as zealous as it once was and as it should be, an unbiblical fanaticism is neither warranted nor an acceptable alternative. For instance, cultic tendencies are unsatisfactory reactions to the apathy and the indifference of some churches today.

View with suspicion and caution the development among brethren of attitudes that: (1) apparently see others as undeserving of full fellowship before undergoing involuntary conversion to a more elite core of discipleship; (2) encourage the substitution of human principles for Bible ways—resulting in the undermining of

the authority of the Word of God on the topics of New Testament worship, church organization, church government, conversion, prayer, fellowship and discipline; (3) attempt to segment the local church into groups smaller than the entire corporate body (4) try to micromanage the minute affairs of one's private life.

When the church at Ephesus lost its first love, Jesus told those brethren to **repent** (Revelation 2:4-5)! Our Lord gave the same direction to the church at Laodicea, which was lukewarm, **repent** (Revelation 3:15-16, 19)! The churches of Christ do not need the reactionary extremism and vices characteristic of an unbiblical fanaticism. Weak, indifferent or apathetic Christians and congregations should instead hearken to the Lord and **repent**!

Thought Questions

1. What is the common consequence for both the believer and the unbeliever who reject discipleship? In what ways are the consequences for rejecting discipleship different for the believer and the unbeliever?
2. Biblically describe and compare an unbeliever with a believer.
3. List some of the ways in which one can reject Christian discipleship.
4. List some of those who rejected discipleship about whom one can read in the Bible. Note any of the stated consequences for such rejection.
5. Under what circumstances might it be extremely difficult or nearly impossible to restore one to discipleship? Cite appropriate Bible passages and elaborate.
6. What are some of the reasons men are likely to offer, either verbally or in action, for not practicing faithful discipleship? Which reasons will God allow to mitigate one's responsibility to be a faithful disciple?
7. What is the spiritual condition of one who is not actively serving Christ as His servant? Are accountable souls ever exempt from making the decision to obey and to serve the Lord?
8. Name some of the choices that confront every soul and involve the ultimate decision whether to be a disciple of Christ.
9. How important is fruitfulness to good discipleship?

10. With what fervor should Christians practice their discipleship? In what way(s) should Christians be able to balance their zeal between apathy and fanaticism? How important is it for Christians and the church to be balanced in practicing Christianity?

Chapter 12:

Militant Discipleship

(Acts 17:6)

Militant discipleship is depicted emphatically in both testaments of the Bible. That **passive discipleship** is displeasing to our Lord is evident from Revelation 3:15-16. Furthermore, neither does **fanatical discipleship** possess inspiration's stamp of approval (Acts 15:1; 3 John 9-10). Militant discipleship lies middle-range between the passive and the fanatical. Fruitful, militant discipleship, then, is a **balanced discipleship**.

As in the first century, our generation boasts of disciples, many of whom are passive Christians, a few of whom are militant disciples and some whose zeal overrides the authority and balance of the Scriptures. For instance, many are the elderships and congregations who are content merely to sit upon orthodoxy. Comparatively few congregations and their elders, armed with the sword of the Spirit, appear genuinely concerned about lost souls. At the same time, some other brethren have undertaken the intensified distribution of their own and peculiar brand of zeal. Militant discipleship is the medium and biblical stance between two extremes.

Old Testament characters bring to mind a militant perspective that has always been characteristic of God's most useful servants. Hebrews 11 appropriately portrays many Old Testament worthies in some of their most militant or active roles. Examination of the *Bible's Hall of Fame* discloses the activity with which they demonstrated their faith, often in the face of personal peril.

The New Testament also records a militant disposition with which the Lord's disciples demonstrated their faith. Remember how John the Baptist boldly proclaimed God's Word before the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 3:7) and even in the presence of a wicked king (Matthew 14:3-4). John was beheaded because of his militant discipleship.

Recall the earnestness with which the apostles in Acts 2-5 and Stephen in Acts 7 preached the Gospel. Their zeal was not hindered by the prospect of physical abuse or death (Acts 5:40-42; 7:58-60). In the face of great personal danger, they practiced militant discipleship.

The apostle Paul, even when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, was an exceedingly zealous man. Before his conversion, Paul vigorously pursued Christians unto their imprisonment or death (Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1-2, 13-14; 22:3-5, 19-20; 26:9-12; Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13). Paul said of himself, "...according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). Being a Pharisee was the epitome of the most intense Jewish zeal of his day. The apostle further wrote to the Galatian brethren, "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:13-14).

The identical militancy that he exhibited regarding the traditions of the Jewish fathers (Galatians 1:14), the apostle Paul applied to his Christian discipleship. The intensity of his Christian zeal can be evaluated by noting that he willingly ignored the manifold blessings and honors of his Jewish station in life (Philippians 3:4-11) and willingly suffered repeated perils and persecutions (2 Corinthians 11:22-28) to preach the Gospel. Beginning in Acts 9 throughout most of the remaining chapters of the Book of Acts, the militant discipleship of the apostle Paul can be easily traced.

Not only the apostles but other brethren with whom we are less familiar also demonstrated militant discipleship in the first century (Acts 8:4; 11:19). Besides the general reference to the scattering of the Jerusalem disciples (who "went everywhere preaching the word"), detailed accounts appear in the New Testament that depict militancy as a fundamental characteristic of discipleship in the first-century church.

The following names and references represent a fair sample of the militant discipleship chronicled in the New Testament. Joses (Acts 4:36-37); Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas (Acts 6:3-6); Stephen (Acts 6:3-6, 9-15; 7:1-60); Philip (Acts 6:3-6; 8:5-40; 21:8-9); Ananias (Acts 9:10-17; 22:12-16); Dorcas (Acts

9:36-42); Cornelius (Acts 10:1-4, 45-48); Barnabas (Acts 11:22-26; 13:2; 14:1; 15:12, 22, 35-36); Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); Rhoda (Acts 12:13); John Mark (Acts 12:25; 13:5; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philippians 24); Simon that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen (Acts 13:1); Barsabas (Acts 15:22, 27, 32); Silas (Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 34, 40; 16:1; 17:1; 18:5); Timothy (Acts 16:1-4; 17:15; Romans 16:21; etc.); Luke (Acts 16:10-17); Jason (Acts 17:7-9; Romans 16:21); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28); Apollos (Acts 18:24-28); Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19:9; Philippians 24; Colossians 4:10); Sopater, Secundus, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4); Agabus (Acts 11:28; 20:10-11); Mnason (Acts 21:16); Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2); Sosipater, Tertius, Erastus and Quartus (Romans 16:21-23); Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11); Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:15-17); Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25; 4:18); Onesimus (Colossians 4:9); Epaphras (Colossians 4:12; Philippians 2-3); Demas (Colossians 4:14; Philippians 24); Nymphas (Colossians 4:15); Onesiphorus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia (2 Timothy 4:19-21); Artemas and Zenas (Titus 3:12-13); Philemon, Apphia and Archippus (Philemon 1-2); Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12); and Demetrius (3 John 12).

Particularly in the first century, to have one's name publicly associated with "the way" (Acts 19:23) or Christianity was of itself a deliberate and often dangerous demonstration of militant discipleship. The selection of these Bible characters and the placement of their names in a public record attests to the militancy of these disciples.

Jesus Christ is, of course, ultimately the supreme model of Christian zeal (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21-24). His disciples should imitate both the fervor with which He served the Father (Matthew 23:1ff) and His willingness to fulfill the mission on which God sent Him, in spite of persecutions and death (Matthew 26:39; John 6:38). Militant disciples today need to acknowledge the fervor and sufferings of Christ and first-century disciples. Further, faithful disciples of the present should endeavor to duplicate the zeal of the first-century church. Though, if first-century Christian zeal were uniformly duplicated throughout the church in this day, reactions in the form of some degree of persecution would be directed toward brethren now (2 Timothy 3:12). How well would the church in our day bear the first-century *cost of discipleship* (Matthew 10:16-39;

16:24-26; Luke 14:25-33)? Is the relative freedom from persecution enjoyed by the churches of Christ today any indication that the church **is not** as zealous as it was in former years?

Even the militancy with which first-century disciples evangelized the world did not then cause the entire world to be saved, but it “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Consequently, discipleship was multiplied (Acts 2:47; 5:14). There is no hint in the New Testament that the early church was content to **hold its own or keep house!**

The biblical formula by which the first-century church grew both spiritually and numerically is recorded in Acts 2:42. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The early church changed forever the world by these principles, **not in spite of them! The early disciples multiplied in direct proportion to their proclamation of the Word of God** (Acts 12:24)!

For what, brethren, are we waiting when denominationalism and those among us not true to the Book are making disciples of Satan? Is it not now time that we disciple the nations (Matthew 28:19) and otherwise turn this world upside down (Acts 17:6)?

Thought Questions

1. Describe the difference between militant discipleship and discipleship that might be legitimately called either passive or fanatical.
2. What was the purpose or thrust of the greatest activity among the churches of Christ in the first century? What is the mission of the church according to the New Testament?
3. How did the Lord view first-century congregations that abdicated their zealous discipleship? Is zeal or militancy a biblical and necessary quality of the church for which Jesus died?
4. What were some of the effects of militant discipleship upon the Christians and the church of the first century?
5. Who among the churches of Christ in the first century exhibited militant discipleship? Were the apostles the only ones who demonstrated such militancy? Were men of valor the sole participants in militant Christianity? Who today should demonstrate militant discipleship?

6. What were some of the effects of militant discipleship upon the first-century world? Were there both good and adverse effects upon the church then?
7. How well would the church in our day bear the first-century *cost of discipleship* (Matthew 10:16-39; 16:24-26; Luke 14:25-33)? Is the relative freedom from persecution enjoyed by the churches of Christ today any indication that the church **is not** as zealous as it was in former years?
8. What was the key to spiritual and numerical growth in the church of about two thousand years ago? Is it possible that what worked then will work equally well now? Why or why not?
9. With whom are the Lord's disciples competing as they try to execute the Great Commission? From what zealous source(s) do faithful disciples find themselves opposed as they go about to disciple the nations?
10. What is meant by the biblical remark that the early church "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)? Is it possible, and if so, how, to turn the world upside down today? Is it desirable to turn the world upside down today? Are any religious bodies, to some extent, turning the world upside down in our generation? If so, in what ways?

Chapter 13:

The Value of a Soul

(Matthew 16:26)

The value of a soul lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. Jesus Christ, our Savior, was sent to a sin-sick and dying world by a benevolent God “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The Lord’s mission was transferred before His Ascension first to the apostles within the framework of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and then to others (2 Timothy 2:2). The apostles were charged to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 18:19), and that responsibility has now passed from them to contemporary disciples, much as runners pass a baton to their fellow team members in a relay race.

It is a grievously sad day, however, when many children of God seem to care little for the welfare of their own souls and exhibit even less concern for the souls of others! Planet Earth is now home to several billion souls, the vast majority of whom are lost and will cross the threshold of eternity unprepared to meet man’s Creator and God. It is evident from Scripture, though, that all Heaven is keenly interested in the spiritual welfare of humanity. Also, godly disciples are concerned about the souls of fallen brethren and alien sinners in addition to their own souls.

A single human soul is more valuable than all this world’s wealth were every bit of it gathered together (Matthew 16:26). Man’s soul is so valuable that its purchase price is not silver and gold, but the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). The only source, therefore, from which the soul of man could possibly derive its incomparable value is from God Himself. Hence, each soul possesses an inherent value established by God. Thereby, every soul is priceless, even if men fail to realize this fact. There is no more valuable possession or commodity available to a man than his own soul. Furthermore, every soul is as equally valuable as every other

soul upon the face of the earth, irrespective of dissimilarities such as race, ancestry, social status or any other worldly distinction.

God Cares for the Souls of Men

God's intention before the creation of the world to redeem man once he fell away shows that God is deeply concerned about the souls of men. Before the creation, before Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, and obviously then, before man ever sinned, God saw through His foreknowledge that mankind would sin and be lost. He, therefore, devised a scheme of redemption for mankind even before man was created (Ephesians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Titus 1:1-3). (Though the word "world" may be variously interpreted, the *American Standard Version* of the Bible renders it in Titus 1:2 as "before times eternal.")

The same scheme of redemption in Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:1-12 is repeatedly called a "mystery." Verse 10 names the church as the institution by which this former "mystery" or Gospel is to be proclaimed. Verse 11 includes the "mystery" (Gospel) and the church in the "**eternal purpose**" of God. The coming of Jesus Christ to save lost men was in the "eternal purpose" of God! God planned for the redemption of man before man's fall. Only God's intense love for valuable, human souls would prompt Him to devise the salvation of His creation before the world began. God knew too well that His human creation would be rebellious, and He planned for its redemption anyway.

God further demonstrated His love for mortal souls by preparing mankind for the coming of the Messiah. Whereas God formerly sent His law to mankind, Jesus Christ personally brought the Gospel to earth from Heaven (John 1:17). At a divinely appointed time, after many centuries of interaction between God and man, the Savior came to earth (Galatians 3:22-29; 4:1-5) to reveal the "mystery" of the Gospel (Colossians 1:26). The ages preceding the Gospel Age were preparatory to the deliverance of the Gospel by our Lord; there were therein figures and shadows of the Gospel Age (Hebrews 9:9; 10:1). If the human soul were not so valuable, God would not have painstakingly prepared man for the reception of the single, holy and divine plan by which he could redeem his soul.

A third way in which God exhibited His supreme love for souls was by sending His **only begotten son** to earth to die for a sin-laden, unworthy world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10; Romans 8:32). Furthermore, while men were content in and enjoying the pleasure of sin and unconcerned about eternity, God loved men's souls enough to offer up Jesus for sins (Romans 5:8; Hebrews 9:28).

Jesus Christ also Cares for Men's Souls

Jesus also greatly values the human soul. Hence, He willingly fulfilled the mind of the Father and came to earth to shed His blood on the cross (John 4:34; 6:38). Every disciple should endeavor to possess the will or mind of Christ (1 Peter 4:1-2; Philippians 2:5), which mind will compel him to also fulfill the mind of the Father.

Second, the compassion and tears of the Lord also show His concern for souls. Jesus once grieved over lost souls in Jerusalem who would not hearken to the Gospel (Luke 19:41-42). Even when being crucified by those for whom he had come to save, our Lord expressed unparalleled love of souls; He said, "...Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do..." (Luke 23:34).

The final facet of our Lord's earthly ministry, the giving of the Great Commission, also shows divine care for man's most valuable possession, his soul. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8) represents the transferal of Christ's mission to save souls (Luke 19:10) to "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). The object of Christian discipleship is to save souls. Begun by the Lord, this mission of making disciples throughout the nations is so important that it has been willed to each successive generation of disciples to complete and fulfill. Herein do the value of a soul and discipleship merge. *The cost of discipleship* must be vigorously borne because souls are priceless.

Even the Angels in Heaven Are Concerned about the Spiritual Condition of Men

Angels rejoice when souls obey the Gospel (Luke 15:7, 10). By implication, the angels are grieved or sorrowful at the loss of souls. As heavenly messengers, angels have often been party to the redemption of men by revealing God's will to man. When men

obeyed those heavenly messages, they were saved in prospect of Christ's coming. (The primary function of angels was to serve as a medium of revelation of God's will to man, Daniel 10:1-21; Revelation 1:1.) At least once, an angel also directed a preacher to a lost soul who needed to hear the Gospel (Acts 8:26).

The Apostle Paul Was also Concerned about the Souls of Men

The apostle Paul acknowledged the inherent value of the human soul. All of his Christian life and godly service were predicated upon the value of souls. Therefore, Paul made many personal sacrifices and endured multiple afflictions to preach the Gospel to lost souls. Had he not been completely convinced about the value of souls, he doubtless would not have suffered as he did for the cause of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). The apostle to the Gentiles also willingly suffered the forfeiture of his station in life as a Pharisee and a Jew for the preaching of the Gospel to lost souls (Philippians 3:4-11). He counted as nothing his educational, cultural and birthright advantages because he valued the lost souls of men more than all these.

Like Christ, as the apostle Paul neared the conclusion of his ministry and life upon the earth, he passed the Gospel baton to others. In anticipation of his death, yet acutely aware of the value of souls, he charged others with the responsibility to herald the blessed Gospel of our Lord (2 Timothy 2:1-2; 4:1-8). The Great Commission that the Lord passed to the apostles is also the commission and responsibility of the contemporary disciple by inheritance. Every child of God who inherits the blessings of the Gospel also inherits the Great Commission that was given by the Lord, first received by the apostles and lastly given to each successive generation of faithful disciples.

Conclusion

God is concerned about and places an immense value on the souls of men. Yet, why do Christians and sometimes whole congregations appear to idly watch friends, neighbors and loved ones depart this life completely unprepared to meet God? Why do the children of God often appear to be little concerned about even

their own spiritual welfare? The answer may be that (1) **We do not really believe that non-Christians are really lost** or (2) **We do not really care enough that souls are eternally lost.**

Christians cannot really sense that non-Christians are lost while adopting the philosophy, “We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.” As long as the children of God believe that there are Christians in the denominations around us, the church will not take the Gospel to its friends, neighbors and loved ones.

As soul conscious Christians and congregations, we need to use every biblically defensible and expedient method (permitted within the perfect law of liberty, James 1:25) to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Whose soul are we allowing to go to a devil’s Hell because we have not told him about the Gospel? How many souls will we allow to die and go to Hell before the congregation of which we are members is willing to turn its community upside down?

It appears that many of God’s children have forgotten why they are really in this world (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) and have traded their souls away for a piece of this green earth (Matthew 16:26). This is true especially in materialistic western society. In order for a soul to be saved, it must concern itself with its own salvation (Philippians 2:12) and exhibit the same concern for other souls (Mark 16:15-16; James 5:19-20). Dare Christian disciples show less affection for lost souls than what has been exhibited by God, Jesus Christ, the angels and the apostle Paul?

Our friends, neighbors and loved ones are dying in sin every day; what are we going to do about it? Souls are at stake, including **ours!** Evangelistic success depends not on passive programs of evangelism organized by a local congregation or its preacher or elders, but evangelistic success begins with the **individual. That’s you and me!**

If contemporary disciples would properly order their priorities (Matthew 6:33), the Great Commission would be more expeditiously fulfilled in our time; the Great Commission was fulfilled once in the first century (Colossians 1:23). The construction of extravagant church buildings, family life centers, gymnasiums, tennis courts and the general introduction of entertainment and gimmicks into the church greatly and unnecessarily detracts from the completion of the most noble assignment known to man (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is a sad day when the inference by which we can (legitimately) build a meetinghouse to facilitate our edification (1 Corinthians 14:12; Acts 20:7) overrides the primary mission of the church—evangelism. **The church that is not evangelistic has no future and may presently lose its candlestick** (Revelation 1-3). Entertainment, the responsibility of the home, has no part nor lot among the God-appointed missions of the church. Though gimmicks may falsely draw numbers, **only the Gospel can make a disciple out of a sinner**. Many missionaries here and abroad who are dedicated to taking the Gospel to the lost could more readily preach the glad tidings of the Word of God if only more congregations were mindful of their charge to disciple the nations.

The Judgment Day is approaching, when some soul, maybe someone with whom you or I work or play, may point an accusing finger at you or me. Will he say that you or I neglected or even refused to tell him about the Gospel, though we knew he was lost? Will God also tell us to depart (Matthew 7:21-23; John 15:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11; Revelation 20:12-15)?

Thought Questions

1. From what source does the human soul derive its value? Estimate the value of the human soul.
2. In what ways has God the Father demonstrated His love for the human soul?
3. What was mankind doing or thinking while God was exhibiting His divine affection for lost souls?
4. In what ways did Jesus Christ show that He, too, is concerned about the spiritual welfare of men?
5. How is it now the responsibility of contemporary disciples to fulfill the Great Commission?
6. How can one know that even the angels love the human soul?
7. In what two general ways did the apostle Paul pay *the cost of discipleship* to proclaim the Gospel to lost souls (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Philippians 3:4-11)?
8. Do Christians today really believe that souls are lost? Are there Christians in the denominations? Is the church of Christ distinctive and different from denominationalism? If so, how?

9. In what ways may it appear that Christians are unconcerned about lost souls? Discuss how the churches of Christ could appear more concerned about lost souls.
10. What is the purpose for which man was placed upon the earth (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)?
11. What does the phraseology 'turning the world upside down' mean (Acts 17:6)? What would a local congregation have to do to turn the world upside down? What are some of the things an individual Christian or disciple can do to help turn the world upside down?
12. On whom does evangelistic success depend? Why do programs that are intended to evangelize the lost or fulfill some other biblical mission often fail?
13. What is more important, a magnificent church edifice or saving souls? How could a meeting place detract from the mission of the church? Name other popular practices within the churches of Christ today that detract from the mission of the church.
14. For whose soul must one have concern to himself be saved (Philippians 2:12; Mark 16:15-16; James 5:19-20)?

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God's Redemptive Plan

God's Part

Love (John 3:16)
Grace (Ephesians 2:8)
Mercy (Titus 3:5)
Gospel (Romans 1:16)

Christ's Part

The Blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)
Our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)

Holy Spirit's Part

Revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Man's Part

Bible Faith (John 8:24)
Repentance (Acts 17:30)
Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)
Obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9)
Purity (Revelation 22:14)
Faithfulness (Revelation 2:10)
Love (1 John 2:10)
Hope (Romans 8:24)
Works (James 2:24)
Endurance (Matthew 10:22)
Confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10)
Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)
Laying Aside Evil (James 1:21)
Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21)
Calling on the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:14)
Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)

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