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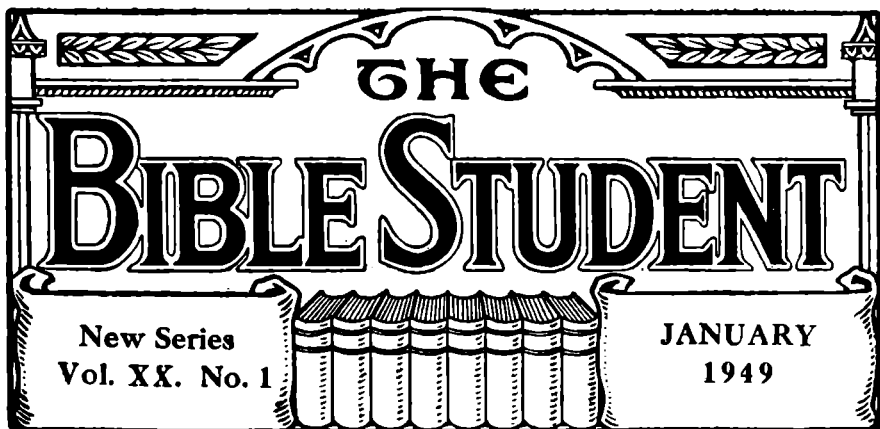
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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE DISCIPLE	1
THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS	9
NOTES ON HEBREWS	15
BIBLE MIRACLES	22
HE THAT IS WISE	29
DIVINE ELECTION	36
EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS	42
THE HITTITES	46

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THE DISCIPLE

BY THE EDITOR

Life is made up of certain *relationships*. "None liveth to himself and none dieth to himself." We are all "bound up in the bundle of life," and what we make of life depends on what we make of these inevitable relationships.

This is particularly true of the spiritual life. In fact, a Christian may be described as one who has *adjusted his relationships according to the will of God*. A happy and successful spiritual life consists in entering fully into the privileges and responsibilities of these divinely adjusted relationships.

Without making any hard and fast distinction it is helpful to indicate certain Scriptural relationships as follows:—

In relation to God we are called *children*,
In relation to Christ we are called *disciples*,
In relation to each other we are called *brethren*.

In all this the Holy Spirit is the Uniting Bond, the One who makes real to us the ties of relationship and all they imply. Hence the Apostle's injunction, "Let us walk in the Spirit", for it is the Christian's joy to fulfil the responsibilities attaching to each by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Our main object now is to fix attention on *Discipleship*—a subject that often fails to get the study it deserves. Many Christians tacitly assume that being "born again" is synonymous with becoming a disciple. They fail to see that there is a difference between them—as striking as the difference between an infant and an adolescent. Whilst both terms are applicable to the same individual, the one is an advance on the other, involving *growth*. So that, whilst every true disciple is of necessity a believer or child of God, not every believer has assumed the *responsibilities* belonging to the disciple. And just as it is possible to meet adults

who have "never grown up", it is possible to find Christians of long years who have never progressed beyond the stage of spiritual babyhood (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1).

Its Meaning

1. **The Meaning of Discipleship.** One of the special titles the Lord applies to Himself in the Gospels is that of Master: "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well for so I AM" (Jn. 13:13). "One is your Master even the Christ" (Matt. 23:10). As Master, He makes His appeal to every believer to follow Him in true discipleship. He took for granted that *all* believers would faithfully carry out the responsibilities of discipleship, as seems implied by the fact that disciple is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels. Later on, disciples were called *Christians* first at Antioch (Act 11:26).

What does the word mean? A disciple is a follower, a 'copyist' in the highest sense. The Bible word applies to one who believes Christ's doctrine, rests upon His sacrifice, imbibes His spirit, and imitates His example. A disciple not only accepts the views of the teacher but carries them out in practice. When we examine how Christ taught His disciples, we learn what He meant by discipleship. He taught both by *precept* and by *example*. His precepts were always with authority. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but *I say* unto you" (Matt. 5:22, etc.). The whole Sermon on the Mount is a wonderful example of Christ's teaching by precept. That Sermon is not for some future dispensation merely, it is for today. It contains some of the greatest lessons ever taught. It is practical morality in operation. True, no one can keep it except he be united to Christ in a *living* faith, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But for all *such*, it is the rule of life.. It is the *practice* of discipleship.

He taught also by example: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have *given you an example*" (Jn. 13:14, 15). Jesus suffered not only to redeem us from sin and its curse, He also "suffered leaving us an *example* that we should walk in His footsteps." He asks us to tread the path where and when He *leads* the way. The main emphasis of discipleship is on the habitual following of the Master's example and teaching. Because some failed to live up to their profession the Lord rebuked them: "Why call ye me Lord, and *do not* the things I say?" (Lk. 6:46). The same

searching question might be asked today, for there are numbers who have never gone beyond the mere infancy of spiritual attainment. Discipleship has been only a name, not a reality. Let us never forget, however, that we are not only saved by believing but 'saved' daily *by following*.

A very illuminating verse is found in 1 Peter 3:15 (R. V.): "*Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.*" Here the Apostle gathers into a sentence the whole meaning of discipleship. It is putting Christ into the forefront of life. The force of the word 'sanctify' is—"give Christ the heart's throne; exalt HIM *altogether* above everyone and everything else." Henceforth His will is to be supreme; His love the ruling passion; His service the sole aim; His teaching the one guide. "He must increase, I must decrease." In such abandonment the heart gladly responds to His call: "Take my yoke upon you and *learn of Me.*" "Sufficient (with how full a sufficiency!) for the *disciple* that he become as his Teacher, and the *bondman* as his Lord". Each of those sentences is worth years of study, a lifetime of obedience. Comparing the standard they set with the low level on which so many Christians are content to live today, it will be obvious that not *all* believers have entered into an understanding of either the privileges or the responsibilities belonging to discipleship.

Its Measure

2. **The Measure of Discipleship.** One of the aims of present-day religion is to make it as easy as possible for the aspirant to Bliss. People have so many things they are not prepared to renounce; if they are to get to heaven the "strait gate" must be broadened! But does that agree with the teaching of Christ?

There is a passage in Luke 14:25-35, that will repay all the study and prayer we can bestow on it. It concentrates into a few verses a large amount of the Lord's teaching concerning discipleship. More specially does it deal with the *demands* He makes upon those who would become true disciples. Let us examine the passage in some detail.

The Terms

The Lord first lays down the *terms* which those who would follow Him must be prepared to accept. Verses 26, 27 and 33 each touch a different aspect of one central truth, viz., *the necessity of yielding without reserve to the supreme claims of Christ.*

(a) The first is, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father . . . he cannot be my disciple." That touches human rela-

tionships—ordained and blessed by God. The main point of the whole passage is that Christ's claim to our loyal devotion must take precedence of all human ties. It must be Christ first, Christ last, Christ all between. The 'hating' is a relative, not an absolute, term. It is certainly one of the "hard sayings" of Jesus, and yet it states a principle that is of first importance. It challenges our obedience if we are to walk the way of the disciple. We may obey with all the greater assurance knowing that He who ordained these human relationships will never violate, nor call us to violate, any moral law governing every such relationship. We must never forget that other equally imperative word of Christ, "Thou shalt *love thy neighbour* as thyself;" and the words that *precede*—"Thou shalt love *the Lord thy God* with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Lk. 10:27).

(b) The second saying is, "*Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*" Whatever else it may involve, this goes to the root of the self-life, and bids us "put it to death". In the other Gospel the Lord adds the words, "Let him deny *himself*". The "himself", is the key to the passage. And when we begin to deny self, actively and conscientiously, we shall be surprised possibly at the 'cross' we have to handle! No one may determine for another just *what* the 'cross' shall be; but to the *seeking*, the *humble*, the *willing* heart Christ Himself will make it known. And that cross means the making (if accepted), or the marring (if rejected) of the whole spiritual life, for it is in such cross-bearing we find closest fellowship with Christ Himself.

"In every incident of the Passion the great Cross-bearer of the universe cries in our ears, 'Follow Me.' Live boldly, dangerously, completely, without fastidiousness. Accept the mud and the slime, the heat and the misery, the odious rebuff and the stinging rebuke. Be silent before your accusers. Endure and dare for My sake and the Gospel. Do not refuse to drink with Me the cup of failure which is often more bitter than the cup of death—the agony of mockery which precedes the agony of the Cross."*

(c) The third saying is, "*So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*" It may be that the hindrance is a stubborn, unyielded will. The

* *The Glory of the Cross*, by Dr. S. M. Zwemer.

man who says deep down in his heart 'I surrender all to Jesus—my money, my poverty, my fame, my pride, my emotion, my prejudice, my poor stubborn will'—will not go away sorrowing. There will flood his soul the peace that passeth all understanding. All this, so impossible in our own strength, becomes easy when the Holy Spirit is allowed full sway in the heart and life. Not only easy, but a *joy* that passes telling, even as the Christ Himself "for the *joy* that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." And whenever we put from us our idols, take up the cross He gives, face the stern call of some exacting duty, bear in silence some withering sorrow, surrender some cherished hope, step out into some cheerless future, for *Love's sake*, we drink with Christ His cup of joy. Sacrifice lies at the root, as also it is the fragrance of the blossom, of all spiritual fruitage. It is questionable whether we know anything of love except through sacrifice.

It is a fact, both significant and sad, that the Kingdom of Christ today is being progressed not by the multitude of churchgoers, but by the handful of disciples who remain at their posts in spite of great odds, though the world scorn them. To the faithful and fearless, "the way to the crown is by way of the cross". But so many shun that way—and yet hope to win the crown! Happy is he who has died to the glitter and applause of the world, taking his stand by the rejected Christ now, content to be numbered with the minority, in full assurance of a great day of recompense and reward.

Its Manifestations

3. There are also the Evidences of Discipleship. Christ specially referred to the three marks or signs by which a true disciple might be recognised, viz., *knowledge* of His Word, *love* to fellow believers, and *fruit-bearing*. All are mentioned in John's Gospel, and are worth studying.

(a) "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Ch. 8:31, 32). This reveals the disciple's need of dependence on the Word of God. "God's great matrix of character is His Word."

In this day when so much emphasis is placed on *experience*, this word of Christ becomes doubly necessary. But we cannot abide until we accept. We must be able to say, "THIS IS the *Word of God* for me—I accept it." Then we must *obey*; "If any man willeth to *do* His will, he shall *know* of the teaching." Know-

ledge follows obedience, not precedes it. "In other departments," says Pierson, "Men *know* in order to *believe*; in God's school we must believe and *obey* in order fully to *know*, for it is only as we practically test this mould of teaching by conformity to it, that we actually learn its perfection." Liberty from the bondage of the law of sin and of self will result. The true disciple is, therefore, a man of (1) obedience; (2) of knowledge; (3) of liberty wrought through the Word of God.

(b) "*A new commandment* I give unto you that ye *love one another*; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another*" (Ch. 13:34, 35). Love can be seen by all, knowledge by comparatively few. Love is, however, the Word hidden in the heart and revealed *in action*. Men will *know* that we know when they *see* we love. "Love is the substance of holiness." "Love *never* faileth." Love is not a sentiment nor merely an emotion, but a principle, unaffected by changing circumstances. It is one of the unshakable things that "abide" (1 Cor. 13:13). Hence the little word "as" ("that ye love one another, *as* I have loved you") betokens a *consistent motive*, a *constant measure* and a *corresponding* manner. Not only so, but the sole reason *why* we can love at all is because "HE first loved us". The R.V. of the verse in 1 John 4:19 omits the "*him*"—leaving the idea of love in its fullest breadth, without any definition of the object, whether of God or man: "We *love*, because *He first* loved us." (Read 1 John 4:7-21).

(c) "Herein is my Father glorified that ye *bear much fruit*; and so shall ye be my disciples" (Ch. 15:8)

Here we get the classic of *the fruitful life*. There is never fruit where there is no life. And yet fruit-bearing involves death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die (yields up its old nature and condition) it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." That is where fruit begins—with death. "I have been crucified with Christ." "They that are of Christ Jesus (in the abandonment of all that is of self) *have crucified* the flesh, with the passions and the lusts thereof." "The world hath been crucified to me and I unto the world." "Ye were also *raised* with Him." These and many other passages, form the sure foundation in *fact and teaching*.

The practical experience of it, the turning of the facts into life, is found in those two all-important words found in Rom.

6:11 and 12:1, *reckon* and *present*: "Even so *reckon* ye also yourselves to be *dead unto sin*, but *alive unto God* in Christ Jesus." "*Present* your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Both these words are necessary. The first challenges us to step out in faith upon the facts, viz. that we are delivered from the bondage of sin and law—"dead unto sin"; and, that we are in possession of "*newness of life*"—life in Christ *unto* God. The door is shut forever on the past and now we have entered upon a *new life* (not merely upon a new record or a new character, but *life*) spiritual and eternal, ever expanding in glory and power.

Then, there comes the voluntary handing over of the renewed being to the absolute control and service of the new Master. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice". It is an act of *faith*. It is a definite *act*, not a mere *thinking*. It is a definite act of the *whole* man, of the entire being, yielding up every member, including the mind, the affections, the will—body, soul and spirit. The outcome is fruit—"abundant fruit"—the productiveness of the normal spiritual life.

To one who asked him the secret of his service (may we not say the secret of his whole life?) George Muller said: "There was a day when I died, utterly *died*"; and as he spoke he bent lower, until he almost touched the floor, "died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will, died to the world, its approval or censure, died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends, and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

It must be noted that this fruit-bearing has a two-fold aspect. In Gal. 5:22, 23 we get the "fruit of the Spirit", produced in *the life* by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit—when He is allowed to work ungrieved and unhindered. This aspect is the first essential. The second is related to *service*, and is that referred to particularly in John 15. This fruit is dependent upon the branches *abiding* in the Vine. And it is necessary to remember that, the *only* use of the Vine branch is for fruit-bearing—a truth clearly stated in Ezekiel 15. So that where there is no fruit there is no usefulness. The branch is withered. Testimony and witness are dead. All such branches "men gather, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned"—for, as with the savourless salt, even men of the world have only the fire of ridicule and contempt for "spiritual duds"! Such, then, are the manifestations of a

true discipleship. Loyalty to the Word, love to the brethren, fruitfulness in life and testimony. "By their *fruits* ye shall *know* them."

4. How sustain the disciple-life? The simplest answer is perhaps the best: Live out the spiritual life in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one and only Secret. He is not only the Giver, but the Nourisher of the "life that is Life indeed." It is not so much *our* working and striving, as allowing Him to fill us, empower us, and use us. As someone has put it: "I *take*, He *undertakes*."

Ponder prayerfully some of those great passages in the N.T. which express the Spirit's ministry in, and through, and for the believer: Turn, for example, to that emancipating word in Rom. 8:2, "The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath *made me free* from the law of sin and death". The old life-bondage has gone, we are *free* to serve, thank God! "If we live by the Spirit let us *walk by the Spirit*" (Gal. 5:25; also v. 16). "The mind of the flesh is death; but *the mind of the Spirit is life and peace* . . . Ye are not in the flesh but *in the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:1-11). Take these truths to heart, make them your own in experience by the Spirit's help, for they supply the dynamic of all discipleship.

Let it be reiterated, discipleship is not for some few select souls—it is for *every believer* to practise and enjoy. We do not enter the path of discipleship by some mysterious rite, some secret formula. We *are* disciples by daily and closely following in the footsteps of the Master, and by the doing of His Will in the power of the new life in Christ.

This then is the great teaching on Discipleship. It is, after all, but the claim of Christ to pre-eminence in every department of life. And, "when by these means the Christ has come into the heart and life as its supreme Object, to Whom all things are gladly surrendered, there will be little difficulty in turning from that which tends to displace Him, or to lower or limit His royal authority. The persons, the places, the pursuits, the reading, the looking, the thinking, all that wars against Jesus Christ, that grieves Jesus Christ, and that tends to dishonour Jesus Christ inwardly or outwardly, will be discarded and renounced, and the victory will be a victory for Him and for the love that passes all understanding." May this be the happy experience of both reader and writer!