



Light from the Word

Knowing That We Are Christ's Disciples

How can one know if he is a disciple of Jesus Christ? What are the marks of a true disciple? While we recognize that this is ultimately a deep matter of the heart, and the result of our trust in the shed blood of Christ for our salvation, we also know that the heart is revealed in our lives. *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."* (Luke 6:45).

In its most basic definition, a disciple is one who follows the master. He mimics him and learns from him. He accepts instruction and grows to be more like him. Just as an apprentice is taught by the journeyman, the disciple is becoming fully conformed to the example and image of the one under whom he is in subjection.

The Christian's master is Jesus Christ. And He has left us with both instruction and example from His life upon this earth.

Perhaps foremost among the things Jesus said would mark us as His is our love for the brethren. The familiar words of the "new commandment" to love one another contain the convicting reminder that, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:35).

Further, God has given us the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit as a Comforter, Guide, and "earnest" (down payment) of our salvation – a token of His acceptance of us as His own. Jesus assured the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and that *"at that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."* (John 14:20).

Again, at the most basic, the disciple is known by his obedience to the lord and master. Jesus taught,

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21). To love Jesus is to follow Him. To follow Him is to keep His commandments. To keep His commandments is to gain victory over the world through faith, including the carnal mind and other fiery darts of the wicked (1 John 5:1-5; 1 Cor 3:1-4; Eph 6:16). Two examples revealing evidence of obedience to Jesus' commandments are to humbly acknowledge our errors (Ps 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9) and to forgive as Christ forgave us (Col 3:13).

The true disciple is not one who makes an expression of allegiance and lives in obedience for a while. Jesus taught the perseverance of continuing in His Word, even making it a mark of an authentic believer. *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:31-32).

Finally, the observable mark of the disciple is his bearing of much fruit to the glory of God. True fruit, born of a life surrendered to Christ and yielded to the guiding of the Holy Spirit, is seen of others and brings glory to God, not self. In the Sermon on the Mount, we are directed to *"let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matt. 5:16). And later John records, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* (John 15:8).

It is evident from the "new commandment" to love one another that discipleship is not merely an individual or personal matter. Indeed we find that the vineyard in which we work is filled with other workers with whom we are blessed to relate. The Lord places us *"in the body"* (1 Cor. 12:18) as it pleases Him and for His purposes. Those purposes

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are accomplished when we unite in true brotherhood; loving out of a pure heart fervently, yielding ourselves in submission one to the other, staying accountable, and bearing one another's burdens (1 Peter. 1:22, Eph. 5:21, Gal. 6:2).

Repentance is an essential aspect of discipleship. As we seek to continue in His word, we will find areas where we need to repent (to turn and change). Genuine repentance includes genuine self-denial, the absence of any rationalization, true sorrow for sin, open and full confession, complete restitution where possible, and restoration of joy and peace (2 Cor. 7:11). The one to whom God will look—recognize as His child through adoption and sonship of

Christ's sacrifice—is the one who is broken, contrite, and trembles at (has respect for) His word (Isaiah 66:2).

As we have already considered, the disciple seeks to be like his master. As such, God has called us to holiness, commanding us to, "*Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God*" (Lev. 20:7). Further, Paul writes, "*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (Eph.1:4). This holiness must grow and expand to every aspect of our life, as Peter teaches, "*but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;*" (1 Peter 1:15).

True disciples are living in this world but are not "of it." They understand their citizenship is in Heaven and walk as "pilgrims and strangers" in a foreign land (Heb. 11:10, 13). Sanctification—being separated and set apart for a holy purpose—will necessarily involve a clear distinction from the world. "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*" (2 Cor. 6:17). The separated disciple dies daily to the desires of the world, rather seeking fulfilment in the labor of the master. He is busy doing "*the Father's business*" (Luke

2:49) and knows both the duty and the protection of Jesus' prayer, "*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil*" (John 17:15).

The becoming like Jesus will happen as we benefit from the example of the "cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us by faith and help each other in always looking to Jesus, the only source of righteousness. "*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (Heb. 12:1-2).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
Romans 1:16