

Discipleship – Part 3

2 Peter 1:16-19

May we take a moment as we begin today and say again why we are taking this short side trip from our study of the Book of 2nd Peter and instead devoting our time to a study about “true discipleship”. The most prominent reason for our side trip is that God has, of late, been vigorously stirring my heart to learn and to know more about discipleship, what it really means to “be” a “true disciple”, how my behavior and my conduct should demonstrate that I am a “true disciple”, and then also, how I should be diligently seeking to “make disciples” of other people.

Part of my inspiration has also come from our reading and studying these words here in 2nd Peter. Here we find that “discipling” was exactly what Peter was doing with this group of saints in these churches, rehearsing over and over again with them that because they now have “faith”, they must not remain in their old ways, but rather, they needed to move on forward and learn more and more about this Jesus who has saved them, and especially, get to love Him with all their hearts, adding to their faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Folks, these words and these concepts are exactly how “true discipleship” is supposed to be worked out in your and my daily life.

So then, what exactly is the message that God has given to Peter to convey to us regarding how to be “true disciples”? It seems that it is two-fold, perhaps even three-fold, that much can be learned as we walk closely each day with Christ, just as Peter did, experiencing His presence and His passion to seek and to save those who are lost. And much can also be learned from these scriptures as we are told here in verse 19,

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19 (ESV))

But it is also clear that real and true discipleship cannot be limited to or reduced down to just diligent study and learning and methodology and obedience. Yes, those are absolutely necessary elements of discipleship. But there is another, more excellent element of discipleship that lies beneath and undergirds all of our learning and all of our obedience, the more excellent element of a personal intimate love relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Now that may sound strange to some modern day church members who prefer to think more on the order of Jesus simply being a “good teacher” and a “good example” to follow, and also of the bible as being just a good “set of instructions” for Christians to

follow. Yes, Jesus really was a good teacher and a good example to follow, the very best, and the bible really does have a wonderful collection of instructions. But there is so much more involved in being a “true disciple”.

And the Apostle Peter understood that so very well, especially after the encounter that he had with the Lord Jesus there on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, the encounter when Jesus asked Peter three times, “Peter do you love me”, and then instructed Peter to “Feed His Sheep”.

That encounter was a very disturbing one for Peter, and perhaps even a bit confusing. But Jesus wanted Peter to fully understand that before he (Peter) would be able to truly feed Jesus’ sheep, Peter would need to have a love within him that was far deeper than any measure of love he had ever known before, more love than he had for his friends or any other human being, a love that could only come as a gift from the Holy Spirit, “agape love”, love that was itself filled with the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And that was what Peter came to understand about Jesus and about being Jesus’ disciple, that being a disciple of the Lord Jesus was first, above all else, a deep abiding personal and intimate love for the Person of Jesus.

And that is the message that God has for you and me, that we are first, above all else, to have a deep abiding intimate and personal love for the Person of the Lord Jesus. And then, everything else that is called “discipleship” will be borne out of and flow out from that love.

And so, as we continue to pursue our study into the meaning of “true discipleship,” may I ask you and me, do you, do I, right at this moment, have a deep personal and intimate abiding love for the Person of the Lord Jesus, because we should, and we must! And we must pursue after that love relationship with all that we have within us all the days of our lives.

So then, may I repeat myself and say that for the purposes of this study about “true discipleship”, we will conclude that this is the “first part” of the understanding that we must hold tightly to in being a “true disciple” of the Lord Jesus. It begins first with “loving Him with a deep abiding personal and intimate love?” And then, everything else that is called discipleship will be borne out of and flow out from that love.

Our verse that we have been studying from John 8:31 . . .

³¹ . . . Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. (John 8:31)

Last week, as we delved into our study of these words, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples”, we asked first what was meant by “you are truly my disciples”, and what would be required from us to be a “true disciple” of the Lord Jesus.

We said that sadly not everyone who calls on the name of the Lord is a “true disciple”, that many who sit in the church pews each Sunday, even some who take active roles in church programs and events, are not real and true disciples. Unfortunately, they have not taken that necessary step of full surrender, leaving them as just “wannabes”, and “pretenders”, who might on judgment day hear Jesus say those awful words “depart from me, I never knew you”.

And we then also asked that each person examine their own soul carefully and make absolutely sure that Christ was truly their Savior.

And we also said that being a “true disciple” of the Lord Jesus did not take place at another time later on in their relationship with Him, but actually begins in the very first moment that we receive Him as Savior and Lord. This is a very important distinction that Jesus makes in this matter. Because being a “true disciple” is not something that we can set aside and work towards later on. Even though yes, we will grow over time in our knowledge and our love for Christ, being a true disciple must begin immediately, at the first moment of our salvation.

Why is this such an important point for us to consider? It is important because there really is a tendency within our souls to “segment” out the various stages of our relationship with Christ. In this matter of discipleship, our life and our lifestyles will, of necessity, change. There will be both “time” and “work” involved in being a disciple, time and work that we used to devote to other interests, some of which are no longer acceptable to the Christian life, time and work that now must be devoted to learning about Christ, learning how to be a “true disciple”, learning how to act and to behave as a disciple and then also learning how to go out and make disciples of other people.

And we must not make the mistake that so many Christians make in thinking that they have an option in this matter of discipleship. Folks, when we surrender our hearts to Christ for His salvation, we are surrendering into a whole new way of life. And to simply pray the “sinner’s prayer” and then not devote you heart to the next step of discipleship will not work out very well for you.

Jesus put it well when He said, “To whom much is given, much will be required.

Also, last week, as we began to address the expression within this verse, “my word”, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples”, we said that the intended meaning of those words is that it means the “sum total” of all that Jesus is, all that He has done, all that He has said, and all that He has taught. And that to “abide in My Word”, means to actually abide in Him, to abide “in Christ” Personally”.

But such a concept is often so very foreign to the rational and secular mind. And even for us who are devoted believers in Christ, these words are not easy to grasp. They are “mystical”, not “real”, at least as we understand “real” to be. They are “spiritual” words, coming to us only in and through the Person of the Holy Spirit, possible only as the Holy Spirit abides within us and enables our minds to comprehend what is taking place.

I know of no other way to say it, but to say that as we step “out of the darkness” into the light of Christ in our salvation, everything begins to change and to transition. We are no longer simply “flesh and blood”, but we also begin to live within a realm of “spiritual” existence, a realm where our soul and our spirit begin to unite with the very Person of Christ.

Again, yes this is all difficult to grasp, but it is nevertheless true. Listen for a moment to the way Jesus explains it in John 15! There, He said,

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (Listen) ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
(John 15:1-7 (ESV))

Here in these words, Jesus spoke of this mystical concept of “abiding” seven times. And again yes, it all does seem so foreign and mystical to us, but may I admonish each of us to begin from this moment forward to seek with all our hearts to lay hold of these words because they are “real”, “really real”. And if we are to be a “true disciple” of the Lord Jesus, this must take place. We must abide in Christ and in His word, no exception and no other pathway.

And as we abide in Christ and in His word, and as He abides in us, our discipleship then begins to transition on to the next step in our relationship with Him. Our “being” in Him begins to change and manifest itself in wonderful new attributes and habits and behaviors. The “Fruit of the Spirit”, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control begin to come to the surface in our daily lives.

And those “fruit of the Spirit” will not only be a wonderful blessing to us personally, they will be a blessing to everyone that we encounter. And as you well know, people who radiate these precious qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control, they easily attract the attention and favor of most everyone they meet. And those people then begin to “want” what you have for themselves.

And then, that step leads on to the next of “evangelism”, that of “making of more disciples” for the Lord Jesus.

We’ll talk more about this in the weeks to come, but may we close for today by repeating some of the things we’ve said? First and simply that if we really do want to have and to enjoy all the blessings that are ours in the salvation that Jesus gives to us, then we need to be willing to move on ahead and to join with Him in the plans and purposes that He has for us. He calls us to not only “get saved” but to also “be His disciples” and to do all of the things that “being His disciples” requires of us.

The ultimate question is, “Are you yourself ready to make that commitment to Christ?” You should and you must!

"Jesus said . . . 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" (John 8:31)