

# Discipleship – Part 4

2 Peter 1:16-19

Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them (His disciples) and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV))

As we have pursued this study about discipleship over the past few weeks, we have said that from the very first moment of our salvation, we “are” a disciple of the Lord Jesus. It is not some process that will take place later on, it is immediate. Yes, we do have a lot to learn and to know about this blessed Savior who has laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sins, and there are things that we must learn to do, and that must take place over time. But our “being” His disciple really does begin immediately.

I emphasize the words “be” and “being” because the “being” really must always come before the “doing” of our discipleship efforts. Why would that be so? It is as we have been saying and it is as simple as it seems. Before we can begin to tell others about our blessed Savior and Lord in a true and right and correct way, we must first take some time to really get to know Him ourselves, who He really is, and to love Him in a deep and intimate way.

Again, I know that my words are contrary to the mainstream preaching within most of our churches today. There is much preaching that advocates brand new Christians going out immediately and telling others about their experience of salvation and about the Lord Jesus. But folks, it is clear that in the zeal to witness, too often well-meaning, but unlearned new Christians will pass along faulty and wrong beliefs to other people, leading those people down errant paths, people who are vulnerable to wrong teaching.

And then, unfortunately, those other people will then pass on the same faulty beliefs and teaching to others and then others, and on and on. Please, it is so very important for us to first take whatever time is necessary for us to really get to know the Lord Jesus intimately, else we too can easily go astray in our efforts to witness for Him.

As we read the Book of Acts, we find that it was several years after his conversion that the Apostle Paul began his missionary journeys. Most bible scholars agree that during those intervening years Paul spent much time in study and preparation.

Again, yes, God may call and equip some new Christians to immediately be able to go out and begin witnessing. And it is good for all of us to immediately begin, in limited ways, to share our testimony about our salvation with others. But it seems clear from these scriptures that our first order of discipleship is to first begin to read and to study God's word with all diligence, learning the truths of God and getting to truly know and to love the Lord Jesus with all our hearts before we begin to try to teach others about Him. In other words, the first "disciple" that we need to "make" is our self! And yes, that does sound strange, but it is true.

And It is through the words of these scriptures that God is able to begin to make the necessary changes within our heart, the "rooting out" of the "old man" and the putting in of the "new". His word is able to carefully examine our hearts and to reveal to us the depths of the needs that are hidden there, needs that have been there for a long, long time, but have never risen to the surface, needs such as for that of "repentance".

Folks, you and I come into our Christian life filled with the residual effects of the debts and burdens of sins that plagued our old life of unbelief. Yes, in our salvation we were forgiven and set free from the penalties for those sins. But the residual effects of all those sins often do linger on for a long, long time, plaguing us and holding us back. But the Holy Spirit wants to lead us out of that mire and through whatever steps are necessary for "repentance", cleansing our hearts and unburdening our souls.

And again, He uses the powerful word of God to do it. Listen to these words from Hebrews 4!

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 (ESV))

This is real folks! It is through the pouring out of God's word into our minds and hearts and souls each day that this is able to take place. I cannot emphasize that enough. You and I must be diligent in our continual daily reading of these precious words, else the Holy Spirit will be hampered in His efforts to cleanse us from all those old habits and behaviors and mindsets, and we will not be able to be the disciples of the Lord Jesus that He calls us to be.

May I ask you? Do you have this commitment to Christ? Do you set aside time each day to read and to study God's precious word? If you do not, how can He do His cleansing work within you.

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May I plead with you to do this, to read and to study and to surrender your heart and mind to the Spirit of Christ in you, and He surely will do His marvelous work.

And as you and I study, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to tell us more and more through these words of scripture about who the Lord Jesus really is, and how we are to love Him with all of our hearts, and how we are to respond and follow Him in obedience.

And may I emphasize again that it is only through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in us that you and I are able to truly come to know the Lord Jesus and “be” His disciples. Jesus said those very words in John 16. Just before He was about to be crucified, He said to His disciples,

<sup>12</sup> “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15 (ESV))

The Holy Spirit does many things. He is wholly God, right along with God the Father and God the Son. But there is one very special thing that the Holy Spirit does, and Jesus speaks of it here. The Holy Spirit reveals the Lord Jesus to us. He takes who the Lord Jesus is and “makes Him known” to us.

May I stress this with all earnestness. People cannot learn of the Lord Jesus in any other way. No amount of scholarly reading and study, even bible college classes and seminary classes can ever teach us the truths of Jesus, unless those truths are powered by the omnipotent presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). And as these words here in John 16 tell us, one of the things that He does best is to reveal the Lord Jesus to us. And again He does it through our diligent reading and study of this word.

So then, as we surrender our hearts and our minds to getting to know the Lord Jesus, that is when the Holy Spirit will begin to do His most intense work within us. He especially begins to make dramatic changes within our character and our personality

and our behavior. As He indwell us, His manifest presence begins to come to the surface and show forth the personality and the character of the Lord Jesus, and that is best seen as “The Fruit of the Spirit”. His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control will begin to show forth within our own character and behavior.

And please may we understand that you may have been a really nice person before these changes began to take place. But these “fruit of the Spirit”, are not just nice moral attributes or some other human traits. No, nothing even remotely similar to these “Fruit” can be present within a person until the Holy Spirit begins to show Himself within our character. This is “holiness”, the “holiness” of Christ shining forth, and there is nothing else like it.

I cannot over-emphasize this folks! These are dramatic changes that take place within our souls, the “fruit of the Spirit” blessing us personally, but even more importantly, blessing all the people that we encounter.

And as we said in an earlier message, that is when opportunities begin to take place for us. Those who are watching us cannot help but observe and wonder at our changes. And as those precious qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control, are radiated out, attention and favor are gained. And that is when the Holy Spirit begins to secretly prompt the hearts of those who are watching to begin to “want” what we have for themselves.

And it is then that we are cast into the next step of our role as a disciple. We are, at that moment, a “witness”, a powerful witness. And that is when we can use the Spirit-filled words that we have been learning from these scriptures to perhaps walk with those other people through the steps of their own salvation experience.

I hope to dedicate a future message to the process and appropriate wording used by evangelists as they lead a person along the pathway to their receiving Christ as their Savior and Lord. But for the purposes of our study about discipleship, may we continue for today to consider the steps that follow along after a person has already taken that precious step of receiving Christ and are a new believer. They now need to “disciple” in their growth and knowledge of Him. Those words again in Matthew 28,

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them (His disciples) and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am

with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV))

With this command as part of our marching orders, how do we step on forward and begin to obey this command from Jesus? Our role must begin in the ordinary occurrences of daily life. Yes, we are members and in regular attendance at our church. And yes, we are involved in attending, and even perhaps teaching Sunday School classes. And yes, we seek out and find at least one weekly small-group bible study to be a part of.

All of these involvements give opportunity to "rub shoulders" with other believers, some of whom will eventually make it known that they are desirous of being discipled. They may not word their desires in exactly that manner, but discipleship is what the Holy Spirit is prompting within their hearts and we must be ready to recognize the opportunity. And it usually comes down to just the simple question to them, "would you like for us to begin meeting, perhaps once a week to study these scriptures together"?

And these same opportunities can come up in your workplace. Your co-worker may go to a different church, or perhaps not attend church at all. But they have watched your Godly behavior over time and they sense that you have something within your soul that they would like to have. And the Holy Spirit will prompt a conversation to develop between you and them, and you need to be ready to respond and say, "would you like for us to begin meeting, perhaps once a week to study these scriptures together"?

You may be timid and uncertain and reluctant thinking that you don't know enough about these scriptures to be trying to disciple someone else. And that may, to some degree, be true. But that too is the work of the Holy Spirit prompting you to move on ahead and to begin a more intense learning of these truths. Sometimes, you might only stay one week ahead of the one you are discipling, but it is what God is calling you and me to do and we must step on forward and do it.

One last thought before we close for today. Your mind will question, "But where do I begin?" "What do we study from these scriptures?" There are a lot of discipleship materials that are available in the bible bookstores, and those are sometimes good. But more often, your direction of study will be prompted by the conversation you have with that other person. Listen to their needs and then ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to the appropriate scriptures to study.

Most of the time, people have the simple need that we have been speaking about here in this message, the need to "know and to love the Lord Jesus with all their heart". If

they want to be a disciple, that is absolutely their first need. So, may I suggest that you begin there!

May we close with these words,

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