

Becoming a Disciple of Christ

Opening Hymn: #13—Self-Examination

It's easy to be a Christian in America. This country was established on Christian principles. Most Americans claim to be Christian. It is unthinkable that someone seeking political office would say he is a non-Christian.

It's easy to become a Christian in America. Most Christian tracts generally tell a reader to accept Christ as his personal savior and in that moment he is saved—which is another way of saying he is now a Christian. Where do the writers of such tracts get this idea?

Acts 2:21 [Peter speaks] And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Joel 2:32)

Acts 16:30,31 [A jailer asks] Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And [Paul and Silas] said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

Rom. 10:9,10,13 [Paul speaks] If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:32).

Is it really this simple? What should you say to someone who quotes these scriptures, then says you make discipleship too complicated?

Luke 14:25-27,33 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them ... [believe on my name and be saved? No!] ... If any man come to me, and hate not¹ his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, **he cannot be my disciple**. And [2] whosoever **doth not bear his cross**, and come after me, **cannot be my disciple**. [vs. 33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that [3] **forsaketh not all that he hath**, he **cannot be my disciple**.

Here was the best time for Jesus to tell everyone how simple it was to be his disciple. But he didn't do it. Was Jesus making the subject of discipleship too complicated? Hardly.

Yes, Joel [2:32] does talk about "calling on the name of the Lord," but Joel does not claim that saying certain words is enough. In verse 13 he tells Israel, "Rend your heart, not your garments." In other words, if you don't change your real self, it has no value in God's sight. Discipleship is **not** about saying the right words. It is **not** about giving God 10% of what you have. It is about giving God everything you have. And few are willing to do that:

Mark 10:17,19-22,26 There came one running, and kneeled to [Jesus], and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? [vs. 19] Thou knowest the

¹ Jerusalem Bible footnote: "Hebraism: an emphatic way of expressing a total detachment."

commandments . . . And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him... [believe on my name and you will be saved?]

One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. [verse 26: disciples are astonished and ask] Who then can be saved?

Not very many, if salvation means becoming a disciple of the Master. One-third of this globe's billions claim to be Christian. But it is an empty claim:

Matt. 7:14 [Jesus speaks] Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and [billions?] **few** there be that find it.

Luke 12:32 [Jesus speaks] Fear not [big flock?] LITTLE FLOCK, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Let's return to Acts 16:31 for a moment. The publishers of the Amplified Bible use this text to show why it is necessary to use more than one English word to translate a single Greek word. Here's what they say in their Forward:

“Acts 16:31 reads: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” What does the word “believe” mean? Webster defines it [as] . . . to expect or hope . . . to think or suppose.” In this sense, most people believe in Christ—that he lived; that he was a perfect man who sincerely believed himself to be the Son of God, and that he died on the cross to save sinners. But this is by no means the meaning of the Greek word which 22 New Testament versions out of 24 consulted render “believe.” They do so because there is no one English word that adequately conveys the intended meaning. Actually, the Greek word used here for believe . . . means “to adhere to, cleave to; to trust, to have faith in; to rely on.” Consequently the words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ...” really mean *to have an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.*”

An illustration of this kind of “belief” is found in James 2:23 where we read that “Abraham **believed** God and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” Abraham had such “an absolute personal reliance upon God” that (as James tells us in vs. 21) he willingly offered his greatly beloved son Isaac on the altar according to God's instruction.

Losing One's Salvation

Why do we never see a tract warning Christians about the possibility they could lose their salvation? Perhaps it's because the churches really think that saying the magic words guarantees everlasting salvation. But Paul didn't think that. He realized he had to remain faithful to his beliefs for his entire life or he could lose everything:

1 Cor. 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Rom. 11:21 If God spared not the natural branches [*meaning natural Israel*], **take heed** lest he also spare not thee.

Take heed! We should continually sweep out the corrupting influence of old “leaven” from our hearts and minds not just at Memorial time, but every day of the year.

The Pearl of Great Price

One of Jesus’ parables illustrates the idea of giving up everything to get something more valuable:

Matt. 13:45,46 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

What was the **price** of this costly pearl? The parable doesn’t say. All we know is that it required “all that he had.” Jesus told the young man in Mark 10 to sell all that he had. And he asks us to do the same. Is this a sacrifice? Would the merchant man of the parable say he made a big sacrifice? No! The pearl is so wonderful that everything he previously thought he wanted, he “sells” because he realizes that in comparison those things were worthless. The apostle Paul had exactly the same perspective as the merchant man:

Phil. 3:7,8 (RSV) But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.

The young man who wanted to know how to obtain eternal life decides the price is too high. He was unwilling to sell all that he had, take up his cross, and follow the master. He actually “saw” the “pearl of great price,” but he would not pay the price to obtain it.

Leprosy

Most students of the Bible agree that leprosy pictures sin.

1. Leprosy disfigures the one who has it. Sin disfigures the perfection of God’s creation.
2. Leprosy is progressive and highly infectious. Sin generally starts small, but eventually infects everything it touches.
3. Leprosy is incurable except by God; the effects of sin cannot be erased except by God.

Leviticus 14 describes the rituals required to certify that someone had been cured of leprosy. Was it easy? Did the priest or the leper say a few words and that was that? Not at all. Establishing a relationship with God after one was estranged from Him and His people was complicated. Here is what had to be done:

1. Two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop are brought. One bird is killed and the remaining bird, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop are dipped in its blood.

2. The leper is sprinkled seven times; the live bird is released in a field.
3. Seven days later the leper washes his clothes, shaves his hair, and washes his body.
4. The next day the leper brings to the priest **three** unblemished animals, flour, and oil.
5. One animal is killed. Some of it and the oil are waved. Some blood is placed on the leper's ear, thumb, and toe. Some oil is sprinkled seven times and some placed on the leper's ear, thumb, and toe, and poured on his head.
6. The other two animals are also killed and placed on the altar.

Notice that the leper does not say he believes in God, the great creator of the universe, and then he is saved. In fact he does not **say** anything! He must **do** something (in fact, a lot of "somethings"). Likewise, the process by which we become disciples requires far more than simply confessing our belief in the Lord Jesus. God has established the rules:

Matt 16:24 (NEB) If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, (1) he must leave self behind;
(2) he must take up his cross and come with me.

This text places the emphasis on what one must **do**, not on what one must **say**! Leaving self behind is equivalent to selling all the one has and giving it away. When people saw someone carrying a cross, they knew he was on his way to die. And death is frequently associated with discipleship:

Rom. 6:3,4 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore **we are buried with him by baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Phil. 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, **being made conformable unto his death**.

1 Cor. 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were **appointed to death**: for we are made a **spectacle** unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

The Greek word rendered "spectacle" means "theater" and is translated that way in the two other places it appears in the N.T. Criminals "appointed to death" in Paul's day were exhibited as a gazingstock to amuse the people in the amphitheater and were "set forth last" in the show to fight with wild beasts. And this is the idea of Heb. 10:32,33:

Heb. 10:32,33 Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

These are not the images used by our Christian friends when they try to find new converts to Christianity. Yet a disciple is expected to be like his Master. And what can we say about the Master?

Luke 9:57,58 A certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Matt. 10:25 It is enough for the **disciple** that he be as his **master**, and the servant as his lord. *If the head of the family is called Beelzebul, the members of the family will be called by even worse names!* [italics—Today’s English Version]

Adam Clarke on Beelzebul: “It is supposed that this idol was the same [as] worshipped at Ekron who had his name changed afterwards by the Jews to *Baal zebul*, the dung god, a title expressive of the utmost contempt. It seems probable that the worship of this vile idol continued even to the time of our Lord; and the title, being applied by the Jews to our Lord, affords the strongest proof of their malice.”

The world does not reward anyone for being a disciple of Jesus. If the world thinks well of you, then you must be the disciple of someone else!

Drinking Blood

John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, **and drink his blood**, ye have no life in you. [vs. 56] He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

The law was quite clear about “drinking blood.” It was prohibited in all circumstances:

Lev. 7:26,27 Ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.

Put yourself in the place of those who heard Jesus say this, and ignore that the law said what it did about “drinking blood.” What would your reaction be to such words? Surely we can understand the general reaction:

John 6:60 [Amplified] When his disciples heard this, many of them said, This is a hard and difficult and strange saying—an offensive and unbearable message. Who can stand to hear it?—Who can be expected to listen to such teaching?

Was Jesus making this unnecessarily complicated? Why didn’t he simply say, “Just believe in me and you will have life”? Because he wasn’t interested in mass conversion. He well knew that many of his “nominal” disciples would no longer follow him (see vs. 66). More than that, he made no effort to attract them back. Why not? He knew there would always be a separation between those **who truly believed** on him and those who did not:

John 6:67-69 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Blood in scripture pictures a life that is poured out, that is sacrificed. Drinking Jesus' blood is a wonderful picture of taking in to ourselves the sacrificed life of Jesus. And we do this in symbol once every year when we "drink the cup":

1 Cor. 10:16 (NIV) Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?

Rom. 8:17 [We are] joint heirs with Christ if so be that **we suffer with him** that we may be also glorified together.

Acts 14:22 [Paul and Barnabas are instructing the disciples and say] we must through **much tribulation** enter into the Kingdom of God.

Discipline

One thing that **should** be said about a disciple is that he is disciplined.

dis·ci·pline (d¹s["] ...-pl¹n) *n.* **2.** Controlled behavior resulting from disciplinary training; self-control.

The word "discipline" does not appear in the King James N.T. This is the NIV:

2 Tim 1:7 (NIV) For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of **self-discipline**.

{Manna for January 2} "Ye are not your own." [1 Cor. 6:19] ... we are not our own, but belong to another; [we are not] to obey self-will, but on the contrary His will. This means holiness in the most absolute and comprehensive sense of the word (not only separation from sin to righteousness, but **separation from self to the will of God** in Christ).

Discipleship

Are you a disciple? Do you **really** want to be one? Do you want to be one even if it is hard, even if it means you have to do more than say the right words? If you do, you must see discipleship as a lifelong process:

1 Cor. 9:24,25 (NIV) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown of laurel that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Luke 18:28–30 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

May you all "run in such a way as to gain the prize" so that in the world to come **you** might receive life everlasting.

Closing Hymn: #183—Watchfulness

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