

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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LEARNERS & FOLLOWERS

Upon the conclusion of what is commonly referred to as Paul's first missionary journey, accompanied by the faithful Barnabas, they returned to Antioch of Syria, from which they had been sent by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2). There must have been great anxiety among the Christians there to learn of the results of the preaching tour among the heathen nations, as well as great eagerness in these missionaries to report on their labor and all that they had suffered for the name of Christ. "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples." (Acts 14:27-28). Luke, the writer of Acts, here refers to "the church" as "the disciples," a term alike in meaning and significance. By this word "disciples," Luke meant to convey the concepts of learners and followers, in this case, of Christ.

Jesus Himself said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me" (Matt. 11:29a), and "Follow me." (Matt. 16:24).

Discipleship means blessings. Numerous blessings are well-known among disciples as they are found in the church, or "in Christ." Paul indicated this in Eph. 1:3: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." Some of the many blessings he goes on to mention are, being chosen by God, being adopted as sons "according to the kind intention of His will," having His grace "freely bestowed on us," "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us," we have "an inheritance," and as "*God's own possession*" we have "redemption." (Eph. 1:3-14). Discipleship means following Christ wherever He leads, and if we do, all spiritual blessings are ours! God said so! Disciples enjoy a fellowship and communion with Christ, their redeemer, and they pray to God, knowing certainly that Christ intercedes and mediates for them. (Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 4:14-16; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Discipleship is conditional. Disciples have stipulations which must be met. Discipleship depends upon agreement to essential requirements, factors, qualifications or circumstances. As the learner follows Christ, his priorities are changed. He puts God first, above all (Matt. 6:33). All else is secondary to God and His Son, even his own family, and even his own life! Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26). Many people are bothered by the word "hate" in this passage, thinking of it as prejudiced hostility, enmity or animosity born of a wicked heart, but this is obviously not the sense of the meaning.

Jesus taught otherwise (Matt. 5:44). One is to hate his family in the same sense that he hates his own life also; it is comparative. Matthew's parallel account makes this clearer: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matt. 10:37). That is, family and self must be rejected and given up when the choice is between them and Christ. Discipleship is complete devotion and unswerving loyalty to the Lord Christ, above every other attachment. Christ is "to have first place in everything." (Col. 1:18). Furthermore, Jesus stated, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27). Following Christ demands the condition of cross-bearing, without which, one cannot be His disciple. Clarity is obtained once again from Matthew's parallel, where the appeal is to lose one's life for the sake of finding it in Christ (Matt. 10:39). These passages make the concept of "essential requirements" of discipleship clear and plain. Further, Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31b-32). Disciples who leave Christ's words, *any of them*, are anything but disciples! Jesus said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (John 15:8). There is an air of certainty about discipleship here. Bearing fruit shows that one is a disciple. The Father is glorified in that disciples bear fruit and also continue to be disciples. Paul described the Philippian disciples as "having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1:11). Discipleship is not stagnant and motionless, but a walk of growth and development. At all times the true disciple becomes more fully and completely a disciple.

Discipleship is known by others. The treasure of the heart finds its way out into the actions and words of one's life (Luke 6:45). Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). Men see and hear words and actions from professed disciples. If they do not see deeds of love, and if they do not hear words of love while observing the lives of disciples, they will not know that we learn from and follow Christ, regardless of what we may be trying to convince others or even ourselves to believe about it! Brotherly love is a clear mark of discipleship.

A discipleship question for you: A blind man whom Jesus healed, upon being questioned by religious leaders regarding what and how of the healing, asked his examiners, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" (John 9:27). He was despised for the question regarding a possible desire to be disciples of Jesus. Friend, we may be risking the same animosity from you, but we must ask, "Will you be a disciple of Christ?" We have no greater desire for you, dear reader, but you must "count the cost" (see Luke 14:33). One should not endeavor to be a disciple of Christ if he has or will have dissatisfaction with the Lord and His way! Can we help you become a disciple today?

- GFS

"That Many Pastors Can't Be Wrong"

So asserted an advertisement for a direct mail service used by more than 1,000 churches. One would think that even with a passing familiarity with the

Bible, people would be reluctant to determine the validity of something based on the number of people who believe in it.

When the twelve spies returned to the camp of Israel to report what they had seen in Canaan, ten of them said, *“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us”* (Numbers 13:31), while only two said, *“We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it”* (Numbers 13:30). The people, evidently thinking that surely ten spies couldn't be wrong when only two spies offered a contrary opinion, balked at trying to invade Canaan. The ten were wrong -- the two were right.

Goliath was a giant who opposed the army of Israel in the days of King Saul. It was the prevailing opinion that Goliath could not be defeated. *“When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid”* (1 Samuel 17:24). It would have been easy for a youth such as David to assume that so many trained soldiers could not be wrong. But you know the rest of that story.

The law of Moses warned against being swayed by a multitude: *“You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice”* (Exodus 23:2). And Jesus said, *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14). And yet the stumbling block for many in obeying the pure gospel of Jesus Christ is that doing so would be an implicit denunciation of what the world views as Christendom, and it seems that *“millions of professing Christians can't be wrong!”* They can be, and they are. And the only way I can be right is to follow God's word without being swayed by the multitudes.

- Jeff Smelser

I Heard A Baby Cry

As I sat among the faithful
on a Sunday in July,
My attention was diverted
as I heard a baby's cry.

Not a wail that would disturb you,
just a whimper, like a sigh.
But it caused my mind to ponder
of the child's life, by and by.

I thought about how blessed it was
that it's young mother cared;
How she nurtured and caressed it
and all her love had shared.

I know that its direction
is a part of mother's plan,
To teach and correct it by the rules
that God has made for man.

And so, she's starting early
in its life of so few days,
To assemble with the saints of God
that "it" might learn His ways.

It almost went unnoticed
amid the preacher's words,

Just a tiny whimper,
but I'm sure the Savior heard.

To hear a baby cry in church
is music to my ears,
For it can learn to please its God,
because somebody cares.

- Tom McLemore

- > Older people know more about being young than younger people know about being old.
 - > There are no detours along the strait and narrow way.
 - > A hug is a perfect gift -- one size fits all and nobody minds if you give it back.
 - > No one has the right to do as he pleases, unless he pleases to do right.
 - > The most important things in the world aren't things.
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SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Respect For God!*" (text: 1 Pet. 1:13-19); Sunday evening: Bi-monthly Singing.