

Nonnegotiable Terms of Discipleship

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May I encourage you to follow with me in your own Bibles as I read two portions of the Word of God. The first, the very familiar words of our Lord at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew 28:16-20:

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

And then the second passage is found in the Gospel of Luke. And the connection between the two may not be evident on the surface, but I trust to demonstrate that there is a very vital connection between the portions. Luke 14:25:

"Now there went with Him [Jesus] great multitudes: and He turned, and said unto them, If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have wherewith to complete it? Lest haply, when he hath laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, as he goeth to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and asketh conditions of peace. So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple. Salt therefore is good: but if even the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill: men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Let us now pray that God would give us all ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us in these portions of the Word of God.

Our Father, we earnestly pray that as we attempt to understand the words that have been read in our hearing, that You would send Your Holy Spirit to open the ears of our souls that we may be such as have ears to hear, truly to receive with understanding and with the response of faith and obedience all that the Lord Jesus

will say to us through His own written words. Send Your Spirit upon preacher and upon hearer alike, we pray. In Jesus name, amen.

Now in the first passage read in your hearing, Matthew 28:16-20, several things are very obvious on the very surface of the text. Our Lord Jesus meets the 11 disciples at the appointed place after His resurrection and before His ascension back to the right hand of the Father. And He underscores several things that He wants them to know prior to His ascension back to His Father. First of all, He points to His supreme authority as the risen Lord. He then gives marching orders to His disciples. And then He promises His abiding presence. But in the marching orders, central to those orders is the imperative verb "[Going] therefore, make disciples of the nations, baptizing them [that is, not the nations, but those who among the nations are made disciples]."

Now how would the disciples to whom our Lord spoke and gave these marching orders understand His words? What would they understand it to mean "to make disciples"? Well, I think the answer is quite clear because they had been with the Lord Jesus throughout His earthly ministry when He Himself had been making and baptizing disciples. We read in John 4:1-2: "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples), He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee." Jesus Himself was the paradigm of what it is to make disciples and then to baptize such as were made disciples. And therefore, when we come to the Gospel records and find any record of Jesus seeking to make disciples, it is right for us to read from those passages what the mandate of the church is in the making of disciples now that the Lord has returned at the right hand of the Father.

In the passage read in your hearing from Luke 14, I sought to emphasize by an exaggerated verbal emphasis the fact that three times our Lord Jesus says in this one passage, unless this or that is true, such a one cannot be His disciple. And surely, if anyone knows the terms of true discipleship, our Lord Jesus knows them, the One who said go and make disciples, not upon terms that you think are reasonable, but upon the terms that the Lord Jesus Himself has clearly articulated and as are recorded here in such a passage as Luke 14. Verse 26c: "He cannot be My disciple." Verse 27c: "He cannot be My disciple." And verse 33c: "He cannot be My disciple." Unless this is true, no discipleship. Unless this is true, no discipleship. Unless this is true, no discipleship. And I want us to spend a few moments contemplating this on the occasion of the baptism of our younger sister in order to underscore afresh in her understanding and in the understanding of each of us who claims to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus the nonnegotiable terms of discipleship, the meaning of discipleship according to Jesus.

The first thing we note is that discipleship means that supreme love and loyalty must be transferred to Christ Himself. Notice the language of verse 26. Our Lord turns and faces the multitudes and says them,

"If any man [any woman, any boy, any girl, anyone who is interested in attaching himself or herself to Me as a disciple, if anyone comes to Me with a view to being My disciple], and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

What is our Lord saying? Our Lord saying that discipleship means the transferal of supreme love and loyalty to Himself from every other person that has a claim upon our love and upon our loyalty. And this breaks down into two categories: first of all, every attachment of human love and loyalty external to us, and then that attachment of love and loyalty that is internal to us.

First of all, every attachment of human love and loyalty that is external to us. He names those deepest ties of natural affection and loyalty: father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters. He goes into the inner circle where natural affection binds us most securely to other human beings. And with reference to those attachments of love and loyalty, Jesus said we must hate them. Now does He mean that we must conjure up an attitude of despising them and ill will towards them? Of course not. In the parallel passage in Matthew 10:34-37, our Lord makes it abundantly clear what He is saying:

"Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

So what our Lord is saying is that the attachment which He both demands and expects of every disciple is an attachment that causes every other sphere of love and loyalty to pale into a secondary place. And the Bible uses this terminology of differing loves, and the lesser love being the one that is hated, and the greater being the one that is loved. And so the very Jesus who tells us we are to love our enemies is obviously not calling upon us to conjure up this negative, nasty attitude toward these who have the most natural claim upon our love and loyalty. What He is saying is He will brook no rival. Coming to Him, there must be this attachment to Christ that is utterly, unquestionably supreme above every other human love and loyalty external to us.

This is one of the issues we seek to press when relatively young men and women apply for baptism and membership. We as elders seek to ascertain (while not being able to read human hearts), has this young adult come to the place where if mother and father stand in the way of their obedience to Christ, they are prepared for the sword that Christ says He Himself sends on earth? "I am come to cast a sword upon the earth to set a man against his father, the daughter against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law." And while we cannot, as I say, read the heart, we seek to probe this issue. Why? Because we have no warrant to baptize any but disciples. And Jesus said that if He does not have the place of supreme love and loyalty, there is no discipleship. What could be plainer? "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters...he cannot be My disciple." Words could not be more plain, more explicit. He will not tolerate any rivalry to that supreme place of love and loyalty with respect to any love and loyalty external to us.

But then notice, He addresses that attachment of love and loyalty that is internal to us. Look at the text: "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also...." That's the attachment of love and loyalty that is internal to us. That is our

natural self love, that disposition with which we were conceived and in which we were born and by which the very wheels of our existence are driven. As 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, "And He [Christ] died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." The Apostle assumes that all of us have by nature a supreme love and loyalty internal to us called self. And that's why again and again in calling people into attachment to Himself, Jesus made as the first requisite, "If any man come after Me, let him say no to himself, let him deny himself." And Jesus says without this hatred of self, that is, this attachment to Christ in love and loyalty from that which is native and internal to us, that is, our self love, we cannot be His disciples.

So all of this talk about being a believer in Christ and being a disciple of Christ and yet not being surrendered to Christ and not loving Christ is sheer nonsense. The Son of God says if in coming to Him, there has not been that work of the Spirit of God so revealing the beauty and the loveliness and the desirableness of Christ, that you have embraced Him, and He now has this place of supreme attachment of love and loyalty beyond all attachments external to you and beyond that attachment of love and loyalty that is internal to you, He says you cannot be His disciple.

To be a disciple of Christ means that by the Word and the Spirit, we've seen in Christ what He describes as the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field in Matthew 13. He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." And He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Christ is the treasure; Christ is the pearl. And in true discipleship, He takes that place in the human heart. And without having taken that place, He does not own us as His disciples. "He cannot be My disciple."

Therefore, none should be baptized but those who can say, "Yes, by the grace of God, Christ is now the object of my supreme love and loyalty. Every attachment of human love and loyalty external to me is expendable, but Christ is not expendable. And that attachment of love and loyalty that is internal to me is expendable as well. And I have said no to myself, to the regulating and the disposing and the living out my own life according to my own desires and my own thoughts and my own perspectives. And I am now prepared by the grace of God to have Christ Himself as my life. So we learn first of all that discipleship means that supreme love and loyalty must be transferred to Christ.

Secondly, discipleship means that we must choose the way of rejection and suffering in fellowship with Christ. Verse 27: "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." Christ says, "I own no one as My disciple but that person who is carrying his own cross." Now what would those words have meant to these multitudes who were following our Lord at this time? Well, if you with them lived in first century Palestine under Roman rule, the concept of carrying your own cross meant one thing. You had seen men go out to a place of execution who were being disposed of in shame, in humiliation, stripped of every last vestige of human dignity. It was society getting rid of its awful. It was society saying, "You're worth no respect, no honor. You're worthy of shame and humiliation." And Christ says, "If you would be My disciple, you must voluntarily, consciously take up your own cross." And what He is saying is, we must choose the way of rejection and suffering in fellowship with Christ, Christ who would bear His cross, that cross on which He would die as the

sin-bearer having our sins imputed to Him and having the sleuth gates of the holy wrath of God opened up and come billowing and cascading down upon His own soul as He hung in nakedness, in utter shame, rejected by society, rejected by the religious crowd, forsaken by His own disciples, and even abandoned by His Father.

Settle it, to be attached to Christ is to be marked for the world's scorn and hatred. There is no way that someone can be a true disciple and have the world be comfortable with him. Listen to what Jesus said. In John 15, words that are so plain, so simple, so blunt that we've got to do I don't know what to get around their clear teaching. Verse 18-19a: "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own...." If the world loves you, that is, this world system under the control of the devil with its perspective of values and standards of right and wrong, what is acceptable in dress, in entertainment, in human intercourse and action and reaction; if this world's system loves you and feels comfortable with you, it's a sign that you're still a part of it.

"If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

Again, the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy said in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that would live godly [not all who simply name the name of Christ and have a measure of what I have come to call polite, cultural reformed Baptist decency] in [union with] Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It's a clear statement. There's no way we can get around it. Without seeking to be nasty, without seeking to be an irritant, if we are living Godly in vital union with Christ Jesus, we are instruments of light that expose darkness. And when darkness is exposed, it seeks to resist that exposure, and it directs its venom, its opposition to the instrument that is bringing that light. That's why Paul could say to the Philippians, "Because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer in His behalf."

Where there is this half-baked attachment to Christ that is so nervous lest in some way it upset the world, I don't understand it in light of the words of our Lord Jesus. If we are unwilling to take up our cross, that measure of shame, that measure of rejection, that measure of scorn that comes in union with Christ, He says, "You cannot be My disciples." The words are clear. No cross, no discipleship; no discipleship, no salvation. And our Lord makes it plain in this passage that not only must there be a transfer of all supreme love and loyalty to Him, but there must also be, by His grace, a commitment and willingness to undergo rejection, misunderstanding, slander, some form of suffering for His name's sake in fellowship with Him.

Then thirdly, we learn from this passage that discipleship means commitment to a life of unswerving obedience to Christ. Supreme love and loyalty attached to Christ, willingness to suffer in fellowship with Christ, but thirdly, unswerving obedience to Christ. Verse 27: "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and [follow] me, cannot be my disciple." To follow Christ is to commit ourselves to regulate all of life by the word and the ways of Christ. We begin our attachment to Christ as disciples when we heed the call of John 6:37: "All that which the Father giveth Me shall come unto me;

and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Discipleship begins in that movement of the soul in repentance and faith that leads us to attachment to Christ.

But then the same Christ who said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out", said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Christ said come, but take and learn. And if we truly come to Him on His terms, we come not only to have Him lift the burden of an accusing conscience, to lift the burden of the horrible reality that we stand exposed to the judgment and wrath of Almighty God, but we come to Him with the disposition of willingness to be yoked together with Him. "Take My yoke upon you", the yoke either being that instrument that binds two animals together to plow in the same direction, to undertake the same task, or the yoke that is laid upon the shoulders to carry a burden, but it is Christ's yoke, that is, an attachment to Christ and His purpose, His direction, His concerns for us as His people.

Then He says, "Learn of Me," that is, you come to have your burden lifted, you come to be yoked to Him, you come to have your mind increasingly saturated with His Word interpreting all reality, regulating every facet of your life as we saw in our reading in Ephesians 6 this morning. The constant reference point was that it is the Lord: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord.... Servants, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.... And, ye masters, do the same things unto them." The whole emphasis is that the Christian life is a life lived in the presence of and unto the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Jesus could describe His sheep in those words of John 10:27 and following. He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." Discipleship means commitment to a life unswerving obedience to Christ in which no area of life is cordoned off, and we say, "No sign of the cross on that area of my life", but the willingness that the sign of the cross will be stamped on every single detail of our lives. In the use of our time, in the choice of our friends, in our romantic interests, in the way we dress, in the way we spend our money, in the way we use our liberties, in the way we eat. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

I beg you, my professing Christian friend, what area do you have a right to cordoned off and say, "Jesus, I don't want Your words to touch that. I don't want your will to regulate that"? No, no, He says, "You must follow Me." The commitment of your heart, no matter how stumbling we may be, no matter how we may fail to live up to the standard, there is no conscious desire to take one facet of life and mark it off and say, "Jesus, don't touch it." Not one! Not one! And the one you mark off and say, "Don't touch it" will damn you because that's the point at which the defiance of your native rebellion against God is manifested. "You cannot be My disciple unless take up the cross and follow Me unconditionally."

But then fourthly, discipleship means the renunciation of all we possess for the sake of Christ. Look at verse 33 of our passage--again, words could not be more plain: "So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." That's what He said. Now does that mean that the renunciation means the liquidation of the title to and possession of all that we have? Well, for the rich young

ruler it did. But the Lord didn't tell everyone what He told the rich young ruler. He told Him, "Sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me." But He does mean something when he says renouncing all you have. And surely He means first of all the renunciation of anything we have in terms of what we might think is meritorious, that would give us brownie points with God just as the Apostle Paul said he had great possessions in the way of religious brownie points. Philippians 3:5-8:

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ"

That's what he's talking about at the most elementary level. Renouncing all that we think in some way could commend us to God, coming to Christ in the nakedness of the realization, nothing in our hands we bring; simply to His cross we cling. But it also means the renunciation of any sense that I have an independent title to anything I have in the way of gifts, capacities, abilities; whatever I have in the way of material possessions. A renunciation of all we have is an essential condition of discipleship. And if you can read your Bible some other way and help me to understand it, please do so. But the words stand before us: "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."

Wasn't that the point of those two parables in Matthew 13? When that man (maybe he was a sharecropper following his plow, and it hit something in the field, and he dug down and there was the treasure) for joy of finding that treasure, he sold all he had (that's the language Jesus uses) that he might have the treasure. And the same thing with that pearl merchant. When he found this one pearl of rare, exquisite beauty, it says he took all of his assets and he liquidated them that he might have that wherewith to purchase the pearl.

Discipleship means that we renounce all we possess for the sake of Christ. There is that disposition that says if the second person of the Godhead would come to Mary's womb and there take to Himself true humanity, true flesh and blood, a human soul and body, and in the mystery of the two natures in the one person live in this sin-cursed world and make His way through to the horrors of the cross in all of its shame and forsakenness and abandonment, then surely when we are given to see something of the love of God in Christ for sinners, we say with the hymn writer, "Here Lord, I give myself away; 'tis all that I can do."

So I lay before you these four things that our Lord Jesus says are the nonnegotiable terms of discipleship: supreme love and loyalty transferred to Christ, choosing the way of rejection and suffering in fellowship with Christ, commitment to a life of unswerving obedience to Christ, and renunciation of all we possess for the sake of Christ. I ask you, have I twisted the passage? Have I made it say more than it obviously says? If not, then the question is, am I a disciple? Do I have any right bearing the badge of baptism?

"Make disciples of the nations," that is, by the preaching of the Gospel and the setting forth of the glory and the beauty of Christ in His salvation. By the operation of the Holy Spirit, He says, "You will see men and women, boys and girls brought to the place where they will see in Me My worth. And they will say with the Apostle Paul, "I count all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

As we come to the table, what a wonderful place to renew afresh in the presence of our Savior those commitments of heart that marked us when He drew us to Himself, and we were bound to Him as we came in repentance and faith. And with the passing of time, there has been the erosion of that single-eyed, whole-hearted, unrivaled affection to Christ. What better place than at this table to have those fountains of single-eyed love opened up afresh as we remember our Lord in His dying love?

What better place to take that thing that right now you've begun to put your fingers around it (for some of you young people, an ambition, a relationship, a standing in the eyes of others) and here unclasp your hand if you're a confessing disciple who comes to this table of remembrance. As you take the bread and take the cup, say, "O Lord, may these hands hold all things this way." Inner renunciation. Those of us who are older (all of our possessions), how long has it been since you've realistically, consciously said from the heart, "Lord Jesus, everything I am and have is Yours. It's stamped with the sign of the cross. It's blood-bought property, and I'm glad to have it so"? May God grant that those of us who are His disciples will find that attachment to Christ deepened and renewed as our faith in the virtue of His dying love for us is strengthened.

Perhaps some of you who have been dallying about, may God send arrows to your heart, and may you hear Jesus say, "You're not My disciple. You haven't come on My terms. Stop this nonsense claiming you're a Christian." Three times our Lord says, "You cannot be My disciple." But by the grace of God, coming on His terms, you can become His disciple, and in attachment to Him know the blessedness of His cleansing, forgiving, renewing, and empowering grace and begin to walk as one who is indeed His disciple; present yourself for baptism, for when Christ makes us His disciples by His grace, it is His will that we openly declare that attachment to Him in the ordinance of His own institution.

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