

The Heart of True Discipleship

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One of the hardest sermons Jesus preached was in John 6:44-66. There we learned that Jesus is the True Manna of God. He said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life. He subsequently clarified that what He meant was that His WORDS are the bread of life. But many could not get past the allusion He used and quit being His disciples. Jesus asked His apostles in John 6:67-69 what they would do. They too did not understand, but what they did know was more important. In other words, they had decided beforehand that they would be disciples through confusion or difficulty.

What is at the heart of true discipleship? The heart of true discipleship is not understanding of all things, since we will always be growing our understanding. It is also not a constant perfect desire at all times to follow Jesus; sometimes that desire will wane. The heart of True Discipleship is the determination to be a follower EVEN WHEN it is not easy. That determination must exist before we are put to any type of test.

What types of tests can we expect as disciples? Jesus spoke about what happens when hard things come in Mark 4:16-18. He pointed to a number of issues that arise that draw away disciples: affliction or persecution; worries of the world; deceitfulness of riches; desires for other things. What discourages your discipleship? What should you prepare yourself to overcome?

1. Affliction or persecution. Consider in Luke 22:56-60 Peter's denial of Jesus. When put under scrutiny, Peter failed the test of discipleship. Are you discouraged to be different from the rest of the world? You are not alone in feeling this weakness. How about when you are discouraged by brethren? Sometimes even well intentioned brethren say the wrong things. Is your desire for God enough to say that no one will prevent you from seeking God?

2. Worries of the world. In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus talked about the danger of worry. For many the worry about tomorrow takes us away from our discipleship today. We find ourselves distracted by current events or politics, and not mindful of the promises of God or the hope of eternal life.

3. Deceitfulness of riches. Paul warned Timothy of the dangerous deception riches offer in 1 Timothy 6:7-9. He said that this is born in a lack of contentment. When temptation to have more causes us to put God second, we have failed the test of discipleship. You must determine in your heart that you will not rob God to have nicer things.

4. Desires for other things. Paul told Timothy that one of the disciples, Demas, had forsaken him (and Christ) for the world in 2 Timothy 4:10. Ask yourself this: what would you leave God to possess? If you are single, would you leave God for a boy/girl? If you are a young adult, would you betray God for alcohol or drugs?

The heart of discipleship is the determination to follow no matter what comes. It is exemplified in Tamar, Rahab and Ruth, all three women who determined that neither circumstances nor people would prevent them from obtaining the promises of God. This heart is a determination that you will not be stopped, either by the adversary Satan (by the ministers of Satan or the distractions of Satan) nor by your own weaknesses. Jesus' desire is for devoted disciples; devotion is only apparent when tested.