

Becoming a Disciple

By Chauncey C. Riddle

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If we are serious about following Jesus, we must question all that we previously have been and accepted.

The New Testament account of our Savior's mortal ministry is a rich treasury of knowledge concerning what one must do to be saved. One insight we may gain concerns what one must do to be a disciple of the Master.

The word *disciple* comes from the Latin *discipulus*, a learner. A disciple of Christ is one who is learning to be like Christ—learning to think, to feel, and to act as he does. To be a true disciple, to fulfill that learning task, is the most demanding regimen known to man. No other discipline compares with it in either requirements or rewards. It involves the total transformation of a person from the state of the natural man to that of the saint, one who loves the Lord and serves with all of his heart, mind, and strength.

As part of his instruction to his disciples in Judea, the Savior took pains to explain his own ministry, a ministry that was the pattern for all of them and for us. One thing that the Father required of our Savior was the suffering and sacrifice of the Atonement. Matthew records:

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." ([Matt. 16:21.](#))

Peter, not understanding that only in these difficult things could Jesus fulfill the will of the Father and make universal salvation possible, remonstrated:

"Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be [done] unto thee." ([Matt. 16:22.](#))

The Savior then administered a severe rebuke to Peter:

"But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." ([Matt. 16:23.](#))

In calling Peter "Satan," the Savior suggests the plight of all men. Until we savor (understand) the things of God, we are found to be behind the adversary's programs. But when we learn the glorious truths of the gospel we can get behind Jesus Christ and his work and abandon Satan.

Within that historical setting is one of the great revelatory insights into the ways of godliness given by the Master. Perceiving Peter's ignorance and that of the others present, he proceeded to instruct them in the essence of discipleship:

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.

"And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.

"Break not my commandments for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come.

"And whosoever will lose his life in this world, for my sake, shall find it in the world to come.

"Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls. ..." (JST, Matt. 16:25–29.)

If we take up our own cross we truly become disciples.

From the above we learn that discipleship begins with self-denial. Our lives are much like forested land that must be cultivated. Before the word of the Lord can bear fruit in our lives, we must first clear the ground of all that grows wild or naturally. What grows naturally in our lives are the things of the world. As any person comes to spiritual self-consciousness, he will realize that his mind, his desires, his habits, his manners, and his politics have all been shaped by the people in his physical environment. What he hitherto thought to be himself he now sees as the encrustations of the world upon his true self, the newly awakened spirit within. His true self delights in being touched by the Holy Spirit with the witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ and of the urgency of faith and repentance. He finds that to believe in Christ is one thing, but to deliver one's soul to Christ as a faithful, obedient servant is quite another. That delivery must begin by becoming as a little child.

To be born again as a little child is to question all that we have formerly been and accepted, and to see the world with different eyes, heart, and mind. As a little child, we walk through the forest with one hand in that of the Holy Spirit and the other in that of the living prophets of God.

Our mentors, the prophets and the Holy Spirit, literally turn the old world some of us have known topsy-turvy. In that process we are thrilled to see things freshly, as they really are.

With their help the scriptures become pure, the word of God; the interpolations, omissions, and interpretations of men no longer cause us to stumble. We learn the joy of seeing the complete harmony between the teachings of the ancient prophets found in canonized scriptures, the teachings of living prophets found in canonized scriptures, the sweet whisperings of the Holy Spirit. To that harmony the promises of God and the necessities of true faith come alive to us, and with hope and faith we begin to become spiritually alive.

With the help of our new friends, the prophets and the Holy Spirit, we can see in our culture that which is truly virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy. These things we treasure and delight in. We are also now able to see what is petty, selfish, and evil in our culture. Carefully we dissociate ourselves from those things, grateful to see plainly that those things we once enjoyed were actually part of our misery.

Our new friends help us to review what we have learned about the ideas of men. We gladly respond when we see now that some men have taught truth, sometimes against great odds; but we now perceive the absurdity of some of the world's most cherished theories. As we see anew, the chains of darkness and the lies of Satan become plain to us, and we slip off those chains, thrilled with the freedom and mobility we now have.

A new perspective—that of eternity—is taught to us by our mentor friends. We now glimpse why it is that family

relationships are paramount, why no other success can compensate for failure in our homes. We see why force and compulsion can never be the means of establishing a great and good society. We see that doing good for others is the important thing in life, not just seeking knowledge. We see that the point of repentance is learning to live righteously, so that we can be trusted with the powers of gods. We no longer worry about just being forgiven; we strive to overcome the world.

Perhaps the greatest thing we learn from living prophets and from the Holy Spirit is the importance of doing the best we know at all times. They show us that what we will really be sorry for later is not having done what we plainly know we should have done.

With thankful heart the disciple of Christ thus learns the ways and ideas of the world, to be taught anew in all things by God. But even in this, his preparation is not complete; he must next cleanse himself of worldly lust. To eliminate the influence of the world is a difficult thing. But to gain mastery over his own desires is another, even more difficult task. It is like hauling off all the rocks and thoroughly tilling the soil once the forest of his mind has been cleared of false ideas.

What are the rocks of lust in our lives? One is the desire to eat too much, to eat the wrong things, and to eat when we should not. Another is the inability to get to bed on time, to get up on time, or to be where we are supposed to be on time. Rocks of lust are the habits of being absorbed in television or reading when we should be working with our family or doing our home teaching. They are hunger for a new car when the old one would serve as well or better; the desire to have it known to everyone when we have done some good deed; the need to retaliate when someone has hurt us. They are anger, selfishness, loud laughter, and self-indulgence. They are the powers of Satan exercised on us through our own flesh. We can be rid of these things only by yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit.

Then our spirit conquers our own flesh and the flesh becomes a servant instead of the master of our lives.

Having cleared our forest of worldliness and having tilled the soil of our souls to a state of ready obedience to the Lord, we are then able to receive the word of God as the pure seed; we are ready to keep the Lord's commandments.

The first commandment is to love the Lord:

"... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. ..." ([Mark 12:30](#).)

In nothing can one show forth love for God more surely than in making and keeping the baptismal covenant. Therein we promise that we will take Jesus Christ's name upon us (to stand as a witness of him at all times and in all places), that we will always remember him (never forgetting that we are to rely solely upon his merits), and that we will keep the commandments he has given us: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." ([John 14:15](#).)

It is thus that the crowning act of repentance is to make the covenant of baptism. As Christ laid down his life for us, so we voluntarily put to death our old worldly, lustful self and bury it in the waters of baptism. As the Savior rose from the dead, so we rise up out of the water as little children of our new Father and Savior, to a beginning of eternal life. Without this death; burial, and newness, we cannot fully show that we love him.

In baptism we gain the privilege of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Only as we live under the influence of that gift can any mortal person love the Lord with all his heart, might, mind, and strength. Only as we continue under the influence of that gift can one keep every commandment.

Above all the other commandments we might receive as we strive to keep the first and great commandment is the second—the admonition to love one another. The world, not understanding the things of God, fancies that the second commandment can be kept when one has not honored the first commandment. But those who understand remember the Savior saying:

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." ([John 13:34–35](#).)

To love as Christ loves is to have charity, the pure love of Christ. Pure love is a gift of the Holy Spirit reserved for those who love the Lord enough to covenant with him in baptism, and Who receive his spirit to be with them:

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." ([John 14:6](#).)

The way of Christ is the way of love. It is to visit the widows and the fatherless in their afflictions; it is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit those in prison, to liberate the captive. But it is to do all this in the Lord's way, not walking in the ways of the world or following the vain imaginations of our heart as to what is good for others. Pure love is of the Father. Saith our Master:

"I can of mine own self do nothing ... because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." ([John 5:30](#).)

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." ([John 15:5](#).)

Are we the disciples of Jesus Christ? Are we learning of his ways, of his discipline? Are we doing as he commanded? Do we know we have to overcome the world? No man is saved in ignorance of that knowledge. To gauge our progress we might ask ourselves three questions:

Have I denied myself, all ungodliness?

Have I denied myself every worldly lust?

Do I keep every commandment the Savior gives me?

The future of a person who can give an honest affirmative answer to each of these questions, is not in doubt. The rest of us should remember that the Lord is mighty to save. Though we cannot overcome the world on our own merits, his are quite sufficient. If we are learning, then we are disciples. May we learn well and be disciples indeed.

Then, instead of the natural forest of worldliness that smothers out all else in our lives, we shall have created a Garden of Eden. As the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory, even so must each individual disciple renew his own personal life in the glory of our God.

[illustrations] Discipleship begins by becoming as a little child and being born again.

[illustration] Becoming a disciple, we perceive the absurdity of some of the world's most cherished theories. The chains of darkness, the lies of Satan, become pain to us. We slip off those chains, thrilled with the freedom and mobility we now have.

[photo] Becoming a disciple, we yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, haul away all the rocks of lust, break habits of being absorbed in television or reading when we should be working with our family or doing our home teaching.

[photo] Becoming a disciple, we learn a new perspective of eternity, we glimpse why it is that family relationships are paramount, why no other success can compensate for failure in our homes, why force and compulsion can never establish a great society.

Notes

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