

Commitment to Learn - Discipleship

[Sermon Notes]

Review of the series

Worship - Committed to God
Fellowship - Committed to one another
Discipleship - Committed to learn
Service - Committed to serve
Evangelism - Committed to share

When I was young, preachers used to make a difference between salvation and discipleship. You got saved and then your next step was to become a disciple. But that just isn't what the Bible says. Accepting Christ is an acceptance of being part of God's family and Christ's followers - Christians - are always called disciples in the Bible. There is no such thing as being saved and then becoming a disciple. If you are a Christian you are a disciple.

Learners mean that we learn something. That God teaches us something and it becomes part of our lives. The problem is that often we don't learn. We like the entertainment value of hearing God's word expounded or coming to worship. We like the buzz, but we don't like what discipleship means - that being a Christian is life changing. It's transforming.

I was a teacher for 14 years and my students (my disciples!) came in various shapes and forms. Some were keen to succeed but others were lazy, unmotivated, fearful, demotivated, insecure or just underestimated themselves. It's the same with Christian disciples (students!) they come in all shapes and forms but God wants us all to make the grade and become mature in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians Paul actually describes Christian growth in terms of a movement from babyhood to maturity. And our lives are a learning experience that takes us from one to the other. The problem is that our churches are full of old Christians but few mature ones. Sometimes I have met mature men and women in Christ but young in chronological age.

Learning is a commitment and we never reach the point of not needing to learn. We get the word discipline from discipleship - to be a disciple, to grow to maturity we need to be disciplined. That's an unpopular word these days, rather like the word obedience. We don't learn because we do not respond to what God desires of us. We like to have the blessings, but we don't want to do the work. This isn't a young persons thing either it goes right through the Church. We want the benefits of salvation, but we are not prepared for the commitment that is involved. We get old as Christians but we never become mature.

God wants us to be committed to Him. Discipleship involves commitment. What can we glean in this passage from Acts about this?

1. A commitment to learn from God

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

The Apostles' teaching. How devoted are we to learn from the Word of God? The problem in many Baptist Churches is an ignorance of what God says in his word. These people were *devoted* to the apostles' teaching.

What we miss in many of the churches in this generation is a commitment to learn. And that can be seen in the ignorance of God's word. As a young man I spent time with God's word and part of the culture of the youth I was involved with my church was a commitment to learn together. It's still exciting to watch young Christians who can't get enough of God's word. That should be true of all of us.

But learning from God isn't just trying to be men and women of the word - but people who put that into action. I've been to too many Bible-believing churches where they fiercely protect their theology but their behaviour shows that they might never have read it. I have spent time even with people in this Church who have been hurt by people in such churches. We are a bible-believing church - let's commit ourselves to that work and become more like Jesus..

2. A commitment to learn from one another

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts

We can learn from one another. These people were meeting together on a daily basis. They learnt from one another.

We learn from fellowshiping with one another in Christ; discussing God's word; being taught through

sermons and specials. How sad that the tradition of expository Bible teaching is declining these days. Reading the Bible personally is also declining.

In Acts they accepted that they could learn from one another and we must be humble and available to be taught by one another. Don't ever feel that you have got the maturity and experience not to benefit from someone younger and less experienced. God may give them insights you never had - and vice versa. remember that it is the Holy Spirit who opens the word to us..

3. A commitment that is costly

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need

Discipleship is costly and for the first century disciples it was literally costly. As we have seen in our Ephesian studies, for Paul discipleship was literally costly too - in suffering and ultimately martyrdom. Let's see a few words Jesus spoke from Luke 14.

Luke 14:25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

These are quite tough words from Jesus. Here were all these people following Jesus around and he puts to them these words

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple

What on earth did he mean. Did he mean actively hate them. No he meant that our love for Him should be so great that the world and all the people in it would seem like hatred.

It then gets worse *27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple Carry his cross* - we must be prepared to carry our cross; to make our love sacrifice for Him as much as He made His for us.

Easy-believism? Discipleship according to Jesus isn't "Come to Jesus and he will make your life right. Come to Jesus and you will be prosperous". What did Jesus say. Come and suffer! Come and DIE! Hardly a selling point to the modern ear but people became Jesus' disciples and died. Why? Because they saw the eternal aspect. He is our hope. And in that suffering the Church grew like wildfire and people saw the power and presence of Christ in their lives!

How prepared are we to take up our cross? In the end it comes down to how much Jesus really means to us. These are the words of Jesus. The promises of God are about eternity, not for our short number of years. The rightness of life and prosperity are waiting for us in heaven - and that is a promise.

Often it is this appreciation of what He has done. It isn't important enough to us. Are we disciples? If so then commitment is costly? The problem is, that Christians love the salvation but ignore the cost. If we want to see the power of God in our lives, if we want to see the Holy Spirit poured out in Swaffham, then we must be prepared to count the cost!

4. A commitment that is productive

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

But when we count the cost and make the commitment - then things happen. Do we want to be a productive Church? Then we must be good pupils, true disciples. Committed, Disciplined. And the Lord will add. That is our challenge. Growth is about discipleship as much as anything else.

Someone said to me once that we should not be obsessed with numerical growth as spiritual growth is more important. In a sense that is true, but I would maintain that a church that is growing spiritually is a church that will grow numerically. Churches can grow numerically without spiritual growth if we make them attractive and entertaining enough - but they will eventually implode and I have seen that happen. But in the same measure there is no such thing as a church that has grown spiritually that has not grown numerically. If a church thinks it has grown spiritually yet has seen no converts, no baptisms and no new members is deluded.

Discipleship is not for the Pastor, not for someone else - but for me!!

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