

# The G. Campbell Morgan Archive

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## I. Becoming a Disciple

"Disciples" is the term consistently used in the four Gospels to mark the relationship existing between Christ and His followers. Jesus used it Himself in speaking of them, and they in speaking of each other. Neither did it pass out of use in the new days of Pentecostal power. It runs right through the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting also to remember that it was on this wise that the angels thought and spoke of these men; the use of the word in the days of the Incarnation is linked to the use of the word in the apostolic age by the angelic message to the women, "Go, tell his Disciples and Peter" (Mark xvi. 7).

It is somewhat remarkable that the word is not to be found in the Epistles. This is to be accounted for by the fact that the Epistles were addressed to Christians in their corporate capacity as churches, and so spoke of them as members of such, and as the "saints" or separated ones of God. The term disciple marks an individual relationship, and though it has largely fallen out of use, it is of the utmost value still in marking that relationship, existing between Christ and each single soul, and suggesting our consequent position in all the varied circumstances of everyday living. It is to that study we desire to come in this series of papers.

**1.** The word itself signifies a taught or trained one, and gives us the ideal of relationship. Jesus is the Teacher. He has all knowledge of the ultimate purposes of God for man, of the will of God concerning man, of the laws of God that mark for man the path of his progress and final crowning.

Disciples are those who gather around this Teacher and are trained by Him. Seekers after truth, not merely in the abstract, but as a life force, come to Him and join the circle of those to whom He reveals these great secrets of all true life. Sitting at His feet, they learn from the unfolding of His lessons the will and ways of God for them; and obeying each successive word, they realize within themselves, the renewing force and uplifting power thereof. The true and perpetual condition of discipleship, and its ultimate issue, were clearly declared by the Lord Himself "to those Jews which believed on Him." "If ye abide in My word, then are ye truly My disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 31).

Before considering the glorious endowment the Teacher confers on every disciple, and the stern requirements that guard the entrance to discipleship, it is very important that we should have clearly outlined in our minds the true meaning of this phase of the relationship, which Jesus bears to His people.

It is not that of a lecturer, from whose messages men may or may not deduce applications for themselves. It is not that of a prophet merely, making a Divine pronouncement, and leaving the issues of the same. It certainly is not that of a specialist on a given subject, declaring his knowledge, to the interest of a few, the amazement of more, and the bewilderment of most. It is none of these.

It is that of a teacher — Himself possessing full knowledge, — bending over a pupil, and for a set purpose, with an end in view, imparting knowledge step by step, point by point, ever working on toward a definite end. That conception includes also the true ideal of our position. We are not casual listeners, neither are we merely interested hearers desiring information, we are disciples, looking toward and desiring the same end as the Master, and therefore listening to every word, marking every inflection of voice that carries meaning, and applying all our energy to realizing the Teacher's purpose for us. Such is the ideal.

**2.** Now let us consider the privileges that the Teacher confers upon those who become His disciples.

I. The first is the establishment of those relations which make it possible for Him to teach and for us to be taught. The question of sin must be dealt with, and that which results from sin — our inability to understand the teaching. Christ never becomes a teacher to those who are living in sin. Sin as actual transgression in the past, must be pardoned, and sin as a principle of revolution within must be cleansed. So before He unfolds one word of the Divine law of life, or reveals in any particular the line of progress, He deals with this twofold aspect of sin. To the soul judging past sin, by confessing it and turning from it, He dispenses forgiveness, pronouncing His priestly absolution by virtue of His own atonement on the Cross. To the soul yielded to Him absolutely and unreservedly, consenting to the death of self, He gives the blessing of cleansing from sin.

This statement of His dealing with us is not intended to mark an order of procedure from pardon to cleansing. It is rather the declaration of the twofold aspect of the first work of Christ for His disciples, the bestowment of the initial blessing. In practical experience, men constantly, though not invariably, and not necessarily, realize the first-named first in order. That is the result of the overwhelming and largely selfish desire of personal safety, a desire which is the natural and proper outcome of the divinely imparted instinct of self-preservation. Nevertheless they ought at once, for the higher reason of God's glory, to seek to realize the deeper side of the one blessing, that of cleansing. But His patience is manifested in our folly. He forgives and graciously waits. When we look at Him again and say " Master, there is more in Thy cross than pardon," then He makes us conscious of His power to cleanse. Certain it is, that there can be no real discipleship apart from the realization of the twofold blessing. Beyond this there lies the dullness of our understanding, our inability to comprehend the truths He declares. This He overcomes by the gift of the Holy Spirit, who makes clear to us the teaching of the Master. What a priceless gift this is. The dullest natural intellect may be, and is, rendered keen and receptive Godward, by the incoming of the Holy Spirit.

So He Himself provides for, and creates, the relationships of communion through cleansing, and intelligence through the indwelling of the Spirit, which constitute our condition for receiving what He has to teach.

II. The other great privilege to be remembered is that the school of Jesus is a technical school. He provides opportunities for us to prove in practical life the truths He has to declare. This is a great essential in His method, with which we shall deal more fully in a subsequent chapter. It is another evidence of His abounding grace, that the proving in technical details of the lessons He teaches, is just as much under His personal guidance and direction as the truth in theory is received directly from Him.

**3.** Now, upon what personal conditions may I become a disciple? I fain would have this enduement of pardon, cleansing, and illumination. How may this be? No school of man was ever so strictly guarded, so select, as this, yet none was ever so easy of access. No bar of race, or color, or caste, or age stands across the entrance. Humanity constitutes the essential claim. And yet, because of the importance of the truths to be revealed, and of the necessity for the application of every power of the being to the understanding and realization of these truths, Jesus stands at the entrance, forbidding any to enter, save upon certain conditions. Let us hear His threefold word.

I. "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" (Luke xiv. 26).

II. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 27).

III. "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 33)

The new relationship must be superior, in the urgency of its claims to the claim of any earthly relationship it must be considered and answered before any claims of the self-life. The Teacher demands that we shall take up the cross and so follow on, even though the progress be through pain. More, we must take the deep spiritual vow of poverty, renouncing all, as possessions, counting every word He shall speak, and every truth He shall reveal, through whatsoever methods, as our chief and only wealth. In short, we must not be held, either by being possessed by others, or possessing aught. There must be a clean severance from all entanglement, and an utter uncompromising abandonment of ourselves to Him. Unless this be so, we cannot be His disciples. If this be our attitude, then, to us He gives pardon, cleansing, light; and so, becoming by relationship His disciples, and entering His school, we are ready for, and enter upon our course of instruction.

If these conditions seem hard and severe, let it be remembered what depends upon them. Character and destiny depend upon this question of discipleship. Not to impart information, and to satisfy curiosity, is Jesus the Teacher. It is because the truth sanctifies and makes free that He reveals it, and because, apart from the revelation He has to make, there is no possible way of realizing God's great purposes for us. Compare Himself and His teaching with the most sacred and beautiful of earth's loves and possessions, and these are unworthy of a moment's thought. They must all come from between Him and ourselves, so that we may know and do His will. Such attitude does not rob us of the enjoyment of all these things, so far as in themselves they are right. It rather adds to our joy.

Self, renders it impossible to know Christ, when other loves and interests intervene, and breeds dissatisfaction with all else and makes that very self sad and weak. Christ absolute, lights the whole being with His love, and joy, and beauty, and shines on other loves to their sanctification, and so, the abnegation of self is self's highest development.

So let us enter the school of Jesus, and, receiving His gifts, await His teaching.