



"In life, and certainly in the Christian life, the mark of real maturity is to escape the prison of self-absorption."
—Matthew Fuller

13-Nov-20

Conditions of Discipleship (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw that [Jesus](#) did not just pick anyone off the street as a disciple. Instead, He looked for people who would fulfill certain conditions that He placed on true discipleship. We took a long look at three major factors: denying oneself, bearing one's cross, and doing good works. Part Two will uncover another three.

It is axiomatic among Christians to say that [God](#) comes first in our lives. Is not the first and greatest commandment that we [love](#) God with all our heart, soul, and mind ([Matthew 22:36-38](#); [Deuteronomy 6:5](#))? In [Luke 14:26](#), Jesus rhetorically takes this principle a step farther: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

As is, Jesus' statement requires a disciple to renounce—"hate"—his earthly family. "Hate" is a strong word, but here, it does not signify an emotion or malice but rejection in a choice between two claims on one's love and loyalty. Jesus is saying that, forced to choose between Him and our family,

we must reject our human ties in favor of Him. As Matthew's version of this verse reads, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" ([Matthew 10:37](#)).

Anyone who leaves family or the family business (creating a cross to bear) will usually incur hard and bitter feelings, to say the least, especially if he or she is key to the success of the family. Jesus' twelve disciples did just this, as Peter testifies in [Mark 10:28](#): "See, we have left all and followed You."

When Jesus asked at another time if they would leave Him, Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" ([John 6:68](#)). They were all in with Him, having "hated" all else.

This included their careers. Several of the disciples left their families' fishing businesses:

Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him. ([Mark 1:17-20](#))

They were not the only ones: "After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' And he left all, rose up, and followed Him" ([Luke 5:27-28](#)). We do not have a complete record of how each of the apostles left all behind, but we know they did, otherwise they would not have become disciples.

Another trait that Jesus requires is steadfastness, that is, we must continue with Him and His teaching. Jesus speaks of this in [John 8:31](#): "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" We do not use the word *abide* much anymore, but in this sense, it means "to remain stable or fixed in a state" and "to continue in a place." We have to be committed to Christ, unswerving in our loyalties and beliefs.

So, are we His disciples just because we keep the [Sabbath](#)? Or just because we pray, pay tithes, and read the Scriptures daily? While these are real and necessary imperatives, they are not the only fruits God is looking for in terms of our being steadfast. One could say that, if our worship and service to God ends in mere slavish obedience, so does our salvation! While He wants us to obey Him, God is not looking for obedient drudges but loyal and productive children.

The word "abide" suggests that we must be determined and disciplined in continuing to grow and produce fruit. As Jesus says in the next verse, if we abide in Him, "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" ([John 8:32](#)). God's Word frees us to live productively. If we stop at mere obedience and produce nothing of spiritual value, we declare ourselves to be unprofitable servants (see [Matthew 25:24-30](#)).

Jesus says plainly in [Luke 9:62](#), "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the [kingdom of God](#)." Our eyes must be on the goal, and our hands must have a steadfast grip on the plow so we may reap a bountiful crop from the good we have sown throughout our lives.

So, Jesus instructs us in [John 15:8](#), "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." This last phrase implies that if we bear little or no fruit, we will *not* be His disciples. Our Father does nothing in a half-hearted manner, and He expects the same of us. A disciple's life should be filled with new discoveries, new insights, increasing [wisdom](#), and improving relationships because of the spiritual fruit produced by living God's way.

A negative example—that is, of not giving one's all to God—appears in [1 Kings 11:6](#): "Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David." Spiritually, Solomon's life was a failure because he split his loyalties, failed to follow God's instructions, and produced little good fruit. If we follow David's example, however, we will put God first, learn hard lessons from our mistakes, and grow in the heart and mind of God.

Jesus ends His explanation of the [Parable of the Wheat and the Tares](#) in [Matthew 13:43](#): "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" The Christian life compares favorably to a financial investment. It is not a get-rich-quick scheme (like the "[once saved, always saved](#)" foolishness), but over years of careful work with the resources God provides, it pays abundant dividends.

Truly, the rewards are stunning—beyond comprehension! "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" ([1 Corinthians 2:9](#)). Christ reserves the highest glittering treasure for His disciples in this age, God's [firstfruits](#): "These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" ([Revelation 14:4](#)).

This glorious future is a spectacular reason for us to keep our spiritual lives sharp!

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Seeking God's Will \(Part Four\): Sacrifice](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting that we frequently hear stories of sacrifice, considers the role of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Some sacrifices are total; some are partial. The common denominator is the giving up of something for another. The sacrifice of God the Father and Jesus Christ eclipse any sacrifice that we could offer. On the Day of Atonement, we are to afflict our souls by fasting. We do no work, signifying that we did absolutely no work to attain our salvation. We solemnize this day, fasting and meditating about Christ's sacrifice for us, without which we are walking

dead men. Only Jesus Christ's life is valuable enough to pay for the sins of every human who has ever lived. The sacrifice of Christ accomplished the judging of the world. God the Father's sacrifice, including seeing His Son crucified, brought about for Him extreme agony. The blood of Christ was costly—a huge price to pay for every human who ever lived. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac prefigures this agony. God the Father allowed Christ's sacrifice to sanctify us, enabling us to become His children. Jesus had to undergo all the temptations and experiences we encounter, yet without sin. God the Father and Jesus Christ were colossal examples of sacrificing for others. Likewise, if we lose our lives for the sake of following Christ, we will gain our lives. By coming under Christ's sacrifice, we are obligated to sacrifice our lives for our brethren.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Faithlessness is the essence of mankind's general character at the end of the age. However, faithfulness is to be a hallmark of a true Christian. How can we become more faithful? How can we be true to the course God has laid out for us?

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