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The Inner Circle of Discipleship (July 1958)

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Read Luke 9:57-62: “And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee withersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto Him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

Nine or ten days previous to this incident Jesus said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

Here in quick succession, Christ deals with three candidates for admission to the inner circle of discipleship—to the circle of those who not only received the truth themselves but would also witness near and far to others about the Lord.

At this stage of Christ’s public ministry the cause of Christianity outwardly was far from being assured a success, yet Jesus was not in a hurry to add to His numbers without testing their reality.

In the case of each aspirant there was an impediment — natural and legitimate in itself — yet a big enough obstacle to hinder the true and loyal discipleship our Lord sought. Down through the centuries these three remain a stumbling block to thousands of Christians:

I. Earthly desires

II. Earthly sorrows and cares

III. Earthly affections

It is an interesting study to notice how Christ deals with these three volunteers. The first offer — so unconditional — was repelled; the man's burst of enthusiasm was repressed. The second offer results in Jesus' taking the initiative and He encourages, summons, and insists upon the services of this man even after an obstacle is presented. Apparently there was more truthfulness in the backwardness of the second than there was in the forwardness of the first. The third offer was a conditional affair with evident half-heartedness, so Christ gave a clear and stern rebuke. Truly He knew what was in man!

We are not told the names of any, nor the final outcome after Jesus gave His unusual and rather blunt replies.

Let us look at the candidates more closely. In Matthew's Gospel we learn that No. 1 was a scribe — one who was accustomed to an easy, sheltered life — perhaps he would be unable to withstand the life of exposure and privation if he followed Christ. For example a young man raised in the tropics would not easily qualify to join an expedition to the Arctic circle. Possibly this fellow was a hasty man of impulse — incompletely estimating what the Lord's service required. In his transient enthusiasm

he was evidently attracted by the graces of Christ, and noticing how popular the Lord was becoming, perhaps he wished to be associated with the “up and coming” that he might share the glory of His ministry.

From a natural standpoint most of us like to be associated with influential people for they can be:

1. Good company (we are gregarious and do not like to be lonely).

2. Good influence (we are affected by our companions),

3. Good example (we find important people provide inspiration),

4. Greater power (close association helps us to profit by knowing the secret of their success).

All of these factors tend to benefit self.

To this self-confident self seeker, Christ replied in so many words—“You will follow Me? I am the poorest of all—despised and rejected of men! I have no throne, no royalties, no kingdom—not even a home or a bed! Certainly there will be no comforts that you have enjoyed in your present occupation.” The Lord does not openly reject his offer, but sends him to prayer and self review.

No. II is the dilatory disciple, the procrastinator who is secretly attracted but undecided. Legitimate responsibilities of domestic duties—perhaps not quite as important as he would pretend—are holding him back. “Wait till I bury my father,” he tells Jesus, and who knows—his father may live another ten years! How many have heard the urgent call to the mission field, but allow earthly cares to hinder their going forth. Surely the Saviour taught “Honour thy father and mother, etc.”

and would have us to see that loved ones are cared for, but perhaps someone else can attend to them.

When one is summoned to the holiest of all divine callings, the disciple is absolved of the holiest of all earthly duties. In all collusions of earthly and heavenly responsibilities, the latter must have precedence! Perhaps someone reading this has allowed legitimate earthly duties to detain him from serving Christ full time — to such our Lord would say, “Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou.” There is always someone on the home front who is already tied down, who can look after others who need care.

No. III. The disciple with a divided heart. He starts to make an offer like No. II’s, but it is conditional like No. II’s — “I will, but!” Apparently he does not appreciate the gravity of the moment, the pressing character of the Lord’s call. He has a close family circle. How many times workers are hindered because they put family ties first and give God second place. To such we would say, read Psalm 45:10 — “Forget also thine own people and thy father’s house!” The lower affections of the natural heart interfere with spiritual affections of a higher plane. The rejoinder is stern! Christ insists upon wholehearted yielding of oneself. “No man putting his hand to the plow, (incidentally, this is literal, as Arab farmers still plow with one hand) looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” So many are ready, but then look at their loved ones and feel they cannot part with them.

But are there compensations when the step is taken? Peter said (Matt. 19:27) “Behold we have forsaken all and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” The answer: “Everyone that hath forsaken houses or

brethren, or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life." Is not that a big reward? Matthew is an example of this, and his name has been revered down through the centuries, whereas he would never be remembered had he remained a tax-collector.

Alfred Gibbs has said, "For every 'Come and see' there is a 'Go and tell.'" Surely privilege is coupled with responsibility.

To summarize: Christ wants followers who:

I. Have counted the cost,

II. Are ready to follow at once,

III. Will follow with an undivided heart.

The claims of Christ are paramount to any other. Let us not allow earthly desires, sorrows and cares, or affections to detain us from going forth in obedience to the Saviour's commission.

The Young Christian and His Testimony (June 1962)

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No two Christians are alike. We have different nationality, economic, and cultural backgrounds and thus we should not expect all young Christians to conform to any one pattern. Yet there will be similarities, and our Christian testimony will carry weight and influence in the measure we follow Christ, and seek to be imitators of Him.

Our Christian testimony is any outward evidence or indication that what we confess with our lips is true. Having experienced the new birth, the young Christian confesses with his mouth that Jesus Christ is his Saviour and Lord. — This is oral testimony, however faltering it may be. But that is only the first step —the changed personal life confirms and establishes this more loudly than his words.

I like the verse—"These things began Jesus both to do and teach." During Christ's public ministry, His actions were closely watched by both friends and foes, and because of His deeds, His words carried more weight — and thus the observation, "Never man spake like this Man." Like his Lord, the young Christian is also closely watched by friends and enemies and by the Great Enemy, even Satan. The effectiveness of his testimony will be closely related to the measure in which he heeds the invitation: "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart." Most of us, yes even Christians, are proud; but if we sit at the feet of our

blessed Lord we will at once learn to be meek and lowly in heart. A “cocky,” self-willed, proud person really has not come into contact with Christ — or, if he has, at the moment he is out of touch with the Lord. Let us take the low place, so that the Lord may call us up higher. John’s motto is a good one — “He must increase but I must decrease.”

Let us consider some of the testimonies concerning Christ given by observers.

Testimony of a Thief

“This man hath done nothing amiss!” Luke 23-41. How true this was of Christ — the Perfect Son of God! We cannot attain sinless perfection, but we should aim to keep short accounts with God and confess and forsake daily sins that so easily beset us. The Pauline Epistles give us specific instructions to strive after the holy life. We are saved by grace through faith. Once saved — we should aim to manifest the fruits of the spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22. love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and self control. Truly we should want to follow in Christ’s footsteps as much as possible.

Testimony of His Enemies

“He saved others — Himself He cannot save” (Matt. 27:42). The young Christian should seek to pattern his life as his Master did: in services to others. If we are selfish and self-centred introverts, our testimony will not radiate for Christ. Remember, it is better to give than to receive. “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and give His life a ransom for many (others). Mark 10:45.

It is true that there are “rice” Christians in every generation. Christ told some followers, “Ye seek Me, not because of the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled (John 6:26). In our ministry to others some will show appreciation, others take advantage. But kindness and thoughtfulness in the little daily acts will help when we seek to witness for Christ.

Testimony of the Scribes and Pharisees

“This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them” Luke 15:2. It is important that the young Christian does not withdraw himself and be aloof from all his school, college, and work colleague contacts. We know we cannot hob-nob with them in real sinful pursuits, but in wholesome activities we must be friendly or how can we expect them to accept our invitations to a Bible study or Gospel meeting?

Some of the finest young Christians I have met were saved in the army or navy because of the strong testimony of a buddy with whom they ate, slept, and worked. The example of our Lard was to mingle with them, but not to be contaminated with them.

Too many young believers are taught only the truth of 2 Corinthians 6:17. In our church fellowship, we are not to be linked with unbelievers and the injunction is “to come out from among them and be ye separate.” But in our daily living when we rub shoulders with these daily contacts, we can show friendliness and the Lord will give opportunities for effective witness to win them for Christ.

Finally, The Testimony of Those Who Were His Close Disciples

Peter could say “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Peter and the others who were so closely associated with Jesus were firmly convinced that He was truly the Son of God — so much so that later on they were willing to lay down their lives as martyrs rather than disown Him.

Each one of us at times is called to show his colours and identify his faith in Christ. “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed” Romans 10:11. Jesus said “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also will the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” Mark 8:38. Unbelief and denial of “the things most surely believed among us” abound on every hand. May God give each of us the courage and the willingness to be ambassadors for Christ, and to boldly proclaim Him day after day. Christ predicted persecution as He said, “The servant is not greater than his lord; if they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.” We can expect to be jeered and despised for our testimony of faith, but even those who taunt may secretly envy the quiet confidence and peace of mind which we possess. Let us continue to witness for Him both by life and by lip, “as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”