

—DISCIPLESHIP: DOOM OR DELIGHT—

1. Introduction and Preface

In Christian history, and perhaps more today than ever, groups within the church seek to discover the dynamics of the Gospel. The dynamic of the Gospel simply lies in its faithful preaching, without seeking to create methodologies. Romans 1:16–17 (cf. I Cor. 1:17–18) says simply that the Gospel itself is the power of God, and that the Cross goes on being the power of God. Passages such as Acts 1:8, I Cor. 2:5 (cf. I Thess 1:5) assert that the power of the cross is released through the Holy Spirit. For this reason methodologies are not needed. However many persist in applying a scientific mode of investigation, seeking to harness and utilise that power, by various means.

The result of such attempts often results in the following:

- (i) **Doctrinal Dogmatism.** It is thought that adherence to right doctrine is the path to, or of, power.
- (ii) **Practice Dogmatism.** Here right practice is thought to produce power. Right practice may involve (a) Modes of holy living (b) Adherence to forms of operation. These again may include emphasis on discipleship, witness, or good works.
- (iii) **Experiential Dogmatism.** Certain lines of experience are demanded such as can be seen and recognised in the new birth, Spirit–experience, love, etc. The demands differ from group to group, but almost can be defined. Failing to have these, adherents are seen as deficient in life.
- (iv) **Ritual Dogmatism.** Certain rituals may be followed in preaching, worship, sacraments, modes of life, etc., without which a person is again seen to be deficient, and even wrong. Such forms of dogmatism, as here outlined are divergences from the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith, and are, in some way or another opposed in the N.T., and in the Galatian Epistle in particular.

One does not wonder that the church seeks power, since power is supposed to be part of its normative living and operations (e.g. Rom. 1:16–17, I Cor. 1:18, Acts 1:8, I Cor. 4:20 etc.). However it is God who works (Phil. 2: 12–13, Ephes. 1:19f, 3:20 etc.) through the Gospel and the Spirit. Methodologies which attempt to capture power and channel it, are a fine form of blasphemy. Obedience alone is the key to the operations of God's power.

We have mentioned the above points because the pattern of discipleship in the N.T. has often been taken hold of, by methodologists, in an attempt to reshape the church of the present back to its New Testament modes, with the belief that this will produce New Testament power, and all that goes with it.

Whilst the desire for renewal is commendable, it is always best to obey God's commands, and expect Him to modalise His own operations. When we do this, we see sooner or later, that we have created other problems, and even extended the ones we have sought to abolish. 'Walk in the Spirit', and 'Be led of the Spirit' are simple and safe commands to follow.

We may now proceed to examine discipleship as it is seen in the New Testament.

2. The Meaning of Discipleship

The Greek word *mathetes* accords quite well with the Latin word *discipulus* from which we derive the word 'disciple'. The Hebrew word *Zimmud* is translated in the O.T. (Greek) Septuagint as *mathetes*, so that, roughly speaking, all mean the same. Disciple means a pupil or a learner. That is, a person or persons gathered around a teacher, and listening to him, learning from him. Generally speaking they came under the discipline of that person. At least they were under his authority for their period/ s of learning.

In the Old Testament the use of disciple is found in Isaiah 8:16, and I Chronicles 25:8. In the New Testament there are disciples of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 7:18, John 4:1, Acts 19:1f.), of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18), and of Paul (Acts 9:25), and even of Moses (John 9:28). In all of these cases the persons were learners from their masters. The term 'scribes of the Pharisees' does not mean pupils, but rather those who worked with the Pharisees, in their examination and study of the law.

If we leave the technical meaning of the word, and examine the persons who were disciples of John, Paul, the Pharisees and Moses we can see that they were committed to the way of their masters. Their ideas accorded with what they were taught. In the case of John the Baptist they followed certain practices that he laid down. We discover that they fasted. They understood much of the significance of what John was about (John 3:22–30), and tradition records that there continued to be many, even after Pentecost. Acts 19 records a small group of them in Asia. Technically, had they understood John they would all have left him for Jesus, the Messiah. Some did, of course.

The disciples of Moses simply means that they were following the teaching of Moses, as against that of Jesus, or any interpreter of the law which in their minds did not accord with Moses. There was no personal attachment to Moses. Likewise the disciples of the Pharisees, e.g. the pupils of Gamaliel, were not overly attached to their teacher, but adherents to his views. The case of Paul's disciples is simple. He was their teacher, whilst Christ was their Lord. Primarily they were Jesus' disciples.

When it comes to Jesus and his disciples, the situation is greatly different. This more accords with the Eastern guru (or, *sadhu*) and his disciples. Here there is an attachment to the teacher. He, more than any other, has the way of life. One is personally attached to him, as against being attached to another or others. One trusts the master, listens and learns. One does not simply receive teaching, objectively, and make one's own decisions. Incidentally the pupils were expected to provide the means of sustenance to their teacher (cf. Gal. 6:6, I Cor. 9:1f.) because he gave them his time and knowledge in order to enrich them. It must be said that this order of guru–discipleship is unacceptable within the Christian church. I Cor. chapter 3 makes this very clear.

We have to say, above this, that Jesus demanded more of his disciples than was required in his day, or by the type of guru mentioned above. To be his disciple required total commitment, total loyalty, and total participation in his programme. We will see this below in various passages of the N.T., but here we can define a disciple of Jesus as ‘An undistracted learner: a devoted follower: an obedient servant: a fellow worker’. It is clear that disciples did not, in fact, fulfil these requirements in perfection.

What we must next note, briefly is that within the Gospels the disciples are in a period of apprenticeship. They are not perfected as disciples. In fact they are not proven, and at the last, actually desert their Teacher. However, in the Book of Acts they are all called disciples who follow Christ, who practice ‘the Way’ (Acts 24:22). The question we need to ask is, ‘May a Christian, today, rightly be called a disciple, and if so, what is it to be a disciple?’

3. Jesus and The Call To Discipleship

What is clear in the Gospels is that Jesus chose twelve disciples whom he called apostles (Luke 6:13). In addition to them there were many disciples, none of whom was an apostle. The twelve were close to him, but whilst the others could number multitudes, yet they were distinct from the twelve near him, who are named as the twelve (cf. Matt. 10:2f). In Luke ch. 10 we read of another seventy whom he used. These would no doubt be dedicated, but not as intimately near him.

The call of the twelve is through quite a process. In John 15:16 Jesus makes it clear that they had not chosen him, but he, them. Others may wish to make him their teacher, but he, in fact, had made these his pupils and followers, and they owed him loyalty and obedience. We will see that there are various tests of authentic discipleship, but a look at the Gospels shows that for the first period of his ministry no disciples were attached officially to him. Hence Matthew 10:2 seems to be the occasion when they are defined as such. Luke 6:12–13 tells us that he prayed all night before selecting them.

We can see that the disciples, one by one, loosely attached themselves to him. We say ‘loosely’ because Jesus’s demand (see Luke 14:25–35) was that none could be his disciple until first he had forsaken all in order to follow him. In Luke 5 we see the disciples still at their natural vocation, fishing, and they do not seem greatly interested when Jesus comes to them. He has to get Peter to pull the boat out a little from the land. After his preaching and teaching ministry, to the crowd, when he commands Peter to put down the nets for the haul, the response is a mild protest. The incredible haul of fish alerts Peter to the truth that the Man is the Holy One, and from that point the disciples forsake all to follow him. The fact that they seemed to make their own choice does not alter the assertion of Jesus that he had chosen them (Luke 6:13, John 15:16). In any case choice validates vocation.

Whilst chronology is not easy to work out in the Gospels, yet it is certain that some of the disciples were with him at the feast of Cana, in Galilee. We are told ‘Jesus manifested his glory, and his disciples saw it, and believed on him’. (See John 2:11). In some real sense they had not believed on him, prior to this. From John 1:35–51 it is apparent that two who followed John the Baptist, now transferred to Jesus. In this context others also probably joined him. In Matt. 9:9 we see the call of Matthew, and it appears the calling of the twelve was now completed, hence the naming of them in Matt. 10:2f.

4. The Conditions of Discipleship

Luke 14:25–35 is quite clear regarding the conditions for discipleship. One must hate his nearest and dearest, in order primarily to love Jesus. One must even hate his own life. He must take up his cross, daily, and follow Jesus. He must renounce all. Otherwise a part devotion, or a part loyalty will end in disaster. If one is not prepared for the shame of the cross, then he cannot be a disciple.

These terms were given, in particular, when multitudes accompanied him. He obviously knew they were not aware of the Cross, ahead, and that their motives were wrong, or, at the best, mixed. He was not unkind in stating his terms, but was cautioning them against an unfinished job, like a war without resources, or a house which had to be abandoned. This demand is shown clearly in Luke 9:57–62 where Jesus shows to would-be-followers that the Son of man is constantly rejected, hence his true followers will also be rejected. One must follow immediately and not return home to wait until a parent dies. No true disciple will look back, having put his hand to the plow. He looks steadily ahead and concentrates only on the task in hand. To be a disciple is to have a task.

These demands seem very stringent. Commentators have sought to reduce their harshness, but they stand strongly. They add up to total loyalty to Christ, total commitment to his plan, and total participation in it. Also the facts were true. At the end of his earthly road was a cross, in fact the Cross. They had better know this. Many of them, including the disciples, thought he was to be seated on a Messiah's throne of glory. They were always afraid when he talked of death (e.g. Luke 9:43–45). Again, the disciple must be 'an undistracted learner' for if his thoughts were at home, or his loyalties other than with Christ then it would be dangerous. The whole group was beset, continually, by opposition, and attempts to make them appear treasonous to the state, and opposed to Jewry.

Later we will examine these demands in the light of the whole Gospel and not simply in the emergencies of the moment. What is very clear, however, is that such demands are made within the period of Jesus' earthly ministry, and for those dangerous days. They do not relate to salvation as such, and are not conditions for forgiveness, new birth and eternal life, however much they may relate to them.

5. The Tests of Discipleship

There are various tests of discipleship. It is clear that Jesus knew his disciples were unproven. He was seeking to train them up to full discipleship. Hence some of the tests for true discipleship have a future look to them. Some are tests by which one enters into discipleship.

Test One: FORSAKING ALL

We have seen above that one must make the primary relationship with Jesus. All other relationships must follow this. Emotional hate against one's relatives and friends is not called for, but their love must not interfere with full discipleship. One forsakes one's goods, even one's occupation if that is called for. Hence one does not only forsake all, but remains in that state of being loyal to no person or thing, but only, primarily, to Christ.

Test Two: BELIEF AND OBEDIENCE

We saw, in John 2:11, that the disciples believed on him when they saw his glory. In John 1:49 Nathanael obviously believes. In John 8:30 we read ‘Many believed on him’, and to them he said, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’. By this he meant that initial belief should issue in obedience, by which one would come to full truth – the pupil would learn from the Master.

Test Three: LOVING

In John 13:34–35 Jesus said, ‘By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, when you have love one for another’. He meant, ‘I teach, I practice love. If the master does this, so must the pupils. To love is to be in what it is all about’.

Test Four: FRUITFULNESS

In John 15:8 Jesus said, ‘By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples’.

Fruitfulness, in this context is shown to relate to both loving and being obedient. The master is fruitful by both love and obedience, so will the disciples prove to be both learners and doers.

Test Five: TOTAL IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST

This is really restating tests one and two, yet is of a slightly different order. In John 6 Jesus is speaking of ‘eating my flesh and drinking my blood’. By this he means that one draws one’s life only from him. John 4:1 shows that many had become his disciples by baptism. This large crowd, with the exception of the twelve, left him at this point. They were prepared to be pupils, but did not know how deeply they had to be involved. It was not merely in teaching they were to be involved, but in the person of Christ himself. This they could not receive. In similar vein is Jesus’ statement to his disciples, ‘I am the vine: you are the branches’. They were one with him. Hence the demand to take up the Cross, daily, was to be identified with him in the shame of a criminal’s death. So close was this identification that Jesus could say ‘He who receives you, receives me (Matt. 10:40, Luke 10:16).’

6. The Mode of Becoming A Disciple

From John 4:1–2 it is clear that John made disciples through baptism, and Jesus also. In the Acts it is obviously only those who have been baptised who can be called disciples, whilst Matthew 28:19–20 makes it clear that disciples are made through baptism. Baptism, as such, was not a mode used amongst Jews, although it is said that proselytes went through certain purifications. John 3:25 shows that the mode was debated. However it is also clear that whilst John the Baptist’s inner core of disciples adhered closely to him, some came to Jesus, as John had shown him to be the Messiah. Again, the large company which had been baptised into Jesus’ baptism (John 4:1), also left Jesus, so that baptism as such did not commit irrevocably, and it seems that such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38–39) could be called disciples, although they had not, seemingly, declared themselves to be so, publicly. The use of baptism in the Acts is decisive and baptism indicated total identification under Christ in his death and resurrection.

7. The Teacher and The Disciples

So far, what we have scanned, are the facts as we can gather by reading the Gospel accounts, with a slight glance at the book of Acts. What we need to do now is to examine the whole personal and functional relationship between Christ and the disciples, the group and the ministry, the Kingdom, and the ministry. It would be unfair to the theme of discipleship to limit it to the actual number of times it is mentioned, and confine it only to those contexts. Let us then look at the Teacher and the taught.

(i) The Teacher

John the Baptist was accepted by most as a prophet of God. He had been attested by the events surrounding his birth, the prophecy of his priest-father Zechariah, and by his own innate authority, which, whilst contested by some Jewish leaders could not be refuted. He pointed out that with the coming of Messiah, his ministry would now have fulfilled itself, whilst that of Messiah must increase. Hence the number of disciples who detached themselves from him, and attached themselves to Jesus.

Jesus, having John's attestation, also had the attestation of God at his baptism (Matt. 3:17). Whilst this may not have had much affect on people generally, Jesus was attested. Nevertheless it was his own innate authority which appeared remarkable. Hence in Matthew 7:28 we read, 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes'. The scribes had a certain academic and functional authority, but their observations were static. Jesus was dynamic. However, even their acceptance of his innate authority was not enough. Prior to this he had said that every one who heard his words and did not do them was a foolish man, and would ultimately fall. Those who heard them, and did them were wise, and would stand. In fact he had said, that in the ultimate day many would call on him as Lord, only to be rejected, for they had not done the will of his Father, who is in heaven.

In saying such things as these, he was not merely setting himself forth as a teacher, but as The Teacher. He was making claims for an authority which was unique. His teaching, then, was not simply superb, or rich and arresting, but it was the very voice of God. One element of his teaching which makes it unique was that it was more than the ministry of a prophet although it was no less than that. It was the ministry of Messiah himself. When Jesus was said to be a prophet, then John the Baptist was disappointed, Luke 7:18–23. However Jesus demanded that his words be heard, and that they be obeyed. This is made clear in Luke 8:4–21. In so doing he put himself above all others.

With this, but even more than this his teaching was not simply conceptual or even preceptual, but effected what he said. The commands he gave to powers of evil were obeyed. When he spoke the word of healing people were healed. This was a new form of teaching for it was not about obedience, or healing, or exorcism, but it effected what it taught. Hence his disciples were not learners of theology as such, or doctrine, or even practice, but they were those who saw these elements actually happen before their eyes.

This is why discipleship with Jesus demanded involvement. It actually involved those who were to be linked to his person. Other teaching might be listened to, and even have its precepts obeyed, but here was no choice. What he did was dominical.

This explains his high demands for discipleship, since it meant that his followers were part of his action, and were fellow-workers with him. It could not be simply a teacher-pupil relationship, where, at any time, the pupil might opt out, or disagree with the teaching. All of it was, in fact, the action of the Kingdom of God, directed by the Father Who was in heaven, His Son carrying out His commands upon earth. The disciples were involved with the Son. That is why to accept them was to accept their Teacher, and why for Christ to be rejected, was for them to be rejected.

(ii) The Taught: The Disciples

We have already stressed the relationship of the disciples to Jesus. Obviously there was the larger, wider group, without any expressed commitment to Jesus, and there was the closer group, including the women, who constantly accompanied him. Within this was the hard core group of the disciples who numbered twelve. One of them Judas was deteriorating in his loyalty and obedience. Yet he too, had been chosen after prayer, and was essential to the events which were to climax in the last week of Jesus' life.

The wider group would loosely call themselves disciples, for they believed they were in agreement with him. The second group were really committed but had not been called into the action which the twelve knew. The twelve were being taught, often as a separate and special group. Sometimes Jesus addressed them, and others listened cf. Matt. 5:1-2, Luke 6:17 etc. There were times when none other was present, and even times, such as at the Transfiguration, when he took only three, Peter, James and John. One disciple is even nominated as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

- (a) Any study on discipleship must take into consideration these two things: The disciples were being trained, and had not yet blossomed into full operation, and
- (b) The Holy Spirit had not yet come. We will see that there are three Teachers – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and as yet the Spirit had not taught them. We must also note that the disciples failed Jesus many times, and for the most part did not really understand what he was about. It is important to note this for often we idealise discipleship, and forget that the discipleship following Pentecost was on a vastly different level to that prior to it.

We see, then, that the disciples had their problems. Some had ambition. Perhaps all looked to a successful and earthly Messianic Kingdom. John had promised the outpouring of the Spirit, the coming of the Kingdom, and also universal forgiveness. These were not eventuating. Because they had a certain mind-set, much of what Jesus said was not intelligible to them. They were upset when he slept in the boat during the tempest on the lake, they scarcely ever understood the parables, they were worried about bread, even after they had just witnessed the feeding of the five thousand, they were jealous of another man who cast out demons in Christ's name, they forbade children to come to their Master, they finally forsook all and fled. This, in spite of his washing of their feet, and warning them to pray in expectation of great testing.

(iii) The Teaching

What Jesus taught may be reasonably categorised. He came preaching the Kingdom, the Gospel of the Kingdom. He himself was Messiah, pressing through to the defeat of evil, and the liberation of man, so that the Kingdom be consummated. His action of teaching, healing, of exorcisms, signs and wonders was all with a view to this. He had first to make known this good news to the people of God in Palestine, and then go to the Cross. His disciples, as we have said, did not greatly comprehend this, although they had been called, not only to learn the truth, but also to be part of its action. They certainly did not have a rationale of suffering, particularly in regard to the Cross, Christ's death and his resurrection.

Although they did not know it, yet in fact they had a certain ministry along these lines, This is described, in regard to the Twelve, in Luke chapter nine, and to seventy other disciples, in Luke 10. They certainly tasted something of the same 'Kingdom action' as that which Jesus had exhibited. In this context the latter were told that rejection of them meant rejection of him, Jesus.

(iv) Conclusion in regard to the Disciples

We can draw some conclusions, then, of the disciples' condition prior to Pentecost. They were pupils, but called into personal allegiance to the very person and operations of Jesus. When he died they did not have a body of teaching (such as Moses gave) with which they could proceed. Jesus' teaching without his person meant virtually nothing. They were incomplete, in teaching at his death, and even though they may have forsaken all, their discipleship was deficient, because they were no longer with Jesus. Indeed Luke, in his Gospel, ceases to use the term 'disciple' for them from 22:45, as though they had forfeited the term, seeing they had forsaken him, or fallen short of their charge.

This brings us to another element which we should not fail to understand. Jesus had said that a disciple is never above his master. He said it is enough that he be as his master. He was saying that they could not have discipleship and fail to meet persecution. However he was also promising them the level they would reach, as that of being like the master. This too must have encouraged them. What has puzzled many is his prayer on the night of his betrayal, 'Father they have kept thy word' (John 17:7) for he saw beyond the failures to the intention. He also said, 'Now they know that everything that thou hast given me, is from thee,' meaning that underneath all, they were conscious of the initiating and guiding action of the Father.

Having said all this, we repeat that their discipleship was greatly deficient. Something more was required.

8. Christ's General Invitation To Discipleship

Matthew 11:25–30 should be studied very closely. Many scholars see it as having two sections, each not relating to the other. Others see it as one. Whatever that may be, the two elements are closely related. In verses 25 to 27 we see:

- (a) Jesus is delighted that God has hidden His truth from the (seemingly)

wise and intelligent and revealed it to the childlike. This, of course accords with Matthew 18:1f, where one has to become as a child to enter the Kingdom, and know its mysteries.

(b) Jesus sees all this as according with God's will. Hence the seventy have gone out in simplicity and have shared in the action of the Kingdom.

(c) All things have been delivered to the Son, by the Father, that is everything that the Father is about. This means that the Son and his disciples are doing the Father's will.

In verses 28–30 we see an invitation given, for discipleship. It is in two parts:-

- (a) Relinquishing a heavy and anguishing yoke, and
- (b) Taking on Christ's yoke.

Without doubt this is the yoke of discipleship, or discipline. One thing has to be made clear – man must have a yoke. That is, man must be subject to an authority, and be one who works in that vocation. It is part of being man to be vocational, and part of being man to be subject. Primarily, of course, that subjection should be to God. In Matt. 6:24 Christ says that no man can serve two masters, especially when their principles are opposites such as God and mammon. A man can have only one loyalty, but he must have one. He cannot be man without any loyalty, any authority. Hence man will always be found with at least one yoke. Probably man's deepest unease is when he has no yoke. That is when he tries to avoid a yoke. This, then, becomes his yoke!

Lamentations 3:27 says 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth'. It parallels Eccles. 12:1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth'. All cultures presupposed that a man be subject to the discipline of the tribe or the gods. This, also, was the command to Israel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve'. When Joshua presented Israel with its alternatives of serving he commanded them to choose between two sets of gods – those of Egypt, and those of Canaan. They refused both, saying they would serve God. He told them this would be a high and holy form of service.

The yoke of discipline is accepting the order of God's universe as it is, and obeying its laws and principles (cf. Abraham, Genesis 26:4–5). However, in Israel, a heavier yoke than God had made for men had been manufactured by the legalists of the day. They were the Pharisees and the scribes, who had studied the law, and arrived at countless precepts: 'They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger (Matt. 23:4).' Doubtless many were attracted to Jesus, even thinking him to be revolutionary, and hoping to escape these burdens. This same yoke of legalism was objected to by Peter, at the council in Jerusalem, where the acceptance of the Gentiles, into the church, was discussed. He said, 'Now therefore who do you make a trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?' (Acts 15:10).

Paul also warned against such an unnatural yoke when he said, 'For freedom Christ has set us free: stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery'.

The yoke, could have of course been the rebellion of man, and the anguish and weight of his guilt. It could have been the legalism which one imposes on oneself where there is guilt. However what concerns us is not the type of yoke

man has borne, but the new yoke Christ gives. He promises to give rest. He promises us that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. He does not promise freedom from a yoke, but freedom in (or, by) his yoke. In other words, the discipline of his yoke would bring harmony to the person who accepted it. We take it that the old yoke is destroyed, by Christ's work, and that the new yoke is the true yoke.

In the passage of Matthew 11:25–30 we see Christ's yoke – his submission to the Father. This is evident in all the Gospels, and John's Gospel especially. The Son does nothing but that the Father shows him. The Father loves the Son and shows him all things. To see the Son is to see the Father. The Son is never alone, for the Father is always with him; this because the Son always does that which is pleasing to the Father. In fact the Son says nothing from himself; the Father who dwells in him, Himself does the works. (See John 5: 17ff., 8:28, 14:6–10).

The yoke of discipleship is to do the will of the Son, the Lord, who himself does the Father's will. Hence it is to do the Father's will. By this one knows both the Son and the Father, and their discipline is real, but never heavy. One has rest within the soul, when one does their will. Discipleship, in this sense, is not a doom, but a delight. The old yoke is doom: the new is delight.

9. Discipleship In The Post–Pentecostal Era

The call to discipleship in the Gospels relates to its own era. Problems have been caused by making this call normative for all times. It is not. We have already seen that many who purposed to follow Jesus thought of him as the Messiah, and had an image of Messiah and the Kingdom which did not include his redemptional suffering, and the shame of the Cross. We have seen that he himself chose certain ones for special discipleship, and he warned the foolishly exuberant, or the lazily nonchalant, that they had better understand his way was the way of shame. One had to strain to get through a narrow gate and walk a narrow way. Every day it would be the shame and ignominy of the Cross. Let them not take this lightly. He taught strongly and sieved out the false.

To make such a demand of people, other than the true people of God, would be to create a new legalism, and to place on man a heavy bondage. It would be another yoke – the intolerable yoke of discipleship, giving up everything for Christ's sake, forsaking all to follow him, and this out of human effort, and even out of the old device of expiating one's guilt.

Christ only made demands of those who called themselves, already, 'God's people'. Discipleship is no way into grace. It is response to grace. In the Gospels it was the Person of Christ who made the demands, and he was the man who was 'full of grace and truth'. Even his demands would not be construed as those of law. At the same time the demands were realistic, for Christ was working. Soon his work would be finished, and grace would flow. As yet those who allied themselves with him would have to bear his shame and ignominy.

Pentecost came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As prophesied by Christ He brought conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement, and men and women repented. They moved out into a new way of living. Great grace was upon them all. The new wine was flowing, and the new bottles contained it. There was a new yoke which was easy, and a new burden which was light.

(i) Discipleship in the Acts and the Epistles

In the Acts and the Epistles there is no call to discipleship. In the Epistles and the Revelation there is no mention of discipleship, as such. This is quite surprising, and we naturally ask why it should be so. We need to be able to answer our own question, and in order to do so we will need to refer to all three sets of writing – the Epistles, the Book of Acts, and the Book of the Revelation.

In the Acts Christians are not called disciples until the sixth chapter. Prior to this (and following) they are called by such terms as ‘all who believed’, ‘their number’, ‘their friends’, ‘the company who believed’, ‘believers’. The term ‘church’ is not used until Acts 5:11, although some English versions place it in Acts 2:47. In 6:2 we have the first mention of disciples, and this is the term used for believers about 30 times, up to the 21st chapter. It is a term which is used from the outside, that is to say a term to define those who have believed in Christ and who are his followers. The inside term is ‘brethren’, which is used when believers address one another, for the term disciple is not used in this manner. We conclude that the term ‘disciple’ is one by which the Christians are defined from non-Christians, and this borne out by Acts 11:26 ‘....and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians’.

In the Epistles the term brethren is used, as also the term ‘saints’ which almost certainly derives from Daniel 7 where the Kingdom is said to be given to ‘the saints of the Most High’. On the night of his betrayal Jesus had said ‘Henceforth I call you friends’. On the day of the Resurrection the angel had said to the woman (Mark 16:7) ‘Tell his disciples’, but Jesus on two occasions had said, ‘Go to my brethren’, ‘tell my brethren’ (John 20: 17, Matthew 28:10). We conclude that the inner life of fellowship was being emphasised, and that in the church, this relationship of love, unity and fellowship was what mattered. Both the Acts and the Epistles give great emphasis to this.

In the book of the Revelation the term brethren is used, although always from the ‘inside’. It relates to other terms ‘servants’, ‘fellow-servants’, and ‘martyrs’. Many times believers are called the ‘prophets’.

We may, then, well ask ourselves why the term ‘disciple’ is more used as an ‘outside’ word than in the Gospels, and is never used, virtually, as an ‘inside’ word. The answer seems quite clear: those who believed were sons and daughters of God, hence they were brethren of the same family. They were saints of the Most High, hence they were saints and citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. This was how they viewed each other from within. Even so, the fact is, quite clear; from outside they were viewed as disciples, and that is what we wish to examine.

(ii) What is a Disciple in Post-Pentecost Times?

Formerly we saw that a disciple is a learner who is attached to his teacher. In order to listen well, and understand, he must not be distracted by any relationship other than that with his teacher. In the case of Christian discipleship, total commitment to the Master is involved, participation in his operations, and loyalty to his programme. Other disciples may gather learning from their teacher, and having acquired it, depart from him. With the disciple of Jesus the Teacher as the teaching. One cannot separate it from his person. Hence one is entirely bound up in him.

Discipleship in the Acts must surely accord with all of this – with one exception. The exception is that Jesus was working towards the Cross and his discipleship demands were involved in this very process. Those who followed had to believe in what he was about, and bear the stigma of his rejection and the Cross to come. Discipleship demands in the Gospels must be seen, fully, in the light of these facts. Such facts cannot obtain in the Gospels. Hence the modes in which the demands were cast in the Gospel are peculiar to the Gospels, and should not be likewise cast in the proclamation of the Gospel; They are not the Gospel. The publication of Bonhoeffer's 'The Cost of Discipleship' has had a deep affect upon many readers, and has gone close to effecting a graceless Gospel, although undoubtedly this was not the author's intention. Grace as he points out, is never cheap. However the writer goes close to giving the impression that it is not free! Let us repeat: Grace is not cheap, but it is free.

An other point we observed in the Gospels is that the disciples were, as yet, in training. As pupils, they were learning. As followers, they were imperfect. As participators in the programme, they often bungled their tasks. As to understanding what their Master was about, they were often in the dark. It was the Resurrection, firstly, and Pentecost, mostly, which brought them to mature discipleship. In this we must speak primarily of the disciples whom Jesus had already appointed to be apostles, and which, in fact – Judas excepted they became. However the remainder of the 120 assembled at Pentecost could be called disciples, also, and they had now suddenly matured. Indeed, it is true to say that the probationary experience and period of discipleship suddenly ended at Pentecost. Not only those who were closely or loosely connected with Christ, but also those who now came for the first time, under the conviction of the Spirit and who believed, could immediately be called disciples. Why was this so?

The answer is: In the Gospels the work of Christ had not been completed, but when completed through his death, resurrection and ascension, then to follow him was a clear issue. All that was to be known about him was known, and one came through new birth, forgiveness, etc. into a totally new life. This could not be said to be so for those who had come to follow him before the crucifixion. We do not mean they were denied these things or elements of them, but such a thing as 'the apostles' doctrine' crystallised at Pentecost (Acts 2:42) and not before. One either was a believer (Christian, disciple) or one was not. And: that was that!

(iii) Post–Pentecost Discipleship

On the day of Pentecost Peter defined how one became a believer, i.e. a disciple. Note that one was not asked to become a disciple. In fact the invitation to such is never issued. It is simply that one is called a disciple by those outside, and the believers use the term mainly in this context. The way in which one becomes a believer is by hearing the primary message 'Jesus is Lord!' This is clear from a study of the sermons in Acts. Secondly, realising that Jesus is Lord, one must repent, convert, receive forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. One is then a believer, being baptised, and one is regarded as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The question we now ask is, 'Did each believer see himself, primarily as a disciple of Christ?' It is not easy to give the answer to such a question. They would know themselves to be regarded as disciples, and would seek to commend themselves, to those outside, on this score. Yet within the fellowship of the church they were engaged in brotherhood, in sonship of the Father and in obedience to Christ's demands.

If the question is asked, ‘Were the conditions for discipleship in the Gospel more demanding and severe than those in the Acts?’ then the answer is ‘No less severe, for the Christians faced terrible persecution from time to time. Also they still had to bear, daily, the ignominy of the Cross. But they had the initiative – Jesus was Lord, Jesus had risen. He lived in them. They were not imitating him. They were not following after him. They were not trying to believe in him, as had the disciples of the Gospels. They knew!’ We mean that they were now possessed by the Holy Spirit; they had felt the dynamic of the Gospel; they were under great grace, and they knew the Christ who lived in them. In the light of these things the seemingly excruciating demands of the Gospel–discipleship seem no great demand, in fact.

(iv) The Discipleship of Grace and Love

Jesus had said, plainly, ‘My yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you shall find rest unto your souls’. He had said this in the context of his own knowledge of God as Father. The Epistles abound with the thrilling teaching of God’s love, grace and forgiveness. Justification frees from legal condemnation; the work of the Cross, as applied by the Spirit frees man from his former lusts, and the Spirit daily aids him in holy living. From this comes the flush of love and obedience so that one is not simply acceding to stringent demands to be a true disciple, but one is eager to be totally at the command of the Lord. The enabling power of the Holy Spirit, ‘the power that works within us’, means that the obedient one is not exhausted by having to work from his own resources. Hence discipleship is not doom, but delight. This has to be said, because the Acts, Epistles and Gospels speak of dreadful tensions which come upon believers, as also the constant pressure of evil. II Cor. 4 is a chapter which speaks (amongst others) of such a pressure. Yet, says Paul, ‘We have the (a) spirit of faith’. He means we are always resilient. We go on obeying whatever.

If discipleship is not seen in this light, it is better not to see discipleship at all. If we have to go back to the Gospels with their overtones of mystification, impending trouble, death predictions, and the nameless hostility of the Jews, then discipleship is cast in a dreaded mould. Come his victorious death and resurrection; come the ascension, and Pentecost, then come a new triumphant life, call it discipleship, or sonship, or membership of the militant host of God’s people – it does not matter. One is not a grimfaced disciple, pressing on, but one is member of a family, an army, the people of God. Hence this yoke is easy; its burden is light; it gives true rest to the soul.

(v) Discipleship and Teaching

(a) Discipling the Nations

Those who press still, for discipleship – and who shall deny them? must be sure they see it in its true, full, and Biblical perspective. Often it is said, after this manner, ‘Is a disciple not a learner? Do we not have to be taught? Does not Jesus say ‘Make disciples of all nations, teaching them?, and does not Paul exhort Timothy to teach others what he has been taught, and so, to teach others?’

The answer to this is, 'Yes'. However, when the points mentioned are examined, teaching does not at all relate to discipleship in the same sense as we find it in the Gospels. It is related, of course, but not after that mode.

In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus is asking his disciples to make disciples of all nations, not out of all nations. He means, 'Cause the nations to come under my authority'. He says this in the light of 'All authority is given unto me. Go ye therefore,...etc.' This point is often overlooked. Psalm 2:7 pictures God as saying to His Son, 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for your possession'. It is this to which Jesus refers in Acts 1:8 – Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and the 'uttermost part' of the earth. Genesis 49:10 speaks of all the nations gathering unto him, 'to him shall be the obedience of the peoples'. Paul is referring to this in Romans 1:5, 15:18, and 16:26, when he speaks of the 'obedience of the nations'. It is also referred to in such passages as I Cor. 15:24–28 and Rev. 11:15.

It is true that disciples need to be made within the nations, before the nation can become, each one, itself a disciple. Yet to have a view only of disciples within a nation is to miss the true perspective of the nation becoming a disciple!

(b) The Godhead and Teaching

As to teaching itself, that is a large subject. Let us see that:

1. The Father is Teacher.

Jesus said, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God'. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me'. Scriptures related to this are Isaiah 2:3 (cf. Micah 4:2), 'And many peoples shall say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths': Isaiah 54:13, 'All your sons shall be taught by the Lord...'; Jeremiah 31:31–34. These scriptures obligate the true disciple (learner-cum-doer) to sit at the feet of the Father. It involves him in understanding the whole prophetic thrust of the Scriptures, and so of all history, for this is how the Father taught of the (coming) Christ.

2. The Son is Teacher.

We need not here concern ourselves with the profusion of material relating to Jesus as Teacher. Some of it we have seen. However (John 1:14,18, 14:6 etc.) he came to teach concerning the Father, and hence whilst the Father leads to the Son, the Son leads to the Father (Romans 5:12, Ephes. 2:17–18, 3:11–12, Matt. 11:27). Hence, to know the Father, one must be a disciple of the Son, remembering of course that his teaching was dynamic, demanding involvement to know and participate in its truth.

3. The Holy Spirit is Teacher

Scripture itself is a witness to its own Author, the Holy Spirit. However Jesus states explicitly that He is Teacher. Jesus had taught them much, so that he claimed, on the night of his betrayal, that they knew all things (see John 17:6–8), yet he had to tell them they would need the Spirit to teach them all things, and also to bring to their remembrance, the things he had previously

told them (John 14:26, 16:12–15). In John 16:12–15 he tells them that the Holy Spirit will take the things both of the Son and the Father, and show them to them. Thus it is that the true disciple must sit at the feet of the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, and learn. In I John 2:27 we read that believers have an anointing from the Holy One (the Holy Spirit) and they know all things (or, all know). In a powerful passage – I Cor. 2:9–14 – Paul actually calls the Holy Spirit the Teacher, and says that, searching God's w, he imparts his knowledge to us.

(c) Teaching and Obedience

We have stressed that the true disciple is wholly subject to his master, and the Christian believer is submitted totally to his Lord. We have seen that the proclamation of the Gospel is not so much an invitation, as it is exhortation to repentance and faith, and a command which we must obey. We saw that repentance is the gateway through which all must pass. At its least repentance is taking responsibility for all that one has ever been and done, and is so a confession of total need. God for His part, in the Cross, has taken total responsibility for the judgement of this evil, and we are free. Free, that is, to serve. We have obeyed the Gospel. Now we are free.

Our freedom is to obey. It is to obey all authorities, for they are ordained of God, however imperfectly they may use their authority. What we must see, nevertheless, is that all obedience is out of love and grace. At creation God commanded man from the grace of creation. With Israel it was the grace of covenant. With us it is the grace of redemption. The ultimate of redemption draws us on in powerful hope. Hence we love God. We love because He first loved us. As Jesus said, 'If you love you will keep my commandments', and John adds, 'His commandments are not heavy'.

Let us repeat then: from the inside we are sons of God, and beloved brethren one of another, as also the Family before the Father. We are under the lordship, direction, and protection of His Son, and as such we are constantly motivated, by love and gratitude, to obedience. From the outside we are viewed as disciples. Within, we are even happy to call ourselves servants, even slaves, of the Lord.

The purpose of saying this is that all true discipleship springs from love, and obedience naturally follows. We are his disciples when we love one another, and are fruitful. We must never view discipleship as grimly necessary. We must not be ascetics. Above all we must never confuse the Gospels and their call to discipleship with the actual experience of salvation. It may well be that repentance is never less than total submission and surrender to God, but repentance, itself is a gift (Acts 5:30, 11:18). Hence man must not be challenged to discipleship, but called to repentance and faith in Christ, the result of which is discipleship, if that is what we wish to call it.

(d) Teaching and Suffering

The teaching concerning discipleship, in the Gospels, seems grim enough, because Jesus was moving towards a Cross. We have observed that in the Acts the Spirit has come, and with him, great understanding. Also the victorious events of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, have dispelled that apprehension of gloom and doom. Suffering, however is no less. Passage after passage in the New Testament depicts this. The Epistles abound in teaching regarding suffering. The Acts show us the suffering the early church experienced. The Book of the Revelation speaks of the great tribulation to come.

Therefore we need not play down the fact of suffering.

Again, our identification with Christ in his suffering means that the true believer groans, waiting for the final day of liberation. Yet, when all is said and done, this suffering is called 'a light affliction', and results in a great weight of glory. The persecuted one may leap for joy, knowing his reward will be great. For this reason discipleship is not doom, but delight.

(e) Teaching Within the Body of Christ

It is true that Paul had disciples. It is also true that he told Timothy to teach what he had been taught. He was to teach others, who were yet to teach others. Yet we ought not to structure a peculiar methodology out of a few such commands, Teaching is a matter of the whole body of Christ. Teachers are set within the body, yet elders also must be 'apt to teach' whilst deacons must hold the mystery of godliness in a good conscience. Older women must teach the younger. Even more the life and action of the church will provide teaching by both precept and example. In this sense the whole church is composed of those who are learning and teaching at one and the same time. All Christ's people must go on learning, and, for that matter, often relearning.

The greatest learning, of course, takes place where there is the action of obedience. For this reason we must not seek to methodologise the principle of discipleship, but keep in mind that it is the whole life of the believer which relates intimately to the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit, as also to the brethren.

In this context each member is alive and operative. This is true discipleship. It is discipleship which springs out of undying gratitude, and unending love. It is this discipleship which is delight and not doom. It is the expression of the same emotion which was in the heart of the Son. 'I delight to do thy will, O God!' It is this son-discipleship, this yoke of which Jesus speaks (Matt. 11:27-30) which takes out the doom, and fills with delight. It is the true ease and rest which the redeemed man knows, who glories in his sonship.