

True Discipleship

by J.C. Philpot

J.C. Philpot's sermon emphasizes the necessity of enduring faith and the true nature of discipleship as rooted in a continuous commitment to Christ's teachings.

Topics: "Discipleship", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the importance of continuing in the word of Christ to truly become His disciples, emphasizing the need to turn away from other teachings and masters, catch the spirit of the Master, and follow His example. He explains that genuine discipleship leads to a deep knowledge of the truth, which in turn brings freedom from the bondage of the law, the world, sin, fears, doubts, and anxieties. Philpot highlights the progressive journey of faith, where believers experience liberty and spiritual growth through a steadfast commitment to the word of God.

Transcript

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Wednesday Evening, July 7, 1869, by J. C. Philpot

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

It is very instructive, in reading the gospels, to trace the different ways in which the miracles wrought by our gracious Lord, and the words which he spoke, were received by the people. In some instances, the miracles which he wrought and the words which he spoke raised up the greatest enmity and opposition. So far from falling beneath the power of God as manifested in the miracles, and so far from acknowledging the truth of the words which fell from his gracious lips, it stung many into the bitterest enmity and opposition. Such were the Scribes and Pharisees. Because our blessed Lord did not come, as they expected, as a triumphant Messiah; because they enviously feared lest the power of his word might displace theirs in the affections of the people; filled with apprehension lest the building of self-righteousness which they had erected should come tumbling to pieces, under his righteous denunciations, they opposed him and all that he said and did with all the malice of desperate enmity.

There were others, again, who heard his word carelessly, and listened to the gracious declarations which fell upon his lips either with the greatest indifference, or with no other effect but to find fault and cavil with

them because they did not suit their ideas or fall in with their prejudices and prepossessions.

Others, again, witnessed the miracles, and were sometimes partakers of their beneficent operations; but they do not seem to have had a spark of gratitude. It was so with the lepers, of whom we read, that though there were ten cleansed, only one returned to give thanks, and he a Samaritan. The others received their healing, one might almost say, as a matter of course, like any natural cure. The leprosy was gone with all its painful and defiling consequences. They were restored to their families, to their civil and religious privileges, and to society, from all which they had been banished; but no tribute of praise was given to the gracious Lord who had removed their disease and defilement. So with the multitude who ate of the loaves and fish- they enjoyed the food which the wonder working fingers of the Lord produced for them; but we read of no gratitude manifested by them, no acknowledgment of his Almighty power in miraculously relieving their hunger, no falling down before him as the Son of God. And even those who would have made him a king for the mere sake of earthly benefits, that they might eat without working and have daily bread without daily labor, only murmured at him when he said, "I am the bread who came down from heaven."

But others were in some degree impressed by what they saw and heard. They saw the power of God made manifest in the miracles that Jesus wrought, as in the case of Lazarus, when he raised him from the dead. Thus we read- "Then many of the Jews who came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." (John 11:45.) These seem to differ from those obstinate unbelievers who witnessed the same miracle, and yet "went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." But even among these, most appear to have believed only for a time. Their minds were impressed, for the moment, by what they saw; the extraordinary nature of the miracle carried with it a certain degree of conviction to their conscience that Jesus was the Christ; and there might have been in them a temporary turning away from their sins or their self-righteousness; but there was no permanent endurance. They only believed for a time, and then through temptation fell away. But there was a little flock, a remnant according to the election of grace, in whom the Lord the Spirit began a gracious work, whose heart he touched with his own hand, into whose understanding he shone with a divine light, and in whose conscience he wrought by a heavenly operation; and these believed to the saving of their souls.

If you look at the chapter before us, you will find a very clear and graphic account of those professing characters of whom I have spoken who for a time believed, but did not endure to the end, and so were not saved. I shall not go through the whole of our Lord's conversation with them, though very instructive, but only quote that part which is immediately introductory to my text. "Then Jesus said unto them, When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak these things. And he who sent me is with me; the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." (John 8:28, 29.) There was in him who spoke these words a majesty, an authority, a dignity, a weight, a power, which, as he uttered them, carried conviction to the minds of many that he was the Messiah. We therefore read, "As he spoke these words, many believed on him." But were these all of them, or any of them, true believers? Was the faith which was produced by this conviction a faith which saved their souls? If we go on to the end of the chapter, we find matters very different from what we would have expected. Our Lord, who knew all hearts and foresaw the end from the beginning, was not deceived by the faith which they thus manifested; for we find, toward the end of the chapter, that he says to them in the severest language- "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own; for he is a liar, and the

father of it." (John 8:44.)

But were not these the very persons of whom we read that they believed on him? But if they were possessed of a living faith, how could they be children of the devil? It is plain, therefore, that there is a faith of which the end is not the salvation of the soul; that there is a belief which falls short of inheriting the blessing given to faithful Abraham; and, though it may seem shocking to say it, a man may believe the word of God, and that Jesus is the Christ, and yet the end prove that he is but a child of the devil.

Now, by taking these scriptural distinctions with us into our text, we may perhaps see more clearly why the Lord lays down continuance in his word as a certain test of that faith which saves, as distinguished from that faith which is but for a time, and neither saves nor sanctifies. And this will explain why the Lord speaks here as if conditionally. It is not really conditionally, for in salvation there are no conditions; but his words assume that form because uttered by way of test. When he says, therefore, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed," he does not mean to say that a continuance in his word would make them his disciples, but that a continuance in his word would manifest them to be his disciples; in other words, that a continuance in the word was an indispensable requisite of true discipleship; no, so much so that with all their seemingly good beginning, unless they held out to the end and continued in his word so as to believe it, experience it, and act upon it all through their lives, all these fair expectations would be blighted, and the end would prove that the beginning was not from the Lord, and that he was not the author (or beginner, margin) so he was not the finisher of their faith. (Heb. 12:2.) But this will be more evident, I hope, as I proceed to open up the subject before you this evening. I shall draw your attention, therefore, to these four points:

First, continuance in the word of Christ.

Secondly, the fruit of that continuance- genuine discipleship.

Thirdly, the fruit of genuine discipleship- a knowledge of the truth.

And lastly, the fruit of a knowledge of the truth- freedom and liberty.

I. CONTINUANCE in the word of Christ. You must not suppose, as I have already hinted, because we read that those Jews believed on Christ, that their faith was of a divine, spiritual, or gracious nature. There is a faith in the natural mind, as well as that faith in the renewed heart which is raised up by the power of God. We believe, for instance, many things in which religion has neither place nor standing. Most of us have, at some period of our lives, read or heard a little, if not much, of English history, and we believe there were such persons as Cromwell and Charles the First, and such events as the battle of Naseby, Worcester, and other battles fought in those days, on the testimony of historians. The credit which we thus give to their accounts is a species of faith. And not only as regards past historical events, but very many, if not most of our daily transactions in business and the affairs of this life depend upon crediting the testimony of others. Indeed without trust and credit how could business be carried on? Sometimes great panics occur in trade and business; and what is chiefly their cause? Lack of credit, lack of trust; but as soon as credit and trust are re-established the panic ceases.

And yet these things have nothing to do with religion, with anything saving, or anything that affects the destiny of the immortal soul. Nor would I have named them except to show that there is a trust, a faith, a crediting human testimony, which is purely and simply natural. When, then, we come to religion, when we leave the simple domain of nature and come to the word of God and the things of eternal life, why should

there not be the same credit given to the word of God naturally, as we give to the records of historians? Thus, as we believe naturally and notionally that there was once a person named Caesar or Cromwell, so we may believe naturally and notionally there was such an one as Jesus Christ; and yet that faith may have no more effect as regards salvation or even as regards religion, taking it in its broadest view, that is, may have no more temporal or spiritual effect upon our heart or life, than merely crediting the simple facts that Caesar once landed on the shores of Britain, Cromwell fought at Naseby field, or Charles the First was beheaded at Whitehall.

So with these Jews of whom we read that they believed on Christ, it was not, as the event clearly proved, by a spiritual and saving faith, but was the effect of a natural light that made its way into their understanding, or the result of some natural convictions, which laid hold of their conscience; and thus by the light that shone into their natural mind- not the light of life, but the light which streamed from the word of the Lord, as spoken by one greater than man, and as carrying with it a peculiar power of conviction, though, not necessarily, or in all cases of saving conversion, they believed that he was the promised Messiah, the sent one of God. This at first sight may seem strange; but there is that in the mind of man, from its very natural constitution, which makes it fall under the power of truth.

We see it again and again even in people who, so far from professing religion, rather scorn and despise it, that there is a power in truth which bears down all before it, and that it carries with it a self-sustaining evidence which forces its own way. But when this voice of truth is blended with those solemn realities of an eternal world, which have a power with them of fastening upon and arresting the conscience, we clearly see that there may be much light in the mind, and much conviction in the heart, which is purely natural, and as such is wholly distinct from that work of grace by which divine light shines into the understanding, and divine life, acting through the conscience, quickens and regenerates the soul.

Now there may be, and no doubt often is, such a resemblance between what is thus of nature and what is thus of grace, that we cannot well determine which is the false and which is the true. The Lord, who knew all things from the beginning, and who could read the secrets of every heart at a glance, did not tell these Jews at once that they believed in him only notionally and naturally; but he put a test before those who should prove sooner or later of what nature their faith and profession really were. He takes- if I may use the expression- a broad, simple view of the case. It is as if he said to them, "You believe in me. As far as appearances go, you begin well; but the end must prove whether the beginning be good."

What, then, was the test which he gives to prove that there is in those who believe a good beginning; that the convictions which they feel are produced by the operations of God's grace; that the light they have is the light of life, and the zeal and fervor which they seem to manifest by a corresponding profession, spring out of the work of the Spirit? What is the test? "If you continue in my word." If you depart from my word; if you turn your back upon me and upon it; if you give the lie to this good beginning, then the issue will prove that the light which you have is not the light of life, the conviction which you have is not the work of the Spirit, the faith you profess is not wrought by divine power, but is of the flesh, and as it is of the flesh, will perish with the flesh.

Thus there is nothing in the words of our gracious Lord in the text to imply that continuance in the word will give us, as of itself, a place in the bosom of God, which we should not otherwise have, or write our name in the book of life, which would not otherwise be written there, or grant to us an interest in the blood of Christ, which otherwise would not have been granted. It is plain even upon common principles of sense and reason that continuance in a thing was not the original cause of our being in it. We find, for instance, a

daily continuance of our bodies in life; but this continuance did not at first call us into being. We see the sun continue its daily round, the seasons continue their annual course, night and day, continue to succeed each other in regular order; but we well know that there must have been a beginning to all these movements, and that this beginning was quite distinct from their continuance.

Continuance, therefore, in what is good, merely shows that the beginning was good. If the sun did not continue to rise and set, if the seasons did not continue to maintain their annual course, if day and night did not continue to succeed each other in due regularity, we should conclude that there was something faulty in their original creation and constitution. Thus we see that right continuance is a test of a right beginning, but not its first cause; and it is in this way that the Lord uses it in our text as the test of a living faith, but not as making a beginning to be right by gradually changing nature into grace.

A. Now let us apply these thoughts to the subject before us. Why is it that, say of two people who seem to begin much in the same way, with some light in the understanding, some convictions of conscience, some coming out of the world, and some reception of divine truth, one continues and is saved, and the other falls away and is lost? This is not a matter of mere theory or speculation, but one of constant observation. We must have seen it again and again in very many instances. How many whom we have personally known, seemed for a time to run well. Like blossoms on a tree, they promised fruit; like young recruits in an army, they seemed likely to make good soldiers; and we gladly hailed them as fellow-travelers and fellow-pilgrims to the heavenly Zion. But where are some of them now? Gone back into the world, fallen into error, given up to the power of sin, and even abandoning the very profession of truth. Now why is this, and how are we to explain why some fall away and perish, and others continue and are saved? If once we admit the fall of man and how ruined and hopeless is the creature; if once we allow the sovereignty of God and that none can be saved but by his distinguishing grace, the reason is plain at once to an enlightened mind and a believing heart, and I have no hesitation in plainly and boldly declaring it to be my firm and fixed conviction. The only reason, then, why some continue and are saved, while others fall away and are lost, is because the Lord the Spirit begins a work of grace upon their hearts in consonance with the eternal will of God, and his purposes of mercy toward them. No, I will go a step further, and say that because life was given to them in Christ their covenant Head before the foundation of the world, life is given them in time by the operation of the Spirit, that they may have a spiritual capacity to inherit, and a fitness to enjoy that eternal life to which they were thus predestinated.

This seems hard doctrine to the world, and is often bitterly assailed as exclusive and unjust; but nothing can be more plain from the Scriptures. Take, for instance, that remarkable passage in Romans 8- "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called- and whom he called, them he also justified- and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. 8:29, 30.) Now what conclusion must we draw from this chain of blessings which seems to link together eternity past and eternity to come? What says the apostle as his comment upon it? "What shall we then say to these things?" Shall we deny them, contradict them, disbelieve them, rebel against them? Is it not better for us to say with him, if we have any testimony to our own calling and justification- "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

But if this doctrine be true, then there is a conclusion to be drawn from it which brings us to this point. Where there are not any such purposes of grace, there, whatever men may profess, there is no work of grace upon the heart, no heavenly light in the understanding, no divine life in the soul, and therefore no root to their religion; and there being no root, it is with it as with a plant or tree put into the ground without a

root which soon withers away and dies. You may take a branch of a tree and put it into the ground and well water it- it will look well for a day or two; but unless the shoot strikes root into the soil, its life and freshness is only a matter of a few days. Having no root, it can draw no nutriment into itself from earth or air, and therefore withers away and dies. So it is with a religion of which God is not the author. Lacking a divine origin, there is no root to it. "The root of the matter is found in me," says Job. But where this root is lacking, there can be no endurance, and therefore no salvation, for only he who endures to the end shall be saved.

B. But apart from this point, WHY is it that men do not continue in the word? Are there not reasons why some believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away?

1. I have shown that the main reason is because they have no root. But, as distinct from the work of grace, we may still ask the question- Why is there no root to their faith? It is on account of the rocky, shallow nature of the soil, being what is called in Matthew, "stony places," and in Luke, "a rock," that is, rocky ground with a thin sprinkling of earth upon it. Their heart was not ploughed up with convictions so that the seed of the word might fall into a deep and fitting soil. There was in them a lack of that "honest and good heart," of which our Lord speaks; that is, a heart made "honest" before God by the implantation of his fear, and good as being the gift and work of him from whom every good gift and every perfect gift comes. He had not "begotten them of his own will with the word of truth," and, therefore, they could not and did not "endure temptation so as to receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him." This was their radical fault, and one which nothing could repair or make amends for.

2. Another reason of their not enduring unto the end, was the love of the world and the spirit of it, which is too powerful for nature to withstand and overcome. No mere natural light in the understanding, however clear; no mere convictions of guilt in the conscience, however deep; no zeal, however fervent; no profession, however bright; no sacrifices, however great, will ever in the end overcome the love of the world and the spirit of it. For a time there may be a coming out of the world in outward profession; for a time it may seem as though the spirit of the world were mortified as well as its pleasures given up, and its company forsaken. But sooner or later, the love and spirit of the world gain fresh ground, gather up fresh strength, overpower, slowly perhaps and gradually, all mere natural light and conviction, and establish themselves more firmly in the affections than ever. The carnal mind bides its time; it know what it is about; it hides itself for a while in the deep recesses of the heart, and there works unseen, unknown. It is, however, all the time in close and intimate union with the world in the love and spirit of it; and though for a season this union and intimacy may be unobserved, yet there is a secret attraction between the two which eventually brings them again together; and thus as convictions gradually decline, and eternal things rest upon the mind with less weight and power, the world in the love and spirit of it reasserts its former dominion; and as opposition becomes by degrees weaker and weaker, it establishes itself again in full strength and force.

3. Sin, again, may for a time receive a stunning blow through the power of the word and the strength of conviction. A man may see the evil of sin, and have very powerful and cutting convictions of his own sinfulness, which may for a time seem to beat back its strength and power. But sin is so subtle a foe; it has such a hold upon our natural mind; it insinuates itself so into every crevice of our very being; it so entwines its fibers round every faculty of body and soul, that, sooner or later, by fraud or force, secretly or openly, it will master every one in whom the grace of God is not found. It runs so completely parallel with our nature; it is so the very breath of the carnal mind; it is so deeply and thoroughly embedded in our very constitution; it is so our very selves and all that we are or can be short of divine grace; that where there is not the

powerful opposition made to it which the Spirit of God can alone communicate, sooner or later it will be sure to prevail; and where sin prevails and lastingly prevails, for a man may go very far from God and be recovered, there is no continuance in the word.

4. Nor let us forget what a subtle, unwearied, implacable, and crafty foe Satan is. He knows all our weak points; he sees exactly where to plant his artillery; every avenue to the human heart is open to his observation; he has had an experience of nearly six thousand years thoroughly to examine and obtain an intimate knowledge of the heart of man, besides his own amazing subtlety as a fallen angel of the highest order. Can we wonder, then, that by force or deceit, openly or secretly, slowly or rapidly, he will overpower every one who is not delivered from his hand by the grace of God? He is indeed a merciless and implacable foe. It is said of our gracious Lord, that "he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." It is literally "overpowered," or "tyrannized over" by him. It is also said, that "the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." We thus see, that all those whom the Lord does not deliver from his power, are overcome by it.

5. But again, the natural tendency of the human mind to be satisfied with the things of time and sense; the engrossing cares of the business of the day; the anxieties that attend a growing family- these things, though not in themselves absolutely sinful, yet have a great tendency to overcome and overpower all such convictions as are found merely in the natural conscience. In such convictions there is not a sufficient resisting power against what opposes them. While they last, and usually they merely come and go and sometimes at long intervals between, they may seem to form some kind of rampart against the overwhelming tide of the cares and anxieties of life. But, as with a rampart of sand, this ever swelling sea of daily cares soon breaks it up and carries it away, and again overflows all the shore.

6. But I may also observe, that our filth and folly, vanity and emptiness, levity and carelessness, intermingled as they always are with pride, conceit, obstinacy, impenitency, and a hard determined spirit of unbelief and rebellion against everything which would pull us down, lay us low, and bring us with penitential grief and sorrow to the Redeemer's feet, are all so many powerful obstacles to continuing in the word. For in the word of grace and truth there is everything against nature, against sin, against Satan, against the world, against self; and therefore when nature, when sin, when Satan, when self, all form what I may call a black confederacy against the power of God's word, and that word is not in the hands of the Spirit, a living word clothed with divine authority so as to break up this black confederacy by giving us divine light to see it and divine life to resist it- sooner or later, man, poor, helpless man, falls into the hands of his inveterate foes and perishes in impenitency and unbelief.

I may seem to speak strongly here, but not too strongly for you who know something of the depths of the fall, and what a hard, impenitent, unbelieving, rebellious, wicked and worldly spirit you often feel struggling in your breast against all that is spiritual and heavenly. What a wretch is man viewed in himself; and how deceiving and deceived are those who vaunt of the power of the creature, and ascribe to man any strength to begin or carry on any saving work upon his own heart. To those who know themselves, the wonder is that any are saved, and the greatest wonder of all is that they should be among that favored number. To grace, and grace alone, in its sovereignty and in its super-aboundings, will they ever say, be all the praise and glory.

C. But now I shall attempt to show you, taking the opposite side of the question, HOW and WHY the saints of God continue in the word while the others fall away. Both classes of believers receive the word, for you will remember in the parable of the sower, that the Lord says- "He who received the seed into stony

places, the same is he who hears the word, and anon (that is, immediately) with joy receives it." And in a similar way he speaks of another character as "receiving seed among thorns." (Matt. 13:20, 22.) But though they receive the word, and by receiving it manifest some faith in it, yet, if I may use the expression, they do not receive it into the same place, and certainly not in the same way. Thus the Lord speaks of those who receive the seed into the good ground, that they "hear the word and understand it." This understanding heart was not given to the other hearers. John, therefore, says- "He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:40.) They were thus destitute of spiritual light, for the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened (Eph. 1:17); and for lack of this divine light, though in a certain way and to a certain extent they believed in Christ, they did not "behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten, full of grace and truth;" and the reason was because they were born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but not of God. (John 1:13.)

There is in the word in the hands of the Spirit an enlightening and quickening power; and, therefore, called by our blessed Lord "the light of life," because there is not merely light but life in it. Thus, besides this divine light shining into the renewed mind, the word of truth in the hands of the Spirit has a quickening influence; there is in it, in his blessed hands, a penetrating energy, a divine force, an invincible power which carries it into the inmost depths of the soul. This special and invincible power distinguishes the work of the Spirit from all and every work of the flesh. The work in those who merely believe for a time is superficial, shallow, external; there is no penetration such as the Scripture declares, when it describes the word of God as "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" there is no entrance of it such as David speaks of, "The entrance of your words gives light," with divine power, so as to change the man in the depths of his heart, to renew him in the spirit of his mind, and make him a new creature in Christ.

But besides this divine application of the word of truth, I have observed that the roots of the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strike down into a different place from the roots of the word in the hands of nature. God the Holy Spirit, by his sacred work upon the soul, raises up a new nature within us, and in that new nature the word of God strikes root. Here it meets with suitable soil; here it can establish itself, because in the new man of grace there is an affinity to the word of truth. It is the very soil which God has prepared for it, and being "a new creature" is congenial to his word, each having the same origin, for as the word was made for the renewed heart, so the renewed heart was made for the word; and, therefore, the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strikes a root into this deep, suitable, and congenial soil. But from this arise these two circumstances, that this root gives it not only firmness, but the means whereby it draws nutriment.

You see a tree- you admire the strength of the stem, the spread of the boughs, the beauty of the foliage; you see how that tree stands up, year after year, against storm after storm, and maintains its standing firm. Why is this? Because that tree has a root, and this root not only gives it stability, so as not to be blown down by the storm, but by the innumerable fibers which spring from it in every direction gives it the means of drawing nutriment into itself, which, being diffused through every branch and leaf, clothes the tree with beauty and verdure. The righteous, therefore, are compared to "a palm-tree" and to "a cedar;" and the reason of their flourishing growth is given also- "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree- he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." (Psalm 92:12, 13.) And all "to show that the Lord is upright."

Jeremiah also speaks of the blessedness of "the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is," comparing him to "a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out her roots by the river." (Jer. 17:8.) Thus the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strikes a deep root in the soul, and being received into an honest and believing heart, obtains a firm position there from which it cannot be dislodged. And the power of the same grace which gives the word a lodging-place in the heart, and a root with it, gives it also those spiritual fibers and rootlets whereby it drinks out of the word of God suitable nutriment.

D. Now, wherever there is this rooting of the word in the heart, there will be a continuance in it. But I will here make one observation lest my language discourage any of you. It does not follow from this description that you may not have very many sinkings, fears, exercises, doubts, misgivings, and questionings about your state and standing. It does not follow from your having a root to your religion, that you always find the root good or find it always, or often, drawing up nutriment into your soul. Not only is the root itself hidden, but growth from it is usually imperceptible. Who has ever seen a tree grow? We see it when we come back to an old spot after a long absence from it, and we say almost immediately and involuntarily- "Dear me, how the trees have grown since I was here!" But those upon the spot did not see those trees grow; and yet they were growing all the time.

So it is with the growth of grace in the soul; we cannot see our own growth, if growth we have; nor see firmness in the root, nor how our soul draws nutriment out of Christ through his word; because it is by the invisible and almost insensible operations of God's grace that the work of faith is carried on. And yet there is a growth in grace, and this growth springs from a continuance in the word. For the word of God is made very precious to God's people. All the faith which they have in the Son of God springs from the word which testifies of, and reveals him; all the hope they have, which is a good hope through grace, comes from the power of God's word applied to their souls; and all the love and affection which they have to the Lord of life and glory is conveyed into, and shed abroad in the soul by the Spirit opening him up in his Person, work, blood and righteousness, grace and glory as revealed in the word.

Religion is not an airy, imaginary, enthusiastic something, which stands independent of the word of God. It is not something mystical and visionary, the creation of the human brain, like some poetical dream, or the mere ebbing and flowing of natural feelings, however deep, various, or refined. This is mysticism, not religion; delusion, not salvation; enthusiasm, not the work of faith with power. True and saving religion is the work of the Holy Spirit operating upon the heart through the word; giving us faith by the application of the word, raising up hope by the power of the word, shedding abroad love by bringing the truth of the word with power into the soul. Does not our Lord, in our text, speak of "continuing in the word," or rather "my word," that being the means whereby we "receive of his fullness grace for grace," and thus by abiding in the word abide in him, as he speaks so plainly and beautifully in the parable of the vine? "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me." (John 15:4.) We forget sometimes these things, expecting religion to be wrought in our heart almost independent of the word of truth. But how striking are those words of our gracious Lord- "For I have given unto them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came from you, and they have believed that you did send me." (John 17:8.)

But bear in mind, also, that the Lord is very tender over his own work upon the soul. He is exceedingly gracious unto those that fear his name; has purposes of eternal mercy and love toward them; has sworn never to leave or forsake them; is pledged to bring them home to himself; and therefore, having begun the work, for his own name's sake, he will surely carry that work on. It is the Father's will that every one who sees the Son and believes on him should have eternal life. He has promised that not one of his sheep

shall perish, and that none shall pluck them out of his hand; their continuance, therefore, does not depend upon creature exertion, creature ability, creature faith, or creature strength; but depends upon the good will and everlasting purposes of God the Father, the eternal love of the Lord the Lamb, and the gracious operations of the Spirit in unison with the choice of the Father and the love and blood of his dear Son. Therefore, they continue in the word, not because they have any strength, or goodness, or wisdom, or righteousness of their own, enabling them to do so; but because the eternal thoughts of God were towards them, because they are savingly interested in a covenant ordered in all things and sure, and because he who understood their cause is able, and not only willing, but firmly resolved to bring them through every trouble, and plant them before his blissful presence for evermore.

II. But I pass on to show the FRUIT of continuance- "Then are you my disciples indeed."

The Lord here intimates that those to whom he is speaking were not his disciples indeed. They were his disciples professedly so; but not his disciples really so. There is a distinction between being a disciple, and being a disciple indeed. He would, therefore, thus say to them, "You listen to my words; you receive them as the words of God; they have some influence and effect upon you; you believe on me through that word- now if you continue in this word, it will make it manifest that you are disciples, not merely who receive my word just for a time and then fall away, but that there is that reality in you which will manifest you to be more than mere disciples in name. There will be a reality stamped upon your discipleship, and you will be disciples indeed, and not disciples in name."

What, then, is "a disciple indeed?" for that is the point which we now have to consider. Though I might mention others, yet I will briefly name three as the most conspicuous.

1. First, then, he is one who turns away from every other instruction and every other Master, and takes all his lessons from his heavenly Lord and Master. Not that he despises means; not that he thinks little of books written by godly men, of sermons heard from the servants of God, of the spiritual conversation of the people of God, and various helps that the Lord is pleased to furnish his people with, in their search after truth. But this is a special characteristic of "the disciple indeed," that he receives his instruction immediately from the Lord, even though it may come through some of the channels that I have named. He sees by faith, as the Lord is pleased to enlighten his mind, such a beauty, such a blessedness, such a heavenly sweetness, such a divine loveliness, and such a fullness of surpassing grace, such tender condescension, such unwearied patience, such infinite compassion in the Lord of life and glory, that he is as if invincibly and irresistibly drawn by these attractive influences to come to his feet to learn of him. It is not merely that he is driven by convictions from all other teachers; it is not merely that he is hunted out of all false refuges by the wintry storm to make him cleave to the Rock for lack of a shelter. But so far as the Lord is pleased to reveal himself in some measure to his soul, by the sweet glimpses and glances which he thus obtains of his Person and countenance, he is drawn to his blessed Majesty by the cords of a man and the bands of love to look up unto him and beg of him that he would drop his word with life and power into his heart.

He knows that "with the word of a king there is power," and this power he longs again and again to feel. If ever he has received instruction from his sacred lips, there was a sweetness attending it, a power resting upon it, a strength given to believe, to hope, and to love, which manifested itself in the light of its own testimony. To hear this voice of instruction, is to hear that voice of which the Lord himself said- "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Having once, then, got a view of the glorious Shepherd of Israel, once heard his blessed voice, and once felt the power of his word in the heart, the

disciple indeed longs again and again to receive the words of grace and truth which fall from his lips. This cuts him off from all other teachers and all other saviors; for he feels as Peter felt when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure, that you are the Christ the Son of the living God." Jesus has the words of eternal life; and having the words of eternal life, to Jesus he must ever go for instruction.

2. But "the disciple indeed" catches the SPIRIT of his Master. This is his second mark. Go into a school- you will soon learn what the master is by the scholars. If you see a disorderly school, the master has no order. If you see a well ordered school, the master is the spring of the order which pervades it; for the scholars drink into his spirit, and a quiet air of order runs through the whole school. Thus the disciple not only receives the teaching but catches the spirit of the master. So disciples indeed drink into the Spirit of their Lord; because they are ever looking to him, and to him alone, to receive of his fullness. They know there is no life or efficacy in the word except attended with power from him. There must be the Spirit of their divine Master attending the word of his grace, to animate it, to make it spirit and life to them; and thus, by receiving his word into their hearts, they drink into his spirit, which is meek and lowly, gentle and tender, holy, humble, and amiable. He never teaches his people to quarrel. He never sets members of churches to fight with one another. He never puts cutting words into their lips, cruel thoughts into their minds, and dark suspicions into their breasts. This is not the spirit of the Master nor the spirit "of the disciple indeed."

3. And as he drinks into his Master's spirit, he desires to follow his Master's EXAMPLE; to walk in his footsteps as well as hear his word and believe. This is the third mark of "a disciple indeed." Such a one will endeavor not to do those things which displease his heavenly Friend, because he knows the consequences; guilt in the conscience, the hiding of his face, the chastisements of his hand, and the withdrawing of his manifested love. Influenced too by gratitude and constrained by love, true disciples of Jesus desire to walk in his footsteps, that they may have clear evidences their faith is a faith of the operation of God, as producing the fruits of faith, that they may adorn the doctrine by their words and works, and live to his praise who has done so much for them.

Being, thus, disciples indeed, what they learn is to good purpose, for they are taught of him of whom it is said that he teaches to profit. (Isaiah 48:17.) Thus they are manifested to be among those of whom we read- "All your children shall be taught of the Lord." and as taught of him, are ever learning profitable lessons, as the Lord is pleased to open up his word to their hearts.

They get also various kinds of instruction from the word of God as the Spirit is pleased to open it to them. Sometimes, for instance, it is in his hands a word of reproof, sometimes a word of admonition, sometimes a word of conviction, sometimes a word of encouragement. Now and then a promise drops in to cheer; or a truth on which to stay the mind; or a blessing that delivers from temptation, or supports in trial, or comforts in sorrow. As a master in a school does not teach all exactly the same lesson, but teaches each according to his capacity, his age, his circumstances, and according to that which shall be for his welfare, so our gracious Lord, who gathers round his feet his disciples indeed, deals out to each such instructions as he knows will edify his soul, be for his good, and redound to his own glory.

III. But as time is running on, I must pass on to our third point- the FRUIT of genuine discipleship. "You shall know the truth." There are links in this chain. The truth is not known at first in all its sweetness, liberty, and power. We have "to continue in the word;" it may be at times in very great darkness, distress, exercise, temptation, and trouble; and yet, such has been the power of the word upon the heart, it cannot,

will not let us go. We see and feel the misery of departing from the truth, the wretchedness of getting back into the world, and being entangled in the spirit of it; and what must be the consequence if we leave those things we profess to know and believe, and embrace error or fall into the arms of sin. There is, therefore, a continuance in the word- it may be often, as I have said, in much darkness, much exercise, many trials, many temptations- but still we are brought to this point, never to give up the word which has been made life and spirit to the soul. And though the Lord sometimes may very much hide his face, and we seem to be very poor, dull scholars, and to be much condemned for our unfruitfulness, to know so little of the spirit of the Master, and walk so little in his blessed ways; yet there is a looking unto him, a longing after him, a cleaving to him; and this manifests genuine discipleship.

Now, as we still cling, and cleave, and hang, and trust, and hope, we begin to know the truth- it is opened up to the mind; it falls with weight and power upon the heart; it is made exactly suitable to our state and case; we seem to enter more feelingly, and believingly, and thoroughly into it; and the wonderful way in which it addresses and adapts itself to our various and pressing needs and necessities becomes more and more manifest. Take, for instance, the grand and glorious truths which concern the Person of the Son of God; the precious blood which he shed upon the cross to put away sin; the glorious righteousness which he wrought out and brought in for our justification; his resurrection from the dead; his sitting at the right hand of God in glory; and his ability to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. These truths, as we journey onward, become increasingly precious; we feel that we cannot do without them. Take away Jesus, and that he is the Son of the Father in truth and love, where are we and what are we? Of all men most miserable. Take away his precious blood, where is any atonement made for transgression? What hope have we of eternal life? How can we get our sins put away and pardoned? Take away his righteousness, where is our justification? Take away his resurrection, where are our risen hopes? As the apostle says, "We are yet in our sins." Take away his intercession, whom have we as Mediator between God and our soul? Take away the teaching and testimony, work and witness of the Holy Spirit, what do we know and feel aright? Take away the power and blessedness of the word of God, what comfort have we in trouble, what support under the various trials of life, and how shall we find our mind supported on a bed of sickness, languishing, and death? Thus we are obliged, sometimes from sheer necessity, from the desperate state of the case as having no hope nor help anywhere else, to cleave to God's word. That seems at times to afford sweet relief, open a door whereby we can enter into the presence of God, to throw back, as it were, the windows of heaven that we may see something of the blessedness and glory of Jesus at the right hand of the Father, and thus to bring down blessed inlets of life and feeling into the heart. Thus we know the truth, not only by the necessity of our case, which is often very deep and pressing, but by the power of the truth adapted to that necessity. There is something in truth unspeakably sweet and precious to a believing heart, and to know it in its purity and power is liberty indeed.

IV. And this leads us to our last point, which is the FRUIT of the knowledge of the truth- "The truth shall make you free." This liberty embraces various particulars.

1. We are by nature in bondage to the law. It is a yoke tied round our neck, followed by a dreadful curse; and we must be set free from that galling yoke and dreadful curse, or have it like a millstone tied round our neck to overwhelm us in the depths of an eternal sea. Now nothing but an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus can give us freedom from the galling yoke of a condemning law; nothing can remove that curse from our neck, or take the guilt from our conscience produced by it, but a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, of his blood and righteousness and dying love, what he is in himself as the Christ and

Lamb of God, and what he is of God made unto us. All experimental knowledge of the truth in its purity and power brings blessed freedom with it, so as to deliver the soul from the galling yoke of the law, its curse and bondage, into the sweet liberty of gospel truth.

2. This freedom is also a freedom from the world and all its alluring charms, its vain attractions, its sensual pleasures, its carking cares, its toils and anxieties; it sets the soul free from being entangled in, overcome and burdened by these things as if they were our all. We still have to do with the world. Many of you are in business and must needs be daily occupied with it. But then the truth will give you sweet liberty from it; you will not walk with the men of the world, nor love the company of the world, nor be entangled in the love of the world; because the truth in its purity and power applied to your heart will make you free from its power and influence.

3. So also it will free you from the dominion of sin. No man ever was delivered from the power and rule of sin except by the truth of God entering into his soul. We may strive against sin in our own strength and only fall more foully than before. We may wet our couch with tears and cry out mightily against sin, and yet only be the more entangled in it. But the truth of God- especially those truths which concern the Person and work of Christ- coming into the heart with liberating power, break to pieces the dominion of sin; and as the power of sin is broken, the love of sin is mortified.

4. The many fears also, distracting doubts, and cutting anxieties that many of God's dear people feel, and some even to the very last- there is no getting free from these things except by a sweet experimental knowledge of the truth applied to the heart with divine power.

The gospel is "the law of liberty," for our blessed Lord came "to preach deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." The only freedom we have, or can have, is by believing the truth. All other freedom is licentiousness. There is no holy liberty but the freedom which springs from the blessed influence and operations of the Holy Spirit on the heart, applying the word of God with power to the soul. This gives true freedom, brings into the soul real liberty, and relieves it from that bondage in which we have so often to walk.

And what is the CAUSE of much of this bondage? Is it not looking to our miserable selves, pondering over the evils of our heart, thinking of our sins and backslidings, and many things that conscience testifies against? It is this which brings in bondage, clouds the mind with doubt and fear, and darkens our evidences. The only way, then, whereby we can get freedom from these things is by believing the truth. But we can only believe the truth by its coming home with divine power to the heart, so as to raise up a living faith in that truth and our interest in it.

Thus, the whole of our text forms a beautiful chain, of which every link is harmoniously connected. We begin by receiving the word. If that reception is of God, there is a continuance in it. By continuance in it we manifest ourselves to be disciples indeed. If disciples indeed, we learn the truth from the lips of him who is truth itself. And as he speaks a word to the heart with his gracious lips, liberty comes with it, and by this liberty we are set free from a thousand things that bring bondage.

We cannot displace God's order. He is a God of order in nature, in providence, and in grace. We cannot leap at once from earth to heaven, carry salvation by storm, and get hold of the choice blessings of the gospel in a few days or weeks. Did we become men and women in a day, a week, a month, or a year? What little we may know in natural things, in business, trade, or information- was all that gathered in a week or month? It was a process of years. So it usually is in the things of God. It is years sometimes

before we know God's truth in its liberating power and glorious freedom. But we have to continue in the word; get a little here and a little there; learn line upon line; still hoping, still believing; still hearing the word, and still hanging upon a faithful Lord, determined never to let him go, until he blesses us; but ever desirous to hear what he has to say to us; and determined to hang 'our eternal all' upon his faithful word of promise. Thus to continue in the word, will manifest us, sooner or later, to be disciples indeed; it will be proved we know the truth by the teaching and operation of the Holy Spirit; and we shall find holy freedom and blessed liberty in the things of God.

I lay these things before you. Think over them; compare them with the word of God and your experience, and then judge for yourself how far my words this evening are the words of soberness and truth.

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