

The Terms of Discipleship

by William MacDonald

True Christianity requires an all-out commitment to Jesus Christ, involving unconditional surrender, denial of self, and a life of sacrifice and obedience.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Luke 14:26, Luke 14:33, John 8:31, John 13:35, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Commitment to Christ", "Discipleship"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes that true Christianity requires an all-out commitment to Jesus Christ, demanding unconditional surrender and prioritizing Him above all else. He outlines the stringent terms of discipleship, which include supreme love for Christ, self-denial, choosing the cross, following Christ's example, loving fellow believers, unwavering commitment to His Word, and forsaking all for His sake. MacDonald challenges the notion of Christianity as merely an escape from hell, urging believers to embrace the sacrificial nature of discipleship. He calls for a courageous acknowledgment of past failures and a renewed commitment to live as true disciples of Christ. The message is clear: discipleship is a serious and demanding path that requires total devotion.

Transcript

True Christianity is an all-out commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Savior is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him--or their weekends--or their years of retirement. Rather He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives. "He looks today, as He has ever looked, not for crowds drifting aimlessly in His track, but for individual men and women whose undying allegiance will spring from their having recognized that He wants those who are prepared to follow the path of self-renunciation which He trod before them"¹--H. A. Evan Hopkins.

Nothing less than unconditional surrender could ever be a fitting response to His sacrifice at Calvary. Love so amazing, so divine, could never be satisfied with less than our souls, our lives, our all.

The Lord Jesus made stringent demands on those who would be His disciples--demands that are all but overlooked in this day of luxury living. Too often we look upon Christianity as an escape from hell and a guarantee of heaven. Beyond that, we feel that we have every right to enjoy the best that this life has to offer. We know that there are those strong verses on discipleship in the Bible, but we have difficulty reconciling them with our ideas of what Christianity should be.

We can accept the fact that soldiers give their lives for patriotic reasons. We do not think it strange that Communists give their lives for political reasons. But that "blood, sweat and tears" should characterize the life of a follower of Christ somehow seems remote and hard to grasp.

And yet the words of the Lord Jesus are clear enough. There is scarcely any room for misunderstanding if we accept them at their face value. Here are the terms of discipleship as laid down by the Savior of the world:

1. A supreme love for Jesus Christ.

"If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). This does not mean that we should ever have animosity or ill-will in our hearts toward our relatives, but it does mean that our love to Christ should be so great that all other loves are hatred by comparison. Actually, the most difficult clause in this passage is the expression, "yea, and his own life also." Self-love is one of the stubbornest hindrances to discipleship. Not until we are willing to lay down our very lives for Him are we in the place where He wants us.

2. A denial of self.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." (Matthew 16:24). Denial of self is not the same as self-denial. The latter means foregoing certain foods, pleasures, or possessions. But denial of self means such complete submission to the lordship of Christ that self has no rights or authority at all. It means that self abdicates the throne. It is expressed in the words of Henry Martyn, "Lord, let me have no will of my own, or consider my true happiness as depending in the smallest degree on anything that can befall me outwardly, but as consisting altogether in conformity to Thy will."

My glorious Victor, Prince divine,

Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine,

At length my will is all thine own,

Glad vassals of a Savior's throne.

H. G. C. Moule

3. A deliberate choosing of the cross.

"If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross..." (Matthew 16:24). The cross is not some physical infirmity or mental anguish; these things are common to all men. The cross is a pathway that is deliberately chosen. It is "a path which so far as this world goes is one of dishonor and reproach"--C. A. Coates. The cross symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Son of God, and which the world will heap on all who choose to stand against the tide. Any believer can avoid the cross simply by being conformed to the world and its ways.

4. A life spent in following Christ.

"If any man come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). To understand what this means, one need simply ask himself, "What characterized the life of the Lord

Jesus?" It was a life of obedience to the will of God. It was a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a life of unselfish service for others. It was a life of patience and longsuffering in the face of the gravest wrongs. It was a life of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, of faithfulness and of devotion (Galatians 5:22, 23). In order to be His disciples, we must walk as He walked. We must exhibit the fruit of Christ-likeness (John 15:8).

5. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This is the love that esteems others better than oneself. It is the love that suffers long and is kind. It vaunts not itself and is not puffed up. It does not behave itself unseemly; seeks not its own, is not easily provoked; thinks no evil. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Without this love, discipleship would be a cold, legalistic asceticism.

6. An unswerving continuance in His Word.

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). For real discipleship there must be continuance. It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the test of reality is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). Spasmodic obedience to the Scriptures will not do. Christ wants those who will follow Him in constant, unquestioning obedience.

Keep me from turning back.

The handles of my plough with tears are wet,

The shears with rust are spoiled, and yet, and yet,

My God! My God! Keep me from turning back.

7. A forsaking of all to follow Him.

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). This is perhaps the most unpopular of all Christ's terms of discipleship, and may well prove to be the most unpopular verse in the Bible. Clever theologians can give you a thousand reasons why it does not mean what it says, but simple disciples drink it down eagerly, assuming that the Lord Jesus knew what He was saying. What is meant by forsaking all? It means an abandonment of all one's material possessions that are not absolutely essential and that could be used in the spread of the gospel. The man who forsakes all does not become a shiftless loafer; he works hard to provide for the current necessities of his family and himself. But since the passion of his life is to advance the cause of Christ, he invests everything above current needs in the work of the Lord and leaves the future with God. In seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he believes that he will never lack food and clothing. He cannot conscientiously hold on to surplus funds when souls are perishing for want of the gospel. He does not want to waste his life accumulating riches that will fall into the devil's hands when Christ returns for His saints. He wants to obey the Lord's injunction against laying up treasure on earth. In forsaking all, he offers what he cannot keep anyway, and what he has ceased to love.

These then are the seven terms of Christian discipleship. They are clear and unequivocal. The writer realizes that in the act of setting them forth, he has condemned himself as an unprofitable servant. But

shall the truth of God be forever suppressed because of the failure of God's people? Is it not true that the message is always greater than the messenger? Is it not proper that God be true and every man a liar? Should we not say with an old worthy, "Thy will be done though in my own undoing."

Confessing our past failure, let us courageously face up to the claims of Christ upon us and seek henceforth to be true disciples of our glorious Lord.

My Master, lead me to Thy door:

Pierce this now willing ear once more,

Thy bonds are freedom; let me stay

With thee to toil, endure, obey.

H. G. C. Moule

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