Discipleship: The Call to Be Like the Teacher

How should we read the Bible so that we understand it? A brother asked me this question recently, and it is a very good question. I think about the way I have read Scripture, and each of us can think about the way he has read it.

Over the years we have been taught how to read the Bible, and one of the pieces of advice we were given was to read it straight through. A sort of calendar was even drawn up: each day a few verses from the Old Testament and a chapter from the New Testament, and in a year the whole Bible is read. But reading like this, we should not expect to understand very much. We will inform ourselves, we will accumulate knowledge, but we will not understand a great deal.

The Word of God is like a jigsaw puzzle. If one piece is missing and you have never seen the whole picture, you may not realise what it shows. Only when all the pieces are put together can you see the picture clearly.

With the Lord's help, let us take an example from Scripture and learn how the Bible must be studied in order to have eternal life, because that is the final goal. Why do we come to the meeting? For material prosperity or for eternal life? Let us turn to Matthew, chapter 28, and see, from a teaching of the Lord Jesus, how we must study.

We subordinate everything to God's plan

We must hold on to this from the outset: the Bible does not contradict itself. The Word of God is very well ordered, and there are no contradictions in it. Starting from here, this is how we study: every time, without exception, we subordinate what we read to God's plan, so that our study leads to the fulfilment of this plan in us.

What is God's plan? Some say: salvation. Others say: the restoration of the image of Christ in us. God's plan is that we should be the brothers of the Lord Jesus. God foreknew us and determined, before the world was, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son, as Paul writes in Romans 8:29, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. This is God's plan, and all things are subordinate to it.

If we are honest, we have to admit that no one taught us to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Everything was reduced to salvation: being saved. And then what are we left with? Only God's mercy, His grace, the forgiveness of sins. But in that case the whole Bible no longer makes any sense. When we study it only from the perspective of the forgiveness of sins, we see that things are not arranged like that in it. God's purpose is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son.

Make disciples

With this plan in mind, we read verses 19 and 20 of Matthew 28, where the Lord Jesus says: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And teach them to observe everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Lord Jesus subordinates these words to God's plan. If God's plan were only the forgiveness of sins, what would be the point of the command “make disciples”? Would we make some people disciples and not others? Would some be disciples and others merely Christians, some higher and others lower? The Lord Jesus does not say that. He says: “Go and make disciples.” Then we too must be disciples. But why, and whose? And what does it actually mean to be a disciple?

The disciple wants to be like the teacher

We often hear the word “disciple” and think of a pupil or an apprentice: someone who goes to a trade school to learn a craft from a master craftsman, that is, an expert. The word in Scripture, however, means much more, and its meaning differs from that of the apprentice we know. The disciple is the one who follows and carries on the teaching of the Master, of the Lord.

Why does the Lord Jesus want us to be His disciples? To answer, we once again subordinate the word to God's plan. The apprentice at a state school learns a trade. But what is the purpose of the disciple of the Lord Jesus? To learn a trade from Him?

I once studied what being a disciple meant in the time of the Lord Jesus. The disciples took on the language of the rabbi, their teacher, and began to speak as he spoke. They took on his habits and his whole way of being. They wanted at all costs to be like their teacher.

Seen in this way, everything changes. How must we live? Like the Lord Jesus. If I want to be cleansed, how far must I go? I do not set a limit myself: I must be pure as the Lord Jesus is. This is the measure, a very high measure, but it is the one I must measure myself against, because I am a disciple.

The devil has stolen the word “disciple”, and that is why we hardly hear it any more today. What are we today? Christians, and that is all. The Orthodox are Christians, the Catholics are Christians. But which of them are disciples, people who follow their teacher? Does the Orthodox Church have disciples of the Lord Jesus?

The Lord's command remains the same: first, “make disciples”, and then the second command: “teach them to observe everything I have commanded you”.

This is God's plan. I must go to anyone and teach him to observe everything, not 95%. But in order to teach him to observe everything, I must be the first to observe everything. If I observe 90%, I will teach the other person to observe at most 90%. As for the remaining 10%, if I am convinced that it need not be observed, I will tell him too that he need not observe it. My disciples will be at most what I am. That is why we are called to be like the Lord Jesus and to live as He lived.

When we read Scripture, we subordinate all things to this plan. Where does the forgiveness of sins fit in? It too has its place in this great puzzle, but it is not the central place and it is not the highest point. We cannot say: “Here is the forgiveness of sins, and with this God's work of salvation in me is finished.” God cannot finish the work there.

What, then, is the purpose of the new birth? If we subordinate it to this plan, things are easily understood: at the new birth we enter the school of discipleship and learn to be like our Teacher. That is where life begins. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The new things come from God, from the Lord Jesus. And the old things have also been made subject to this plan of God; these verses, too, are subject to it in the same way.

A person who stops at the forgiveness of sins will say: “All things have not become new, brother. There are still many old things in me. I live in anger, I live in this, in that.” Why does he live like that? Because he has not started school.

At school you learn something. Let us say I want to learn a new trade, welding. I have never welded and I do not know how to weld. First I am shown: “This is the welding machine. These are the materials used for welding. There is an electric machine, and there is a machine that welds with carbide or with acetylene.” I never knew these things, but I learn them. In the same way, let us go step by step and learn what it means to be disciples.

Whoever does the will of the Father

The way we study the Word of God matters too. If we simply read it straight through, after “Go and make disciples… and teach them to observe everything I have commanded you” would come Mark 1:1: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;” This verse no longer has anything to do with discipleship, and the subject would stop at those two verses in Matthew 28. But there are many verses in the Bible about disciples. Let us first see what “make disciples” means and what the apostles did: did they fulfil the command, or did they say, “What the Lord Jesus said is not that important”?

Let us also remember what we told people when we evangelised. Did we tell them to be like the Lord Jesus, or did we say: “Repent, save your soul, or you will end up in hell; there is heaven, there is hell, there is torment there”, or “Stop worshipping icons, it is a sin”?

Before we see what the apostles did, we find something very important in Matthew 12:46-50: “While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

The apostle John writes in 1 John 2:6: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” How did the Lord Jesus live? He had twelve disciples, indeed even

more, because at one point He sent out seventy. It was towards them that He stretched out His hand when He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers!' His mother and His brothers are those who listen to Him and follow Him. It is on this teaching from Matthew 28, 'Go and make disciples', that we build the way we study the Word of God. And when we study it, we bear in mind that this Word does not contradict itself.

In the Acts of the Apostles, at chapter 2, verse 37, someone has put the heading 'The first Christians'. We shall see, however, that the name 'Christians' was given to the disciples by others; they did not give it to themselves. They were disciples, nothing else. The apostle Peter, the apostle Paul and the others did not say, 'We are Christians.' They said, 'We are the disciples of the Lord, the followers of the Lord.' That is, they lived according to the teachings of their Lord, followed them and passed them on, without taking anything away from them.

Let us think of a human disciple. Plato, Aristotle and other notable people of the world had disciples. Why do we know today Pythagoras's theorem, which we learn in maths? Because Pythagoras had disciples who took up his teaching and left it just as it was, without altering it. His teaching was so clear and so correct that it could not be changed.

More than that: can we really alter the teachings of the Lord Jesus? Even a little, just a little? Certainly not. That is why the heading above this passage ought to read 'The first disciples', because those who followed the Lord and the apostles were disciples, not Christians.

The first disciples, not Christians

In Acts 2:37-38, after Peter's sermon, we read: 'When they heard these words, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" "Repent," Peter said to them, "and let every one of you be baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."'

We see the result in verse 41: 'Those who received his preaching were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to the number of the disciples.' Let us take careful note of the words: they were added to the number of the disciples.

Let us think of an ordinary school, a school for apprentices. A new year begins and five more classes are added. What will these five classes be? Classes of apprentices as well, nothing else. If the purpose of the school is to train apprentices in welding or in lathe work, it will teach the same trade to those who come this year and in the years that follow. We go to the vocational school for lathe work precisely because lathe work is what is taught there, nothing else. In the same way, we come to the Lord Jesus in order to be His disciples, so that He may teach us how He lived. That is how about three thousand souls were added that day.

The disciple does more

Before going further in the Acts of the Apostles, to chapter 6, let us think about one thing. Try telling someone that you are a disciple of the Lord and you will see how wide-eyed they look at you: 'What? What are you? A disciple of the Lord Jesus?' They are astonished, because it sounds

out of the ordinary. Nowadays you can hardly afford to say that you are a disciple of the Lord. To be able to say it, you really have to live like a disciple. If you do not live that way, everyone realises at once that something is false.

With the name 'Christian', however, it works. Anyone can say, 'I have my own faith, leave me alone. I am a Christian too.' You are a Christian, and I am a Christian. But are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus? How many can say that of themselves?

The disciple copies the teacher, lives according to his teachings and passes them on. He receives the teaching without arguing about it. If our Teacher includes foot washing in His teachings, our duty is to receive it, to practise it and to pass it on. If we do not practise it and pass it on, we are not disciples of the Lord.

You can still be a Christian that way, though, because a Christian of that kind has almost no obligations. All that is asked of him is to worship in a particular place, to belong to a religious movement and to bring praise to God. The disciple must do more. And this is where things get complicated.

We learn every day

So as not to feel condemned, we study Scripture differently: by chapters, a bit from here, a bit from there. We make a stew out of it all and, in the end, we know nothing and understand nothing. It seems more comfortable that way. But if we learn what it means to be a disciple, that makes us accountable. Then we can say to ourselves every day, 'I am not a disciple of the Lord. I do not live like a disciple; in my thoughts I live like a pagan.'

How does an apprentice live, and where does everything he learns come from? From his teachers. A young person doing three years at a vocational school goes to classes from Monday to Friday and learns on every one of those days. Do we do that with our Lord? Do we go, at least from Monday to Friday, to learn from Him? We say we do not even have time to read the Bible.

And when we do read it, we are like a student who reads his vocational school textbook a page from here and a page from there, without connecting them. When you study the liver, do you read just one line, then move on to a line about the heart and then on to something else? Or do you read everything about the liver, so that you know absolutely everything you need to know about it?

In the same way, let us follow the word 'disciple' through the Acts of the Apostles, to see how unified and precise the Bible is and how it does not contradict itself at all. In Acts 6:7 we read: 'The Word of God spread more and more, the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great multitude of priests came to the faith.' Those who came to the faith became disciples. Even a great multitude of Jewish priests came to the faith and became disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Let us go further, to Acts 9:1-2: “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to

the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." Saul is the one who was to become the apostle Paul. Let us pay attention to what is written: not 'against the disciples', but 'against the disciples of the Lord'. This is very important.

The Lord Jesus did not merely say, 'Go and make disciples.' He wanted them to make disciples of Him: 'You are My disciples; you will pass on My teachings, you will teach others My teachings too, so that they follow Me.' We could make disciples of ourselves, disciples of one person or another. But if that person has received only 90% of what the Lord taught, where do his disciples end up?

The Lord Jesus says to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:15: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." That is why we must be disciples of the Lord, and those whom we teach must become like the Lord Jesus, not like us. Let us remember: not simply disciples, but disciples of Him. This is the purpose for which we gather: that we may all become disciples of the Lord Jesus and live the life of a disciple.

One Lord, one teaching

In Acts 11:26 we read: 'For a whole year they took part in the meetings of the church and taught many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first given the name Christians.' The disciples were given the name Christians, not the Christians the name disciples. Therefore all Christians ought to be disciples of the Lord Jesus.

If they were disciples of the Lord Jesus, would there still be so many denominations? Every denomination has something different, something extra. I do not wish to disparage anyone, but let us take Jehovah's Witnesses as an example: do they have something more than the Pentecostals in their teaching, in their doctrine? If both the one and the other were disciples of the Lord Jesus, they would have the same doctrine. But when we are merely 'Christians', it is easy to have different doctrines. People say that God is with the Baptists, and with the Adventists, and with Jehovah's Witnesses, and with the Catholics, and with all the rest.

But is God only one? Is there one faith and one Lord? If there is one Lord, His disciples follow Him, not many lords. Does the Holy Spirit really teach some to keep the seventh day and others to keep Sunday? Does the Holy Spirit divide people into two categories and save both the one and the other? If we were disciples of the Lord Jesus, many problems would be resolved. Otherwise, everyone says, "We have this teaching and we follow it." And this happens because we no longer believe that we must be disciples of the Lord Jesus, as though no one had ever called us to this.

The disciple keeps everything his teacher teaches him. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:38-39: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Disciples take up the teaching of their master. How, then, can anyone still justify

some people joining the army, going to war or joining the police? If they were disciples of the Lord Jesus, they would not go. They would take up His teaching and carry it forward. If we are merely Christians, that too is possible.

We have seen that the apostles, the disciples of the Lord Jesus, in turn made disciples. If we are disciples, we too will make disciples, not merely Christians. There are groups of Christians who also have a distinctive teaching, something added: some want to observe the Lord's Supper in a particular way, others want to keep the Jewish feasts. But wherever it gathers, an assembly must be an assembly of disciples.

Someone from another town once asked me, “Tell us what extra rules you have, so that we can see whether we can conform to them.” But what would happen if, after a while, one of us came along with an extra rule? We gather, all is well with us, and suddenly someone says, “Brothers, the Lord enlightened me last night that we should do such and such a thing.” And we do it, because the Lord “enlightened” this person or that. However, whoever is a disciple of the Lord cannot come along with an extra rule. In an assembly of Christians, such a thing is possible.

The Lord calls us to follow His word, not added rules. If anyone finds any fault in our obedience, we ask them to help us, so that we may follow this word more purely. This is what we are called to.

Disciple or lay Christian?

Let us see what else the Word of God says about disciples. We turn to the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 14, to find out whether we are obliged to be disciples or whether we may remain in the status of a lay Christian. Such a Christian simply goes to church, sings, prays and gives a tithe wherever it is required. Where it is not required, he gives as much as his heart allows and reckons that this is enough. But is that what the Lord's disciple does? Does he go to the synagogue, worship, and that is all? The disciple lives as the Teacher lived. It is something else entirely; it is a great calling.

The passage that begins at verse 25 bears the heading: “What should the disciple of Jesus be like?” It is a question we too must ask ourselves when we study discipleship. At a state school, a pupil sometimes skips lessons, copies, lies, and does many other things of that sort. Can such a thing be possible in the school of the Lord Jesus? Let us pay attention to what is written in Luke 14:25-27: “And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, 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. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

Here the Lord was not speaking to His disciples, but to great multitudes. We might be inclined to say that this is food that is too strong, that strong food is for those who are mature, and that the multitudes would not understand it. Yet the Lord Jesus spoke these words to the multitudes. This teaching is not for a superior class, for those who have become mature and strong, but for everyone. If the Lord Jesus spoke to the multitudes, we too must speak to the multitudes. This

work is not reserved for a few specialists.

The conditions for entering the school

To make things clearer, let us use an illustration. In these verses the Lord Jesus shows how one enters the school of discipleship and what examination must be passed in order to be admitted to it. You do not become a disciple simply because you yourself have decided to be one. After this decision, others follow. We must know clearly that they are required at the entrance to the school, not at the end of it. If I do not fulfil them, the Lord does not receive me.

It would be very simple to say that the method of salvation is only this: believe in the Lord Jesus and you are saved. According to this reckoning, if you are saved, you are also in the school of disciples, and if you are in the school of disciples, you have already finished it. But that is not how things are. We become disciples for a purpose, which we shall see shortly. The Lord says very clearly that whoever does not bear his cross and come after Him cannot be His disciple. If I do not follow the Master and do not follow His teachings, I cannot be His disciple. Verse 33 adds: "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

These are conditions for entering the school. For salvation, as it is often understood, the conditions do not seem so many: you raise your hand, you surrender your life, and that is that. A man might say, "I was born again twenty years ago, but since then nothing more has happened. At that time I gave up drinking and smoking; I had the strength and I succeeded. Then I stopped there. Ever since, I keep cleansing myself and keep giving up sins, but they come upon me again and again."

The purpose of the new birth, however, is entry into the school of discipleship. That is why we must ask ourselves: when did I consciously enter this school, in order to be transformed into His image? Transformation does not come like this: I sleep, in the morning I wake up more like the Lord Jesus, and the next day even more like Him. It is work. The Lord Jesus calls us to come to Him and to learn from Him (Matthew 11:28-29). If we do not fulfil these conditions, we cannot enter His school and we cannot be His disciples.

Let us hold on to what Luke 14 says: whoever does not bear his cross and come after the Lord cannot be His disciple. We find the same thought in Luke 9:23-24: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

These verses are linked to those in Luke 14. This is how we must study the Word of God: by closely linking the passages to one another.

Let him deny himself

In Luke 14, the Lord says that whoever does not bear his cross and come after Him cannot be His disciple. In Luke 9 He adds, "If anyone wills to come after Me", that is, if anyone wants to be His disciple, "let him deny himself". So yet another condition appears, yet another piece of the

puzzle. Discipleship does not stand alone, but branches out. What does it mean to deny ourselves? And when must we do it: at the end of the life of faith or at the beginning?

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2 that we should have in us the mind that was also in Christ Jesus: He, although He was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. The man who does not deny himself does precisely the opposite: he makes himself equal with God, because he himself decides what is good and what is evil.

So who decides what is good and what is evil: the Master or I? If I still do the deciding, I cannot be His disciple. The disciple, the follower, follows the teachings of the Master and receives them all. That is why the Lord said in Matthew 28:20: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” He is the Master. And we do not keep everything merely to keep ourselves busy. When we keep everything, transformation takes place in us, and it must be complete, not partial.

Light does not dwell with darkness

When we look at night at the moon lit by the sun, we see some patches on it. It is not entirely lit. Those dark patches are the places where the light does not penetrate, in the craters, and there shadow remains. The Lord does not want us to have dark areas, but to be fully light. Wherever we do not receive all that He gives us, darkness remains. And God does not work with both light and darkness, because light cannot dwell together with darkness.

Why must we deny ourselves? Because God has a purpose, and everything is subject to His purpose: that we should be like the Lord Jesus. If we do not renounce our own teachings, we are in fact saying to the Lord Jesus, wherever it does not suit us, “You be like us.”

Let us take an example from the kitchen. A woman has been making soup a certain way for thirty years. Someone comes along and brings her a new recipe for the same soup. She will probably try it. But she used to put in two carrots, and the recipe calls for only one. “No, that's not right, it's too little. It needs two.” In her heart, it needs two. What must this woman do? Deny herself and take the old recipe out of her heart. In the same way, we too must take everything out of our hearts, so that He can work.

A Little for Myself Too

We also have the example of Naaman, in 2 Kings 5. Naaman learned that the God of Israel is the living God, the true God, and he wanted to worship Him, which is natural. But he asks Elisha to let him take earth from there, and to be allowed, when his king goes to bow down before his god, to bow down as well.

That is how we want it with God too: “Leave me a little of my own life. Let me worship in the park as well, since the Name of God is called upon there too.” It is only an example, but the question remains: can you be God's disciple with a divided heart? Does God accept such a thing? The disciple must deny himself.

To understand clearly what self-denial means, let us open the Gospel according to John. Unless we have the Lord Jesus, our Master, as our model, we do not understand how we must deny ourselves.

Until we understand how the Lord Jesus denied Himself, we cannot enter His school; we shall remain merely Christians. Some go to prayer every evening; others, as I have heard, gather in the morning as well, at six o'clock. They go to church twice on Sunday, perhaps fast twice a week, but they do not deny themselves. Is all this of any use to them?

The Lord Jesus shows us through His own life what self-denial means. In John 5:19, He says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself; He does only what He sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does, the Son also does likewise.”

Let us change the words a little, so that we understand what the disciple has to fulfil when he denies himself. Where it says “the Father”, we put the Lord Jesus, and where it says “the Son”, we put the disciple: the disciple can do nothing of himself; he does only what he sees the Lord Jesus doing, and whatever the Lord Jesus does, the disciple also does likewise. That is what the Lord's disciple is like. It is a definition that is easy to remember.

Let us think about the washing of feet. Today it is no longer practised. If I say, “I don't agree with that,” is the Lord Jesus still my Master? Or should He learn from me? Can I still say that I do nothing of myself? Can I still call myself His disciple?

A Christian I can call myself, yes, even a genuine Christian. I have a baptism certificate, I have done many things, I am a pastor, I have studied at a theological university, I have written books. But I have made myself equal with God. Am I His disciple? Have I ever been His disciple? And if I never have been, have I ever been born again? The first day of the new birth is the first day of discipleship. When I was born again, I entered the school of discipleship, the school of obedience, so as to obey as the Lord Jesus obeyed the Father.

Not as Adam obeyed. Adam too obeyed the Father, but not in everything. Eve said that God had commanded them not to eat of the fruit of the tree, nor even to touch it (Genesis 3:3). She wanted to obey even more: not even to touch it. God had told them only not to eat, so that they would not die. She was determined to obey, without a doubt. But the devil came with his cunning, and she no longer obeyed; instead she made herself equal with God. And she died. Yet we want to enter into life through disobedience. Is that not madness?

As I Hear, I Judge

The Lord Jesus says in Luke 14:26 that if anyone does not hate even his own life, he cannot be His disciple. What life is he to hate? The life lived in independence, according to his own mind and his own way: “The brethren tell me, but I still do as I see fit.” Scripture asks us to be subject to one another and subject to the elders, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5). Man replies: “I don't want to be humble, I want to be proud, I don't want to obey.” But then God stands against him. “Never

mind," he says, "but I want to have eternal life." Is that not madness?

So that it is clear to us how the Lord Jesus related to the Father, how He remained in His will and what self-denial means, we read from John 5, verse 30: "I can do nothing of Myself: as I hear, I judge; and My judgement is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me."

For the disciple, "as I hear, I judge" means that I judge according to the word of Christ, not according to my own words, nor according to the doctrine of my church. Then my judgement is just, because I do not seek to do my own will, but the will of the Lord Jesus. How beautiful it is to seek to do His will! Can you still contradict a commandment of the Lord Jesus when you seek to do His will?

It is possible only when we consider that we no longer need to fulfil the Word for salvation. When salvation is seen solely as a gift of God to the one who believes in the Lord's sacrifice, you may even break the commandments, because they are no longer necessary for salvation. Where were we called, and where have we ended up?

There Are No Songs of Discipleship

We have ended up here because we have studied the Word of God without sense, in disorder. What did the word "disciple" mean to me? Just a word in the Bible, of no value whatever. And yet its value is immense. If I do not understand this and do not come to this point, nothing happens. The Lord Jesus says in Luke 14:33: "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." And we reply: "Never mind. I'm not a disciple, but I am a Christian. I'm still something."

More than twenty years ago, when I read about discipleship in the Bible, I did not find myself there. I imagined that the disciples were a special class of the Lord Jesus, an elite group who follow Him in everything, while the rest of us are merely Christians. We were told that the 144.000 in Revelation 14 are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The rest of us, the laity, so to speak, go to the meeting, worship, and get in as well by the Lord's mercy, through His sacrifice. And then all that is left for us is to keep singing "Your sacrifice, Your sacrifice has saved me". There are no songs of discipleship.

The question remains: has the Lord called us to be disciples or not? The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" Although He was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus did not make Himself equal with God, but humbled Himself and took the form of a servant. This is the mind we too are called to have.

It Is Not by Reading That We Become His Friends

This is how we must study the Word of God. We must not stop at reading, as if to please God with a chapter a day. I read in the morning, I read in the evening, I drink and feed on the Word, as they say, but with no benefit to me at all, only so that God may be pleased. Is God really pleased simply because I read?

Abraham had nothing to read, because in his day there were no writings. And yet, how did he live? What was he called? The friend of God. Can I hide anything from my friend? No, because he is my friend. So let us be the friends of God. But it is not by reading that we become His friends.

In Matthew 10:34-39, the Lord Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a son against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who keeps his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Where it says “is not worthy of Me”, we can add in brackets: “cannot be My disciple”. The cross-references beside these verses lead exactly there: verse 38 refers to Luke 9:23 and Luke 14:27, and verse 37 to Luke 14:26.

What is the Lord calling us to here, if not to total devotion? We will have serious trouble at home. Many of us choose to keep the peace at home, even if it means becoming softer towards the Lord Jesus. But can it be that way with Him? In Luke we read “if any man… hate not”, and here “he that loveth… more than me”. The words are slightly different, but the teaching of the Lord Jesus is the same: “He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”

Also in Matthew 10, at verses 24 and 25, we see the purpose of discipleship: why the Lord calls us to be disciples and why He sends us to make disciples. “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.”

Our goal is to be like our Teacher. Everything I do today I measure against the Lord Jesus, and I ask myself: am I like Him? It is wrong to think that I am better. Take long-suffering, for example. It is said that when your patience has run out, you move on to long-suffering. But what does that mean in our minds? “I endure, I endure, I endure…” The Romanian proverb says: “The gentle cat scratches badly.” This cat puts up with a great deal and is gentle, but when at some point it brings out its claws, it scratches.

We too can put up with quite a lot. But when we set the likeness of the Lord Jesus before us, the question changes: like whom must I endure? Not like this person or that, but like the Lord Jesus. He endured to the end and did not open His mouth at all. That is where I must come to: not opening my mouth at any provocation, whether it comes from my wife, from the neighbours or from enemies. That is the goal.

We do not like it? Then we had better give up, because otherwise there is no point whatsoever and we lose out for nothing. If we do not like the way the Lord Jesus, our Master, is, we will not follow Him and we will not want to be like Him. And if we are not like Him, will we be with Him?

The apostle John shows in 1 John 3:2-3 that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him. And he adds: “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” He does not purify himself just anyhow, simply to look busy, but according to the measure of His purity.

I can clean the mud off my boots, but someone may come and say to me: “What have you done? You haven’t cleaned them.” “Yes, I have cleaned them.” “No, they aren’t clean. They still have spots of mud on them.” We can clean ourselves up ninety per cent, and ten per cent remains. Then we say: “It’s a bit grey, but it’s nearly fine.” That will not do. We must be like the Lord Jesus. He is without spot, without wrinkle, without sin, without anything defiled. That is what we are called to. But if we do not have this calling, then that will do as well: a Sunday Christianity.

Every perfect disciple

In Luke 6:40 we read: “The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.” That is what we are called to. This is the main idea, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples”, and all the texts rest upon it.

On this foundation, as a complement to it, rests the new birth: what conditions it has and why a covenant must be made. To it likewise are linked the covenant, the life of faith and the Church. What is the purpose of the Church? Why was it given? To make disciples. Ephesians 4:11-13 shows that everything has the same purpose: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

What does “all” mean? We have entered a school of disciples whose purpose is the perfecting of the saints, till we all come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, as Paul writes in Colossians 2:9. This is the standard, and this is the height to which we have been called. All things are subordinate to this plan of God, and it is in its light that we must study His Word.

Paul shows his goal in Colossians 1:28-29: “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

The Lord has called us to be disciples and to make disciples, to love Him more than anyone else and to purify ourselves even as He is pure. The perfect disciple comes to be like his Teacher. May the Lord help us all to live the life of a true, perfect disciple.

Source: *Discipleship: The Call to Be Like the Teacher* — Unmodified Word
unmodifiedword.com/predici-scrise/discipleship-the-call-to-be-like-the-teacher