

Bible Study  
Monday, September 8, 2008  
Discipleship  
St. John 6: 41-68

Jesus was in the temple in Capernaum teaching about His impending crucifixion and said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." This angered many of the Jews and they asked isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph." How could He come down from heaven? He went on to tell them that unless they ate His flesh and drank His blood they could not have eternal life. This not only angered the Jews but it also offended many of His disciples and they said, "this is a hard saying" and they asked who can understand it? Aware that His disciples were grumbling, Jesus said to them, "does this offend you?" The reason they were complaining was because Jesus teachings were hard to accept. The Greek word is "skleros", which does not mean hard to understand, it means hard to "tolerate." As long as Jesus disciples could not understand Him, they stayed around and asked questions. It was when they did understand Him that they left. They left because what they heard was so contrary to their own views that they would not accept it.

This applies to us today. Many of us remain with Christ and His church as long as we agree or accept God's word and teachings but when they become "hard" we leave. The real cause is not the difficulty of the teaching but our unwillingness to accept what we hear because it conflicts with our own views. We "follow Christ" as long as the terms and conditions are agreeable to us. If not we go away.

Which brings up the question what is a disciple? Initially a disciple is a student or a pupil who seeks to learn about Jesus. But learning and studying is not only about academics, not only to know as much as we can about Jesus; it is to learn so we can apply what we learn to our lives, so that we can live like Jesus. There is no benefit to knowing what we know if we don't apply it to our lives. It is from living what we learn that we grow and mature to:

1. Love and obey God
2. Bear Fruit
3. Live with Joy
4. Glorify God

This is what a disciple of Christ is someone who loves and obeys God, bears fruit, lives with joy and glorifies God. It is important to note that we do not find the word disciple in the New Testament after the Book of Acts. This is because in the Book of Acts (11:26) they began to be called Christians. Christian means "to be like Christ." Disciples and Christians are synonymous. The followers of Christ were called disciples when He was alive and with them but shortly after His ascension and the birth of the church they were called "the people of the way" and then Christians.

We prefer to use the word Christians because in our minds it is different and requires less than it does to be a disciple. But this is only in our minds. If we are not a disciple we are not a Christian. To be a Christian also means we love and obey God, bear fruit, live with joy and glorify God. This is what we have to do to be like Christ. It is easier to say "I'm a Christian" than it is to say "I'm a disciple of Christ." When we join the church many believe they automatically become Christians. Not so. There are many people in the church who are not disciples of Christ or Christians. The question is are we willing to change our opinions in accordance with God's Word or will or will we persevere in our own thinking. If the answer is no we will not be and are not disciples or Christians. As hard as it may be for us to accept God does not change His Word to satisfy or please us.

Look at what happened in this text (verse 66). It says “from this time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” How can they be disciples if they left Him and went back? Disciples are followers, yet they stopped following Him. They were disciples who were “learning of Him” they were students but had not yet made a commitment to Christ. People often associate commitment with their emotions. If they feel the right way then they follow through with their commitments. But true commitment doesn’t work that way. Commitment is not based on our feelings but on what we believe. Human emotions go up and down all the time but commitment has to be rock solid. If we don’t believe something we will not be committed to it. Many have not moved from “learners” to “followers” because we don’t believe and because we don’t believe we are not committed. The disciples in this text walked away because they did not believe.

When the Bible uses the word disciples it is always important to understand the context in which it is used. Many times when the word disciple is used it does not mean those who have made a commitment to Christ, often it means those who are still pupils or students of Christ but have not yet come to believe. They go with Jesus based on their emotions not because they are committed. An example is found in St. Matthew 28:16-17. Some disciples “worshipped Him but some doubted.” They worshipped Him emotionally, they thought He was resurrected but weren’t sure. Many of us come to church and go through the protocols of faith but aren’t committed.

After these disciples went away Jesus asked the twelve, “do you also want to go away?” He said this because He knew what they would do in the time to come. They were with Jesus at that time not because they believed but because of their emotions. They heard what He said and saw what He did. But when difficult times came they too walked away. They denied and forsook Him. But after Pentecost and they were empowered by the Holy Spirit they became committed to Him. Listen to Peter’s response to Jesus.

1. He acknowledged there is nowhere else to go. (verse 68)
2. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. (verse 68)
3. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. (verse 69)