

# ***Spiritual Disciplines***

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## **Introduction:**

### **A disciple is a learner**

**T**he New Testament Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*, and it means 'learner'. The word also implies *thought accompanied by endeavour*. The disciple of Christ is a person who learns from Christ—things pertaining to this physical world, the spirit world, and life as it relates to these worlds. This learner also in return makes practical good of what he or she has learned. In this series on the 'Spiritual Disciplines' we will see how we can, by practical/knowledgeable means, be brought into a student-teacher relationship with the 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords', the one who holds the world in his very hands, the one who loves us very much. Our desire is to learn from our Lord and Master, to be His disciples.

### **The necessary thing**

So many 'Christian' people today make a greater priority doing 'other urgent things' rather than spending the utmost precious time with the Master. In Luke 10:38-42 Martha saw great value in service and Mary saw great value in worship. The Lord said unto Martha (in response to her complaint against Mary), "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her." So, disciples of Christ must make every effort in their busy lives to come to their Teacher to glean that which 'is necessary', that which is the 'good part', that which 'shall not be taken' away.

### **Go forth and make disciples**

At the close of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spoke to eleven of His disciples. He told them to make "disciples of all the nations." Jesus didn't tell his disciples to make converts, but to make disciples. Then later on, in the book of Acts, Luke wrote about the early disciples in Antioch. He tells us of a man named Barnabas who brought another man named Saul to Antioch and there "they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the *disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*" In the beginning of

the Church expansion the Church was made up of disciples. In fact the term 'Christian' (which is used so liberally today) was given to those who were disciples. These Christians didn't become disciples by procuring a secondary conversion or experience; these Christians were called Christians because they were first of all disciples, they were already acting in accordance to their salvation. They were learning and practicing the teachings of their great Teacher and they became the "salt and the light of the world." (Matt. 5:13-16)

### **An activity within our power**

The 'Spiritual Disciplines' are for all proclaiming Christians. These disciplines are *the acts that we do as Christians to bring ourselves before the Lord for inspiration, instruction and correction.* Christian philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard says concerning discipline in general, it "is an activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort." For the disciple of Christ there is an active part of discipleship that ought not be overlooked or undermined.

Concerning the spiritual aspects of discipleship Willard says, "They are disciplines designed to help us be active and effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart, now spiritually alive by grace, in relation to God and His kingdom."<sup>i</sup> Just like an Athlete who spends many hours in training to prepare himself for a special event; or a learner of a foreign language who spends much time studying words, grammar and sentence structure so that she might excel in her discipline, so must the disciple of Christ concern his or herself with spiritual disciplines in order to be of full understanding and preparedness for hearing the voice of his Master and acting upon it.

### **Hearing from God**

Christian disciples hear God. Francis Schaeffer in his book entitled *He is There and He is Not Silent* "deals with the philosophical necessity of God's being there and not being silent - in the areas of metaphysics, morals and epistemology."<sup>ii</sup> As the disciple takes his/her case for Christianity to the world he/she will need to know how God speaks, what He speaks about and how we can know that we have heard His voice. In this series I will not go into much depth into any of these three subjects except the last ('how we can know'), so it might do the reader good to pursue these further in Schaeffer's books. What I will do is examine the process of how God speaks to His disciples, through the disciplines. We will examine first how to validate the disciplines that pertain to

hearing the voice of God, so to discern the 'still quiet voice' of the Master (1 Kings 18:9-18).

### **The Character of the disciplines**

There are four principle methods that can be used to determine the validity of practiced discipline. In the next four sections we will define these four methods in the hope that we can have a good understanding of what discipleship is truly about. For when we look into the specific disciplines in depth later on, it will do us good to have these principles in the back of our minds so that we might trust in the validity of Spiritual Disciplines in our lives.

### **Principle one - the Spirit of God**

***...we...who worship in the Spirit of God...and put no confidence in the flesh*** - Philippians 3:3

The first principle is an obviously easy principle to identify. For where God's Spirit is, His character is clearly demonstrated. The way in which we can understand a person's character is by simply observing their actions. By the Word of God we can know how to discern whether or not God has spoken, by observing whether or not His character is truly being represented. Galatians chapter five offers much insight on both God's character and the character of the flesh; this shall give us a good understanding of what is a genuine and what is a false experience.

Where God's Spirit dwells, the fruit of His Spirit is made abundantly clear. If we don't observe "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control", then we don't see God (5:22, 23). And conversely were we see "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" we most definitely do not see our Lord (5:19-21).

Illustratively speaking, God would never through prayer or any other Christian discipline prompt a man to sleep with a person he is not married to, for the sake of evangelism or any other advantage.

We who make practice of worshiping "in the Spirit of God" should then, with no mistake, observe that discipline which brings

us to the feet of our Master (that which is genuine and productive) versus that which is from an inferior source, glorifying the flesh or another false deity. We ought not to worship the Lord in "confidence in the flesh", but "in the Spirit of God"; this is what is good and what the Lord desires.

***"Truly, truly I say unto to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*** - John 3:3

At this juncture I feel that it is important to point out the obvious necessity of being 'born again'. Without being 'born again'—born of water *and the Spirit* (John 3:5)—it is impossible to worship 'in the Spirit of God'. Christ clearly states, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." What does this mean?

The kingdom of God is all that is God's and all that is in His power. Through the *re-birth of the spirit* comes an understanding of divine and spiritual things, these things are of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not a high and lofty place far away from this planet, but is indeed the very strong power and influence that holds the universe in place, like the skeleton in a body (yet on a much more grandiose scale). The spirit world is metaphysically the farther most or near most component that drives all of reality. God through His spirit holds the universe in His hands. To just think about all that can be gained by coming to God through the *communion* of the spirit.<sup>iii</sup> (*Emphasis added*)

Accordingly, the acts of the 'Spiritual Disciplines' are concerned with God's kingdom (his order, his rule, his reign). His kingdom is spiritual. So therefore, those of his kingdom *need* to be born of the spirit. That is the bond, or the *communion* of the spirit.

### **Counterfeit acts of worship**

Without the 're-birth of the spirit' the practice of the principles demonstrated above would simply be a counterfeit act. These counterfeit acts of worship are commonly referred to in the evangelical community as '*religious* acts of worship', or acts of worship *void* of the important bond of the Spirit. With out the bond of the Spirit, the purpose of the 'Spiritual Disciplines' is unachievable. This bond of the Spirit is the link, relationship or

communion between God and man. We will deal with this in detail in the next section.

### **Only through the cross**

Let us also always remember that this relationship between God and man was made possible only through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. Christ 'came down' to be 'lifted up' as our only focus of faith:

Truly, truly, I say unto you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen... If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life (John 3:11-15).

*To be continued...*

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<sup>i</sup> Willard, Dallas, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p.353, 1998, Harper San Francisco

<sup>ii</sup> Schaeffer, Francis, *The Complete Works of...*, Vol. 1, p.277, 1982, Crossway Books

<sup>iii</sup> Key, Scott, *Ok, the Soul*, not yet published, GSM