

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP BY WILLIAM BARCLAY

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—John 8:31-32

Few New Testament passages have such a complete picture of discipleship as this.

(1) **Discipleship begins with belief.** Its beginning is the moment when a man accepts what Jesus says as true, all that he says about the love of God, all that he says about the terror of sin, all that he says about the real meaning of life.

(2) **Discipleship means constantly remaining in the word of Jesus** and that involves four things:

(a) *It involves constant listening to the word of Jesus.* It was said of John Brown of Haddington that when he preached he paused every now and then as if listening for a voice. The Christian is the man who all his life listens for the voice of Jesus and will take no decision until he has first heard what he has to say.

(b) *It involves constant learning from Jesus.* The disciple (*mathetes*) is literally the learner, for that is what the Greek word means. All his life a Christian should be learning more and more about Jesus. The shut mind is the end of discipleship.

(c) *It involves constant penetrating into the truth which the words of Jesus bear.* No one can hear or read the words of Jesus once and then say that he understands their full meaning. The difference between a great book and an ephemeral one lies in the fact that we read an ephemeral book once and never wish to go back to it; whereas we read a great book many times. To remain in the word of Jesus means constantly to study and think about what he said until more and more of its meaning becomes ours.

(d) *It involves constant obeying of the word of Jesus.* We study it not simply for academic satisfaction or for intellectual appreciation, but in order to find out what God wishes us to do. The disciple is the learner who learns in order to do. The truth which Jesus brought is designed for action.

(3) **Discipleship issues in knowledge of the truth.** To learn from Jesus is to learn the truth. "You will know the truth," said Jesus. What is that truth? There are many possible answers to that question but the most comprehensive way to put it is that the truth which Jesus brings shows us the real values of life. The fundamental question to which every man has consciously or unconsciously to give an answer is: "To what am I to give my life? To a career? To the amassing of material possessions? To pleasure? To the service of God?" In the truth of Jesus we see what things are really important and what are not.

(4) **Discipleship results in freedom.** "The truth will make you free." "In his service is perfect freedom." Discipleship brings us four freedoms. (a) It brings us freedom from fear. The man who is a disciple never again has to walk alone. He walks for ever in the company of Jesus, and in that company fear is gone. (b) It brings freedom from self. Many a man fully recognizes that his greatest handicap is his own self. And he may in despair cry out: "I cannot change myself. I have tried, but it is impossible." But the power and presence of Jesus can re-create a man until he is altogether new. (c) It brings freedom from other people. There are many whose lives are dominated by the fear of what other people may think and say. H. G. Wells once said that the voice of our neighbours sounds louder in our ears than the voice of God. The disciple is the man who has ceased to care what people say, because he thinks only of what God says. (d) It brings freedom from sin. Many a man has come to the stage when he sins, not because he wants to, but because he cannot help it. His sins have so mastered him that, try as he will, he cannot break away from them. Discipleship breaks the chains which bind us to them and enables us to be the persons we know we ought to be.

