

Grace and Discipleship

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The very essence of the grace of God is that it is free and unconditional. The way of its reception - repentance and faith - is plainly laid down for us in Scripture, but though there may be *conditions* for its reception, grace itself is unhampered by any such thing. Some *men* are adepts at the art of giving with one hand and taking away with the other, of bestowing gifts so hedged about with restrictions and conditions as to be positively useless to the recipients; but this is not *God's* way.

"The free grace of God" is a common expression, rightly used, and most of us believe in it. Yet it is puzzling to many when, opening their Bibles, they light upon passages in which they are unexpectedly confronted by an "IF." For example, "IF any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9: 23).

What does it mean? Is salvation, after all, as free as we had supposed? Must we make a kind of bargain with the Master after these terms, ere we can be enrolled as His?

Let us answer these questions by turning to Luke 14 and reading the paragraph, verses 25 to 35. The same thoughts re-appear here: "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." Those four closing words are thrice repeated (vv. 26, 27, and 33). Not, mark you, "he cannot be saved," but "he cannot be My DISCIPLE."

Now of all the four, Luke's Gospel is the one which emphasizes grace. Indeed in Luke 14 the very paragraph which precedes the one referred to contains the parable of the "great supper" (vv. 15 to 24), which is a marvellous unfolding of the grace of God. Is it not worthy of note, then, that, having unfolded divine *grace* in such a way as to bring great multitudes about Him eager to hear, the Lord turns round upon them and tests their reality by proposing to them the terms of *discipleship*; and shall we not do well, while observing the distinction between them, to keep them together in the order in which He put them?

They may be distinguished as follows:

Grace is a special form or character of divine love. It is the shape it takes when it stoops to flow forth to the utterly undeserving, adapting itself to their need, though far transcending the need in the wealth of its full supplies.

Discipleship is the special form taken by the love that springs up responsively in the heart of a believer. It is the backward flow of divine love to its Source. To be a disciple is to be a *learner*, and not a learner only, but a *follower*; and when the grace of God grips a soul and new life begins, its first instincts are to learn of the Saviour and to follow Him.

Granting this, it is easy to see that grace is the mainspring of discipleship, and it is not without reason that they are linked together in Luke 14.

In the parable of the great supper we find the door of salvation swung widely open and the very worst invited. No demand is made upon them, no condition imposed, no bargain struck. Grace shines forth undimmed by any tarnish of that kind. But He who spoke that parable was well aware of two things.

1. That many would profess to receive grace, without being real in their profession.

2. That those who really receive it have thereby had begotten in their souls a responsive love that draws them irresistibly after the One from whom it comes; and such must understand what is needful if they are to follow Him.

Therefore it was that He followed up His declaration of grace with instruction as to discipleship, and added two short parables to show the importance of counting the cost.

"It costs too much to be a Christian," said a gloomy-looking man one day. Was he right?

Did he mean, "It costs too much to be *saved*"? Then he was totally wrong. The untold cost of salvation has fallen upon One who was able to bear it, and He being made sin for us has borne it all. To us it *costs* nothing.

Ah! but he used the word "Christian" in its proper sense, for it was the *disciples* who were called *Christians* first in Antioch (Acts 11: 26). He meant, "It costs too much to be a disciple." Again, then, he was *wrong*. It costs to be a disciple, but it does not cost too much! The fact is, our gloomy-looking

friend was not saved, he had never tasted grace, and therefore had nothing to spend. When a man goes to market with no money in his pocket everything costs too much. He was putting discipleship before grace, which is equivalent to putting demand before supply, and responsibility before the power that meets it - in everyday language, "putting the cart before the horse."

What does discipleship cost? It costs sacrifice in every direction, and therefore the little parables come in here. It costs a good deal of labour in fortifying one's position, and a good deal of energy in fighting one's foes.

"Which of you intending to build a tower . . ." Have you any such intention? Certainly you have, if you propose to really follow the Lord. A tower speaks of protection; and such we need. Nothing is plainer in Scripture than that, though we are kept by the power of God, it is "*through faith*" (1 Peter 1: 5). The responsibility to build up ourselves on our most holy faith rest upon us. Therefore "praying in the Holy Ghost" is the only attitude that becomes us, and the result is to keep ourselves "in the love of God" (see Jude 20, 21). With the love of God enveloping us as our tower of defence we are well fortified indeed!

"Faith" is the hand that builds. "*The faith*" - and we find it in the Word of God - is the mighty foundation on which we build. Prayer is the attitude best suited to these building operations. The love of God, *consciously known*, is our tower of defence.

But all this is the means to an end. We are well furnished defensively that we may act offensively against the foe. The trowel truly comes first, but after that the sword.

"Or what king going to make war . . . Have you any thought of such an aggressive movement? If a disciple you *ought* to have. Notice, the king with ten thousand proposes to take the *offensive* against the king with twenty thousand. A bold movement that! Ah, but behind his back was a well-fortified base of operations, his tower was built. This is ever God's way. David's tower was built in the wilderness experiences of meeting the lion and the bear, and hence Goliath has no terrors for him. Luther, "the monk that shook the world," advances with his tiny book into the hot-bed of animosity at Worms. Yes, but this was his battle cry:

"A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing."

Discipleship means all this. It means prayer, and the study of God's Word. It means exercises otherwise unknown, and the shock of battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Sit down and count the cost. Do you tremble? Then recount the cost in the full light of the power of God and the weighty stores of *grace*, and you will begin to "rejoice in Christ Jesus," and yet more deeply have "no confidence in the flesh."

Thus grace and discipleship go hand-in-hand. Just how, the case of Bartimaeus well illustrates (Mark 10: 46-52). Grace stood still at his cry and gave him all he desired freely. "Jesus said unto him, Go thy way." Then, Bartimaeus, no terms are imposed upon you; go north, south, east, or west, as you desire. You are free! Which way did he go?" Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way." Impelled by grace he entered the path of discipleship. *He followed Jesus.*

Is every Christian a disciple, or is it only certain favoured ones that have this distinction?

There are no "favoured ones" in Christianity. True it is that the world having invaded and conquered the Christian profession, clergy and laity in numerous grades, corresponding to worldly society, are found on every hand. The Christianity of the Bible, while admitting spiritual gifts and office, knows nothing of these things. The early Christians were believers, saints, disciples, all of them (*see Acts 1: 15; Acts 6: 1; Acts 9: 38; Acts 19: 9; Acts 20: 7*). And the very foremost of the apostles was just a believer, a saint, or a disciple along with the rest, though gifted from heaven and clothed with an authority that was indisputable.

We may be sure, therefore, that it is a fatal mistake to consider that discipleship belongs only to a few - a kind of clergy - and that we more ordinary folk may rest content with being saved, and getting to heaven presently, and need bestir ourselves as to nothing else. Shame on us if like Bartimaeus we receive our sight, and then, unlike him, go strolling off to amuse ourselves with the novel sights of Jericho!

Yet there is a tendency in that direction, and therefore it was that the Lord said to certain Jews who believed on Him, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" (John 8: 31).

Discipleship does truly belong to *all* Christians, yet many believers there are who are not "DISCIPLES INDEED."

Can you summarize for us the conditions of Christian discipleship?

Read carefully Luke 9: 23 to 26 and 46 to 62, also Luke 14: 25 to 33 again, if you would gain some idea of them.

The gist of it all seems to be contained in Luke 14: 26 and 33, where we find the one absolutely indispensable condition to be that Christ must be *first* and the rest - relations, possessions, and particularly one's self - *nowhere*.

We "hate . . ." not absolutely, but in a comparative sense, of course. Our love to Christ should so transcend the natural love we bear to our relations that the latter appears as hate when compared with the former. (Luke 9: 59, 60 gives an illustrative case).

We "forsake . . ." *i.e.*, the affections are severed from our possessions; they are no longer ours, but our Master's, to be held for Him. It *may* mean parting with everything, as in the case of the early Christians, or, like Levi, we may *leave all* and yet still have. Levi's house was still "his own," and his money was used to make a great feast for Christ and draw sinners to Him (Luke 5: 27-29). A very good example for some of us!

But if Christ is to be first, self must go, and so we find that the disciple has to deny himself and to take up his cross daily.

"Deny himself," *i.e.*, say NO to self. Accept death - be as a dead man - as far as the working of will is concerned. An inward thing.

"Take up his cross daily," *i.e.*, an outward thing. Accept death as cutting off from the world and its glory. Say NO to the love of reputation and popularity.

Stern work this. Bitter to the flesh. Sweetened by the love of Christ. These are the conditions of discipleship.

It is easy to see what discipleship meant for the early Christians. We live in different days. What does it mean practically for us to-day?

It means precisely the same now as then. The only difference is one of surface details. It means saying *no* to our own wills as much as ever. It means the cross - disallowance by the world - as much as ever. The world disallowed them by cross or sword, by wild beast or flame; it may disallow us by silent contempt, a well-timed snub, or social ostracism. The thing is the same; but in their case an *acute* attack, short, sharp, and all was over; in ours, *chronic*, not severe, but lingering and protracted.

It means walking in the spirit of self-judgment, and separation from the world, even in its religious forms. It means giving up many things lawful in themselves for the sake of His name. It means making THE question at all times and under all circumstances, not "What do I want?" but "What does He want?"

It looks then as if the true disciple stands to lose a good deal in this world. What does he gain?

He gains "manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18: 30). The profit will not be of the nature that appeals to the man of the world, who estimates chiefly by the amount of his balance at the bank. It is more real than that. Here are words which indicate its character: "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour" (John 12: 26).

Companionship with Christ; honour from the Father. Who can estimate the gain of those two things? A glimpse of them was granted to the three disciples, when, having been plainly told what discipleship would involve, they witnessed the transfiguration (Luke 9) - when they were "with Him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1: 16-18).

Small wonder, then, that Paul - who stood in the front rank of disciples and suffered the loss of all things for Christ - when he fixed the eye of faith on eternal things dismissed the *loss* side of the *discipleship* account as "our light affliction," and hailed the profit side as "*a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Cor. 4: 17, 18).

Is there any difference between a disciple and an apostle? If so, what?

There is a very distinct difference. We read, "He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve whom also He named apostles" (Luke 6: 13). The word "disciple" means "one taught" or "trained." The word "apostle" means "one sent forth." Every true follower of the Lord was a disciple; only the twelve were sent forth by Him as apostles. Theirs was a peculiar place, therefore, of authority and service.

Moreover, the apostles had to do with the foundations of the Church (Eph. 2: 20), and have long since passed away; but ever since then and unto this day disciples of Christ are to be found on earth.

Where does the power for discipleship come from, and how can we keep it up?

The necessary power is not to be found within yourself, nor can it be worked up by religious exercises. It is in God alone. It reaches us, however, in a very simple way. Dr. Chalmers it was who spoke of "the expulsive power of a new affection." We may just as truly speak of "the impulsive power of a new affection." Let the bright rays of the love of God break into any heart, however dark, and straightway a new impelling power is known and discipleship begins.

That which *starts* it *sustains* it. Read John 14-16. They are a perfect manual of discipleship. You will find that *love* is the spring of everything. The Comforter, the *Holy Spirit*, is the power, and *obedience*, the keeping and the doing of Christ's commandments, is the pathway into which the disciple's feet are led.

Can you give us any hints to help us, as we seek to live as disciples of the Lord Jesus?

I should just say three things:

1. You will need wisdom and discretion. Therefore you must give the Scriptures their proper place. The will of our Master and Lord is therein expressed; our business as disciples is to search out that will in dependence on the Holy Spirit's teaching. The Scriptures must therefore be to us the Word of God, and we must make them our careful study.

2. You must maintain a spirit of dependence upon God. Therefore prayer is necessary. The disciple must needs ever cultivate the prayerful spirit.

3. You must ever seek the pathway of obedience. As disciples our great business is to obey rather than to do the greatest of exploits. Prince Rupert, of historic fame, performed great exploits in the service of Charles the First. But his exploits in large measure contributed to the smashing defeat which Charles suffered at the hand of Cromwell's Ironsides at Naseby. and led to the loss not only of his master's crown, but his head also. If he had thought less of his individual exploits and more of the leader's plan of campaign, results might have been different.

Obedience to God's Word is our first business. Let us lay aside every weight that would hinder us, remembering the words of the great Master Himself: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13: 17).