

Decisions and Disciples

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Being “saved,” “born again,” or “believing on Jesus” is a free gift and will get you to heaven (John 3:3; John 5:24), but walking as a disciple *in* the kingdom in the here and now experience will cost you something – yourself.

There’s an age-old debate over whether a person can enter heaven by simply believing, or does he or she have to become a disciple. By the way, the word disciple means “a learner,” which was more than just learning things in Bible days – they followed!

The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. If you have an English Bible, it has been translated from the Greek. The word believe is translated as belief (a noun – *pistis*) or believe (a verb – *pisteo*). These Greek words can mean "believe, depend, obey, trust or assurance." It’s interesting that in the Book of James he says, “the demons believe and tremble.”

“You **believe** that God is one; you do well. So do **the demons believe** and shudder [in terror and horror such as make a man’s hair stand on end and contract **the** surface of his skin]!” (James 2:19 Amp).

Intellectual assent

Whenever it is argued that faith is more than a *mere intellectual assent* (i.e., that faith must also include surrender/commitment to the Lordship of Christ), reference is hastily made to the demons’ faith mentioned in v 19. It might even be said that Jas 2:19 forms the preeminent argument for the perspective that true faith comprises more than a superficial, intellectual "faith."

Throughout the Bible, God placed a two-letter word on every kind of decision people would make concerning their desire for more than just getting to heaven.

That two-letter word is *if*, as in “If anyone would come after me, he or she must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me” (Luke 9:23). We can easily add to church rolls with the sweet message of salvation with no commitment, but when you start calling for the cost of discipleship, the numbers get much smaller.

Conditional sentences are "If ..., then ..." statements. They make a statement that if something happens, then something else will happen. The 'if' clause is referred to as the '**protasis**' by grammarians. It comes from the Greek words 'pro' (meaning before) and 'stasis' (meaning 'stand'). So the 'protasis' means 'what stands before' or 'comes

first' as far as these two clauses are concerned. The 'then' clause is termed the 'apodosis'; it is what 'comes after' the protasis.

The “if” is important because *if* a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, they have made a serious decision that their life now belongs to God to do with as He pleases. It’s a one-time decision but a life-long struggle. This discipleship is a process in which the follower goes through myriads of change in their interests, passions, and choices, but it doesn’t come without a great deal of pain and suffering. It “ain’t no” picnic.

“If we died with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:11-12).

The self-centered refuse to “die”

The dying here has to do with the dying of the self-life in us, and not necessarily physical death, as with a martyr, although this definitely has happened to many Christians and still does throughout the world. Jesus said that whoever loses life (self) for my sake will find it, but whoever saves his life (self) shall lose it (Matt. 16:25). This statement is the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Christ – you lose your self-life.

The kernel of wheat

This is tantamount to the verse that says if a kernel of wheat doesn’t fall into the ground and die, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears fruit. People who hold on to their self-life die alone – they are ultimately lonely people because they are self-centered, and Numero Uno with them is protecting their self-life at all costs! Additionally, “fruit-bearing,” bringing forth spiritual fruit in others, is either non-existent or sorely lacking.

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24 NIV).

Incidentally, the Lord Jesus knew that leaving the old self in charge was a horrendous mistake, so He crucified it with Himself:

“Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken—for a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin (Rom. 6:6 JB Phillips).”

How many committed Christians do you know who are self-centered? I mean they focus on themselves, their lives, their success, their appearance, their status, etc. I imagine you can think of a bushel of them. You probably have little doubt that they

“know the Lord,” but their self-centered focus smells like a possum that was just run over by a mactruck.

A good friend of mine Steve Sampson wrote a book titled “I Was Always on My Mind,” an obvious play on Willie Nelson’s famous ditty. He told me that one time after a church meeting, he and his wife wanted to see how long one woman would talk about herself and her problems without their saying a word – 45 minutes! Steve said, “She could talk under water!”

The Seven Giants of Eros

Writer/teacher Bob Mumford calls this kind of living “Eros.” We usually connote Eros with erotic, but in the truest since it’s simply self-centeredness. The symbol of Eros is a snake eating its tail – self consumed. Mumford’s “Seven Giants of Eros” are as follows. See anybody you know here?

Look Good – Over-concern for appearance or image rather than character. Look Good is not just concerned with outward appearance, but with creating a reputation that is not established in truth. It involves an improper or illegal search for originality, uniqueness in dress, language, automobile, skills, etc. It will pay any price and exerts a tremendous amount of effort to preserve its image. (Matthew 6:1)

Feel Good – The pure pleasure principle. Feel Good avoids pain and discomfort at any cost, is committed to personal pleasure or gain, and is given to the senses or is sensual. It controls the emotions, mind, and heart and is the source or first cause of all compulsive and addictive behavior. (James 4:3)

Be Right – The inability to admit that we are wrong. A “know-it-all” paralyzed by the domino theory – if wrong once, how can we be sure we have ever been right? Because the mind rules the emotions, Be Right is focused, controlled, and overly committed to his or her own evaluations, ideas, and concepts. The fear of being wrong or challenged makes them increasingly rigid – a form of stubbornness and rebellion. Be Right often uses anger and rage as protective mechanism to prevent being discovered. (Job 40:8)

Stay in Control – Demands to have his hands on the steering wheel – He always wants to be in control because then everyone is safe and the results are guaranteed. Because he thinks he is god, Stay in Control must determine the outcome of everything for everyone. He experiences anxiety regarding the future because it may be just beyond his control. Stay in Control refuses to take no for an answer. He is a control freak determined to have everything and everyone that touches his sphere of life within his power and subject to his influence. (Esther 1:12)

Have a Hidden Agenda – He is covert with words of peace and a heart of criticism. Hidden Agenda is like a snowball with a rock in it. With this Giant in operation, we lie in ambush with undisclosed motives, watching for weakness and vulnerability, ready to spring the trap, which has been disguised and then set with lies or half-truths. We hide one thing in our hearts while proclaiming another. This Giant is a user; it seeks to use life, people, and every situation to advance his own interests. (Matthew 10:26-27)

Take Personal Advantage – This Giant uses others to accomplish its own agenda. It is constantly maneuvering for title, position, or recognition. When he is not the center of attention, he suffers

envy and pain. We ask “what’s in it for me?” and will help others only if it directly benefits us. Selfish ambition. (Jude 1:16)

Remain Undisturbed – Unwilling to be inconvenienced. Undisturbed is not as blatant as the other six – he is insidious, secretive, subtle, and sophisticated. This Giant disguises himself as the need for stability, perhaps as the need to preserve his reputation or the honor of respectability when more is asked of him than he wants to give. Undisturbed says, “I will follow you, but I cannot follow you *that far!*” It is that subtle difference between admiration for Christ and identification with Him. (Jeremiah 48:11; Luke 10:30-35)

Decisions not disciples

In the “Bible Belt,” where I live, we have a lot of religious sayings. “He made a decision for Christ last night.” This means the guy “trusted Christ” (more jargon), but the real question is will he become a disciple of Christ? Will he give himself up for God’s purposes, or will he let the old self stay in charge?

In the “BB” you can often meet people who have grown up with a list of “don’ts.” I heard someone say that growing up in his family they definitely knew what they were against but weren’t too sure what they were for! At my high school, we had one local pastor who stood against square dancing! Apparently, he felt square dancing led to pre-martial sex – LOL!

We sometimes think “giving your life to Christ” means we have to go to Africa. It *usually* doesn’t. I say *usually* because I heard one evangelist say he wouldn’t give his life to Christ because he didn’t want to go there. He finally decided to do it, and guess what? -- he went to Africa eight times – and loved it! The truth is “giving yourself to Jesus” simply means we give up control of ourselves to the Heavenly Father’s direction through the power of the Holy Spirit. This isn’t a once-for-all decision – it’s an every day occurrence!

We often quote the Great Commission, some of the last words of Christ to the disciples before He returned to heaven (Matt. 28:19-20). The key part in His words was “making disciples of all nations,” not making converts.

If we had obeyed this one thing, the world probably would have already been won by now.

Change is painful

Change into a disciple is painful because the old self wants to continue to assert itself. Consequently, the one who really follows Jesus will experience various kinds of suffering – emotional, physical, mental and spiritual, so this self is rendered meek and servant-like. This suffering allows the person’s spirit to have control over him and more easily submit to the Lord. God made us a tripartite being – (human) spirit, soul

and body. If the spirit is in charge, the rest will follow. In our growth as a Christian, God takes the “acorn” that was planted in us when we were born of the Holy Spirit and makes us into an oak tree. This can take years! The pain we go through creates for us, in us, an everlasting weight of glory:

“For the suffering of this time, while very small and swift, prepares us great glory without limits for the eternity of eternities” (2 Cor. 4:17 Aramaic Bible in Plain English (©2010)).

Suffering and its intensity varies from person to person. Some people experience little physical suffering, but their mental difficulties wreak havoc on them. Relationships falter and sometimes end, and those can be some of the most painful experiences of all. Others experience losing a close friend or many family members within a short period of time. Whatever a disciple incurs is working out that “eternal weight of glory.” Either that, or for some people suffering is wasted on them (1 Pet. 2:20) since may suffer for the wrong reason or find no meaning in suffering for righteousness sake.

The release of the spirit

In “The Release of the Spirit,” Watchman Nee puts all this suffering in perspective. “ANYONE who serves God will discover sooner or later that the great hindrance to his work is not others but himself. He will discover that his outward man and his inward man are not in harmony, for both are tending toward opposite directions. He will also sense the inability of his outward man to submit to the spirit's control, thus rendering him incapable of obeying God's highest commands. He will quickly detect that the greatest difficulty lies in his outward man, for it hinders him from using his spirit.

Many of God's servants are not able to do even the most elementary works. Ordinarily they should be enabled by the exercise of their spirit to know God's word, to discern the spiritual condition of another, to send forth God's messages under anointing and to receive God's revelations. Yet due to the distractions of the outward man, their spirit does not seem to function properly. It is basically because their outward man has never been dealt with. For this reason revival, zeal, pleading and activity are but a waste of time. As we shall see, there is just one basic dealing which can enable man to be useful before God: brokenness.”

Suffice what Bro. Nee said by considering that in the Fall we gave away ourselves to a downward spiral through “Daddy Adam.” The spirit of man, once his loving connection to God, was severed. The soul of man, which was intended to be his servant, took advantage of this and became the master. In other words, knowledge and experience through the senses (soul works) was now the rule of the day. Suffering is one of the ways God uses to release the spirit to become the master again.

“I see that hand”

I don't know about you, but if God, at the beginning of this journey, had asked for a show of hands of everyone who wanted to suffer for him, I would have kept my hand down. I guess that's why in most churches the preacher's use of “I see that hand” only means you want heaven or you need help. I can hear it now: “Ok, church, everyone who wants to die the death to your selfishness come forward.” Out of 200, two make their way to the front, and one of them was pushed!

You may think I'm being a bit cynical or too harsh, but consider the reality of pressure and giving up your right to your self as found among the Seven Giants. In John chapter 6, it provides an account in which a distinction can be made between a decision and a disciple. In this account, there had arisen a dispute with the Jews over who Jesus was, God or just a man. He tells the Jews that eating His flesh (the Bread of Life) and drinking His blood is synonymous with finding life in Him:

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6:56-58).

Losing disciples

Jesus wasn't suggesting cannibalism, as some of these Jews asserted. He was saying that to become and remain His disciple, total submission and becoming one with Him was required. It's interesting to note that, unbeknownst to most people, at one point Jesus had 70 disciples, or 72 as some translations state (Luke 10:1), and not just the 12 primary ones. The confrontation with the Jews over the above declaration about His Body and Blood was so upsetting and offensive to them that “many of them walked with him no more” (John 6:66).

Offending the flesh

Laying down our lives is most often offensive to our flesh. Our independent self nature rears its ugly head every time we're asked to do something that is contrary to our nature. Consequently, most of the time we have to act against ourselves. As with the 70 disciples reference, we also are often offended by others' behavior, particularly in the church, and because of this some “walk with Him no more.” Their offense is geared toward the Lord as well as the people who offended them.

This is the primary reason our focus should never be on the church, a ministry (ours or anyone else's) or some Christian leader. Our focus must remain on Jesus Himself (Col. 1:3) and serve in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33) and not the church per se.

Churches, ministries or sometimes a highly respected and adored minister will fail us, but Jesus won't!

If you serve the church as you're primary goal, you will likely become very disappointed, and if you haven't already left, it won't be long before you do. Church Hopping is in vogue. On the flip side, some people serve churches that have left traditional doctrines in favor of "cultural acceptance" or what's "politically correct," take your pick. They have decided that obedience to Christ first and the Word of God weren't worth the sacrifice.

Besides the pain, etc., mentioned here, becoming disciple definitely has some temporal and eternal benefits. When the disciples reminded Jesus that they "had left all to follow Him," he replied:

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first" Mark 10-29-31 NIV).

The decision is yours.