

A Framework For Discipleship

Jesus, early in His earthly ministry in what is known as the “Sermon on the Mount” (Mat. 5-7), laid the framework upon which discipleship and Christianity would be built. He addressed virtually every important area of life inclusive of inward attitudes, outward actions, relationships with others, the sanctity of marriage, dealing with enemies, prayer, forgiveness, relying upon God, hypocrisy, identifying false teachers, acceptable service toward God, and how to build a life upon the teachings of Christ that will withstand the conflicts and trials of life and emerge victorious in the end. Jesus begins His sermon by emphasizing attitudes and characteristics which must be developed in every successful disciple. It is self-evident that these “Beatitudes” are not hereditary human characteristics, or everyone would have them. Neither are they the exclusive domain of a particular culture or ethnic group, for although Jesus’ initial ministry was to the Jews (Mat. 15:24), he repeatedly uses pronouns such as “they” and “their” which would include both the Jews of the present and the Gentiles who would later be ushered into the kingdom (Acts 11:17-18).

The Beatitudes remain a vital starting point for anyone who would build a life devoted to Christ and destined for heaven. The one who would be greatly rewarded in heaven (Mat. 5:12) must humble himself (poor in spirit) to subject his own will to the will of God. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). No longer must it be "my will" but, "...thy will be done" (Mat. 26:42). There must be a deep sense of mourning over personal sin against God (Psm. 51:1-4), over the devastating effect of sin in the world (1 Jn. 5:19) and among those we love (Lk. 13:34; Rom. 10:1-3). Only this intense sorrow for sin is sufficient to produce repentance (2 Cor. 7:10) and cause one to take seriously Christ's "Go ye therefore..." (Mat. 28:19-20). There must be a will to fully submit (meekness) talents, abilities, strengths to the service of God (Rom. 12:1-2), realizing that all that the Christian does, with no exceptions, is to be viewed as done for God (Col. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 10:31). At this point the disciple is ready for the focus of life to become the desire to be right (righteous) in the sight of God, manifested by both the desire and the will to be obedient. "Lord, what would you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) and "I was not disobedient" (Acts 26:19) ought to come easily to the lips of every Christian. Compassion and mercy shown in every kindness (Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 3:8-9); a pure heart, kept and guarded against sin (1 Jn. 1:6-10; 3:1-3; Prov. 4:23); an earnest pursuit of peace between men and God (Rom. 12:18; 1 Pet. 3:11) become second nature to the one who has become so prepared and devoted.

Finally, the disciple who develops, nurtures and lives by the attitudes above defined must expect two distinctly opposite results: resistance and persecution from Satan and his servants, and great reward in heaven for the one who overcomes (see also Rev. 2:10). Let every disciple determine to stop nowhere short of "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

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