

Handout for Chapter 11

Process of Discipleship

by: Miles Stanford- taken from www.bible.org

In the parable of the sower the seed sown “on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). The principle of growth is always “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mk 4:28). Therefore, “the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it” (Jms 5:7). As this clearly exemplifies, “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28:16).

For most of us it has been a long season of growth from the tiny green blade up to the “full corn in the ear.” So many seek to settle for this stage: saved, with heaven assured—plus a pacifying measure of Christian respectability, at least in church circles. Here we have the believer as a normal grain of wheat containing life inside a more or less shiny golden covering, in fellowship high up on the stalk with similar kernels of wheat. This is but a stage, not the goal. And, like middle age, this can be a dangerous stage—one of seeking a “much deserved” rest, of basking aimlessly in the fellowship of meetings, classes, etc., of ignoring or forgetting the struggles and growing pains of the tiny green blades down at one’s feet and expecting and exhorting them to shape up and mature without delay.

This is all very cozy but costly, snug but sterile. “The seed corn may be beautiful, but it is hard. The germ of life is locked up within its shell and cannot get out. Therefore it produces nothing. Here is the reason why so many Christians, even preachers, are so unfruitful. Only one here and there is a soul winner. When the grain of corn is buried it dies, and that hard exterior surface softens and decays, in order to give nutriment to the young sprout, which would otherwise die and thus cause a crop failure. One must reckon himself dead to the hard, cold, selfish ‘I’ before the softening influence of the Holy Spirit can operate, qualifying the believer in the service of God. Many want to do God’s work but are unable, because of the ‘flesh’ in their lives.”

Our Father understands all this, and it is He who takes the initiative in the matter. He drops the seed of dissatisfaction into our hearts; He begins to show us that there is far more to this Christian life than just being saved and active for Him. And it is necessary for Him to engineer our exchange from carnal kernel Christians to fruitful fellowshiping disciples. From an infinite number of ways, He chooses the most effective for each individual’s transition. And in the hand of the Husbandman, there is no fear, but freedom.

“We often come across Christians who are bright and clever, and strong and righteous; in fact, a little too bright, and a little too clever—there seems so much of self in their strength, and their righteousness is severe and critical. They have everything to make them saints, except ... crucifixion, which would mold them into a supernatural tenderness and limitless charity for others. But if they are of the real elect, God has a winepress prepared for them, through which they will some day pass, which will turn the metallic hardness of their nature into gentle love, which Christ always brings forth at the last of the feast.”

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field... He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:24, 37, 38). The Lord of the harvest plants, or buries, Christians as seeds in a field, which is the world.

Through the Husbandman’s patient and loving cultivation the grain of wheat high up on the stalk begins to fear being garnered alone and hungers to bring forth “much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Here is God’s motivation for discipleship: that filial heart-hunger for fruit bearing. The believer finally pleads to be made fruitful at any cost, and then he hears the Lord say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (v. 24). “Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it” (Mk 8:35). In loving response to this hunger the Holy Spirit silently and gently begins to loosen the grain from its comfortable bindings and supports in the ear.

“When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come” (4:29). As a result, sooner or later the grain of wheat finds itself, not high up on the stalk, but dropped to the earth, into the cold and strange darkness. And still worse, the earth smears and injures that nice, shiny golden coat. Worst of all, the coat begins to disintegrate and fall to pieces. All that is not Christ, no matter how nice in appearance and profession, is revealed for what it is—just self.

There is a further stripping, right down to the germ of life, right on down until there is nothing left but Christ, who is our life. Down, down into death. Patience, grain of wheat: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

'Except it fall into the ground and die' ...
Can 'much fruit' come alone at such a cost?
Must the seed corn be buried in the earth,
All summer joy and glory seemingly lost?
He buries still His seed corns here and there,
And calls to deeper fellowship with Him
Those who will dare to share the bitter cup,
And yet while sharing, sing the triumph hymn.
'Except it fall into the ground and die' ...?
But what a harvest in the days to come;
When fields stand thick with golden sheaves of corn
And you are sharing in the Harvest Home.
To you who 'lose your life,' and let it 'die,'
Yet in the losing 'find' your life anew,
Christ evermore unveils His lovely face,
And thus His mirrored glory rests on you. —Selected.

When the believer takes up his cross for discipleship, the process of death begins to set in. The disciple finds himself a seed sown by the Son, planted in a home, office, hospital, church, parsonage or mission station. Whatever or wherever it is, there will be the death from which resurrection life follows. "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (II Cor. 4:11, 12). We need to enter deeply into the truth that Christ the beloved Son of the Father could not enter to the glory of heaven until He had first given Himself over to death. And this great truth, as it opens to us, will help us to understand how in our life, and in our fellowship with Christ, it is impossible for us to share His life until we have first in very deed surrendered ourselves every day to die to sin and self and the law and the world, and so to abide in the unbroken fellowship of discipleship with our crucified and risen Lord. All the truths we have learned about the cross, of our death with Christ, of our death to sin with Him and of our conformity to death like the kernel of wheat falling into the ground to die, are preparatory to the overcoming life. They are the foundation of and fundamental to it.