

# Bible Studies for Adventists



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May 30–June 5, 2009

## Commentary on “Discipleship”

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### Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, May 30, 2009

This week's lesson is on the subject of Discipleship. The Quarterly for this week opens with these words:

**It is important that we use our intellectual capacities to grasp as much as is humanly possible of what God has revealed to us. Yet, perfect knowledge of all doctrine is not a prerequisite for salvation.**

To use one's intellectual abilities to grasp what God has revealed to us about Himself is a good thing. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, however, intellect is praised more than the non-intellectual means of communing with God, and one must be suspicious when intellect is brought to the fore. This is not to say that mysticism should be a part of discipleship, but a large part of learning from, and teaching others about, our Lord need not be intellectual in nature. We are much more than brain capacity, and to downplay the spiritual aspects of our discipleship is to overlook a major teaching that Jesus shared with Nicodemus, when He told Nicodemus that he must be born again, or from above. (In fact, Jesus was a little sharp with Nicodemus and his intellectual capacity. In Jn. 3:9,10 they have this exchange:

**Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?\***

I can imagine a smile on Jesus' face as He said this to Nicodemus. Nicodemus just forgot what Jesus had just spoken to him one sentence earlier. In v. 8 Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

One of Jesus' statements on what is required of a disciple may be helpful here. Jesus said in Luke 14:33, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

Included in those things that we must renounce is our intellect. God may have blessed you with a fantastic intellect. He may intend for you to use that intellect in the building up of His Kingdom. But an intellect that has not been given up (renounced) might not be used by God. It is better to give up all things, and then take back what God returns to you to use for His glory.

The Quarterly states that a disciple is a “lifelong learner.” As this week progresses, we will see that a Christian disciple is more than a lifelone learner. Jesus said, “Seek and ye shall find.” Often the emphasis is on seeking, as the emphasis should be for those who have not come to Christ. For those of us who have come to Christ, the emphasis must be on the “find.” We have found Him of whom the Law and Prophets testified. Now we are to lead others to Him. A Christian disciple is a reproducer. The disciples of Jesus, while He walked the earth, were definitely learners. Once the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, they were primarily reproducers – evangelists, missionaries, teachers – workers of miracles.

This is what a Christian disciple is today. Yes, learning and using one's intellect is important before one becomes a Christian. And learning should occur throughout one's Christian walk, but once you have found the One you have been looking for, it is time to go out and find other lost souls and show them where to find the Bread of Life.

Before we conclude for today, let's take a look at some of the statements in the gospels about discipleship.

**Mt. 10:25a It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.**

**Mt. 10:32 And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."**

**Mt. 10:24 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.**

**Lk. 14:26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.**

(Matthew gives us the positive phrasing of this teaching of Jesus. He said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.")

**Lk. 14:27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

**Gal. 2:20 The cross that each of us bear is the cross of Christ. We are His disciple if we have been crucified with Him.**

**Lk. 14:33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

We must renounce all that this world has given us. This does not necessarily mean giving away everything we own.

**Jn. 9:28 And they [the Pharisees] reviled him [the blind man who was healed], saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses." [Although the Pharisees are stating this, they are stating the truth that one cannot be both Moses' disciple and Jesus' disciple.]**

**Jn. 19:38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.**

**Jn. 21:24 This is [John] the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.**

From these scriptures, we see that a Christian disciple has these qualities:

- He is to be like his Master, and is below his Master.
- He will be like the master of a house, bringing new and old out of his treasure store.
- He must love Jesus more than he loves anyone else.
- He must bear his own cross (Galatians 2:20 explains this. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.")
- We must renounce all. This includes all that we are, not only all that we possess physically.
- We are not disciples of Moses. (The quartely includes Exod. 18:13–27 as one of the scripture readings. We cannot be both Moses' disciples and Christ's disciples. We must be one or the other.)
- We are concerned with the body of Christ. Joseph of Arimathea demonstrated this by caring for the crucified body of our Lord. For us living today, it is concern for the body of Christ, made up of all Christians. Those of us who write for this particular set of Bible study lessons are deeply concerned over misrepresentations of scripture. We are concerned for the members of the body of Christ that may be in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and therefore willingly set aside time to help those who may be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in their Christian walk.
- A disciple bears witness, as John stated at the end of his gospel account.

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## **Day 2: Sunday, May 31, 2009**

Today's lesson takes its lead from Exodus 18:13-27. It then goes on to explain the importance of both leaders and followers. Unfortunately, this avoids one of the most profound teachings of the New Testament – We are all followers of Jesus Christ. When I learn from a teacher, or allow someone to lead me in serving Christ, I must realize that both that leader and I are equal in Christ.

There are three classes of people that are identified in the New Testament. Jesus had encounters with Jews (leaders and non-leaders), Gentiles and believers. He did not come directly to the Gentiles. He came to the Jews. However, regardless of whether the individual He was dealing with was a Jew or Gentile, once the person was a believer, Jesus' relationship with that person was based on something completely different.

In Paul's letters, we often come across three groups of people, Jews, Gentiles and the Church (believers.) Once a person has become a believer, he is no longer classified as a Jew or Gentile, he is a member of the body of Christ.

This lesson teaches that the Church is made up of leaders and followers and that we must "strike a proper balance" between these for Christians to make an impact in our world.

The false dichotomy of leaders and followers making up the body of Christ is based on the idea that some gifts of the Spirit are more “leadership” gifts, while other gifts are gifts given to “followers.” Just because someone has the gift of mercy and I have the gift of teaching, in no way means that I am a leader and the other is a follower. The person with the gift of mercy may need to lead me in being more merciful, while I may need to teach the one with mercy how to explain a concept to one with whom they are showing mercy. Neither the teacher nor the one with the gift of mercy are truly leading the other – they are both properly sharing the responsibilities of members of the body of Christ – a body of followers.

### Summary

- We are all followers of Jesus Christ.
- The body of Christ is not made up of leaders and followers.

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## Day 3: Monday, June 1, 2009

Today's lesson is on two aspects of discipleship: Obedience and Loyalty. However, the two issues that need to be addressed today are the issue of loyalty, and one of the Ellen G. White quotes contained in the lesson.

### Loyalty

The example of many of the disciples turning away from Jesus, particularly as His crucifixion neared, is given to show that many disciples have temporary lapses. Near the end of the lesson the following statement is made: “Many of us have had moments when our resolve to be disciples was at low tide, but as in the case of the apostles, this does not mean that we cannot overcome our temporary lapse.”

A distinction must be made between apostasizing and having difficulty as a disciple.

One may lose his faith in Christ, while another may have many questions and doubts. However, one who has lost faith in Christ, an apostate, is one who has concluded that Christianity is not true. Often, this is a person who has overcome his difficulty with Christ by rejecting Christ. A disciple, while having difficulty with Christ, is not one who will reject Christ. The Christian with doubt, who believes in spite of the doubt, is as much a disciple as the next believer. This is a person with faith.

Overcoming a temporary lapse implies that a person once believed or practiced something, has given up that belief or practice, but can overcome the giving up. That is a choice one makes. This is different from a Christian who has fallen into sin. Christians fall into sin constantly, and these sins are something that can be overcome with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When Peter denied his Lord, he was sinning. He wasn't less of a disciple of Jesus, he was a sinning disciple of Jesus. Judas did not deny Jesus. Judas made a choice to be a traitor to Jesus. In Peter's case, there was a temporary lapse, in Judas' case a decision had been made in advance to destroy the Son of God.

Loyalty is a quality of God. Only He is truly loyal constantly. He is loyal to Himself. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 is clear on our Lord's loyalty:

**The saying is trustworthy, for:**

**If we have died with him, we will also live with him;**

**if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;**

**if we are faithless, he remains faithful—**

**for he cannot deny himself.**

Denying Jesus, like Peter, is a sin. In denying Him, he denies us. However, if we are in Him, we will not lose our salvation, because He cannot deny Himself. Judas did not deny Jesus he betrayed Jesus. Judas was not in Christ, he was an unbeliever. Peter was a believer who sinned. One is hopeless, the other, hopeful.

### Ellen G. White

A paragraph is quoted from Testimonies For the Church, volume 2, p. 178. Included in the quote are the following statements:

**Follow Him in being forgetful of self, abundant in acts of self-denial ....**

Jesus was never forgetful of Himself. He was always aware of who He was and what He was here for. He never had to deny Himself. The New Testament is not abundant in recounting Jesus' acts of self-denial. The scripture quoted above, from Timothy is crystal clear on this point: He cannot deny Himself.

**He counted not His life dear, but gave it up for us all.**

There is never an indication in scripture that Jesus did not count His life dear. By the time He reaches the Garden of Gethsemane before the betrayal of Judas, we see that Jesus held His life very dear.

Follow Him from the lowly manger to the cross. He was our example.

This is one of the fundamental errors of Seventh-day Adventism. Jesus is first and foremost our substitute. This is not something with which we can strike a balance. We do not follow Him from the manger to the cross as our example. A disciple definitely must become like his master, but not in repeating what his master has done. A disciple takes each moment of the day, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and acts in that moment by the leading of God. It is not so much, "What would Jesus do?" (WWJD), it is more "What would Jesus have me do in this moment?"

The Quarterly ends today's lesson with two questions.

**If someone were to ask you, "How loyal are you to Jesus?" how would you respond, and why? What outward evidences do you give of your loyalty to Him?**

Although the questions are technically good, in the context of Seventh-day Adventist teaching on identifying true members of God's remnant church, the answers that are often provided by members are things such as keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, avoiding certain foods, not wearing jewelry and similar items.

Focusing on external evidences of our loyalty to Jesus is like treating colon cancer with a topical ointment. Your skin may look good, but underneath is dead and dying. We must be found in Him in spite of what the world thinks. Yes, what the world thinks of Christ is of ultimate importance, and my role in that should not be downplayed. But when all is said and done, the Judases will still be Judases and the Peters will still be Peters.

### Summary

- Denying our Lord and betraying our Lord are not the same. We may be guilty of denying Christ at points in our lives, but we are not left without hope.
- Jesus cannot deny Himself. Scripture in Timothy is crystal clear on this.
- Ellen G. White is viewing Jesus as a man. One cannot view Jesus as God and come to the same conclusions about Jesus' self-denial or how He did not count His life dear. When Ellen G. White makes these statements, her semi-Arian theology is showing through. Although the church would deny that that was her position, we are still left with these clear statements that contradict scripture.
- Jesus' life is what we are saved by, not our example of how to live. Disciples do emulate their master, but Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and can have moment-by-moment guidance in their daily lives.
- Focusing on external evidences of being a disciple of Christ misses the important issue of dealing with the deadly spiritual cancer.
- Are you a Peter or a Judas?

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## Day 4: Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Today's lesson in any other context would be a wonderful study. There is a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the cost of God's grace.

The only real problem comes at the bottom of the page with this question:

**What is the cross that God has given you to bear?**

This is just following an important statement by Bonhoeffer regarding the identity of the cross the Christian is called to bear.

**Only a man . . . totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, or he has only got to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God.**

If we ever identify the cross that we are to bear as something other than the very cross of Christ, we denigrate the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ may be manifested in each believer's life in different ways, but the cross remains the same. I may be burdened with a disease, but that disease is not my cross. I may be burdened financially, but that financial crisis is not my cross. Each of these things in our lives that some Christians think of as our cross, is nothing more than an opportunity to glorify Christ in the midst of our sufferings.

The reproaches we bear from unbelievers, pointing out the foolishness of following Christ, is the suffering of which Christ spoke. But our circumstances are not to be confused with that.

## Summary

- The cross that God has given us to bear is the cross of Christ.
- Our circumstances in life are not our cross.
- We have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). This is the cross that we bear when we become believers.
- Attacks from unbelievers, claiming we are foolish to believe in Christ is the suffering Christ foretold. Only in this way to we participate in the sufferings of Christ. This is the cross that we bear daily.

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## Day 5: Wednesday, June 3, 2009

The lesson for today talks about the rewards of discipleship. The Quarterly correctly points out that, in this life, one generally does not receive rewards for being a disciple. The Quarterly does a fine job pointing out the fact that the peace that a believer has is one that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7.)

One point the Quarterly does not make is a common misunderstanding, not only with unbelievers, but with many believers as well. That is that many people think that being an unbeliever makes for an easier life.

If this were true, one should find more happiness amongst unbelievers than believers. There have been too many studies done on the fact that as the world has progressed, as people have become wealthier, as medical care and health have increased, the people are no more happier than they were 2,000 years ago.

Within Adventism, a claim is often made that there is a correlation between a healthy lifestyle and a fulfilling life. This is a lie of the enemy of our souls. Health and longevity do not lead to more fulfilling lives. A fulfilling life is not dependent upon ones health or longevity, it is dependent upon ones relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, we may not know how fulfilling this life has been until we are in the next life. Not only will all that has been done for self be burned up at the reward ceremony for believers, we will learn how our lives have been used by God and a blessing to others in ways we may never know in this life.

Not only in Adventism, but in large segments of Christianity, there is a widespread belief that unbelievers are happier than believers. These Christians do not spend enough time around unbelievers. There is no correlation between unbelief and happiness.

## Tradition

There is one incredible statement in the study today that must not be ignored by anyone. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically held that anything from tradition must be rejected. Only those things supported by scripture are to be kept and believed. The quarterly makes this incredible statement:

**Although we cannot be sure about the details, there is good reason to believe the strong traditions from the early church era which say that all apostles eventually suffered martyrdom.**

Although this writer personally agrees with the statement, I have a strong reaction when I see a church that claims to reject tradition in favor of scripture, speak so highly of tradition. The phrase "there is good reason to believe" is very troubling. What are the reasons? If you consider yourself a true Seventh-day Adventist, this statement should be considered highly suspect. What is the "good reason?" Even the doctrine of the Trinity was rejected by most of Adventism for much of its history simply because the leadership believed it was from tradition, not scripture.

Whether SDA or not, the fact that this statement appears in an official SDA Sabbath School Quarterly should be bothersome. Strong Adventists and strong critics of Adventism alike should take note of this unusual statement.

## Summary

- The Quarterly correctly points out the fact that the rewards of the Christian life are both now, with a peace that passes understanding, as well as future, with our eternal reward with Christ.
- The Quarterly misses the fact that there is widespread belief, among unbelievers and believers alike, that there is a correlation between unbelief and happiness.
- For some unknown reason, the Quarterly misses the opportunity to show the SDA teaching that health, diet and lifestyle correlate with happiness, a long-standing SDA teaching.
- Tradition, according to historic SDA teaching must be rejected. How did a statement supporting tradition make it into an Adventist quarterly?

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## Day 6: Thursday, June 4, 2009

The first part of the lesson today includes good teaching about what it means that Jesus is our only Lord, compared with the common practice of the day, even up through the middle ages, to refer to a figure of authority as Lord.

This day, however, is the day on which the Quarterly takes the disciple of Christ, and turns him into a disciple of Moses.

Quoting Jesus in Matthew 7:23,24 out of context, the Quarterly introduces lawkeeping. For the average Christian, the idea of lawkeeping Jesus introduces here follows His statement that the true believer will produce fruit. Two ideas are contained in what Jesus said. First, the believer will be productive. Secondly, what the believer produces is good fruit, not bad fruit.

Jesus specifically stated that grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. The fruit is consistent with the nature of the tree. If our nature is natural, fallen human nature, we cannot produce good fruit. If our nature is born-again, alive in Christ, we cannot produce bad fruit. We may allow our fruit to go bad on the vine, resulting in the need to be pruned, but we can't produce fruit inconsistent with our nature. (We still carry around our fleshly [bent natured] bodies, but the fruit we produce is spiritual. Our bodies can produce bad fruit, but that is part of carrying around the part of us that is still waiting to be redeemed.)

It is our nature that must be changed. The fruit will follow. None of the things that those who produce bad fruit are doing are bad. Prophesying, casting out demons and performing miracles are all good. Jesus' statement was that He did not know them.

The last part of the lesson for today is where many in the SDA Church separate themselves from true Christians. The question is asked, "What is the key element that reveals how genuine we are in calling

Jesus 'Lord'?" followed by a couple scripture references, one being the Matthew 7 passage about "lawlessness."

One who accepts the Law of Christ as that which supersedes the Law of Moses is not a person of lawlessness. The Greek term is *anomia* which means "without law" or "lawless deeds." A Christian, who does not practice the Law of Moses, but does practice the Law of Christ is not *anomia*. Jesus clarified that the law of Moses was not sufficient by making statements that are even tougher (more impossible) to keep.

We cannot be both disciples of Christ and disciples of Moses. Disciples of Christ are disciples of Life. Disciples of Moses are disciples of the Ministry of Death (2 Cor. 3:7.)

The Quarterly is here participating in the ministry of death.

### Summary

- Jesus must be our only Lord.
- Our natures must be changed before we can produce good fruit.
- We cannot produce fruit inconsistent with our nature.
- We are either disciples of Christ, Life, or we are disciples of Moses, the Ministry of Death. We cannot be both.

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## Day 7: Friday, June 5, 2009

The final day of the lesson suggests a reading from Ellen G. White. The SDA Church has prided itself on not following tradition. May we suggest that you not follow the tradition of reading Ellen White, but reading the Bible.

### A Prescription For You

As an extra exercise, get a copy of a translation that you are not familiar with, but is recognized as a good or reasonable translation (not a paraphrase.) Using a concordance, look up every occurrence of the word *disciple* as it occurs in the New Testament. Don't only read the verse in which the word occurs, read the whole chapter. Then, read the whole book. Then read the whole New Testament. (Of course, this may take you longer than a week, but that is OK if you are a disciple of Jesus!)

Then repeat that daily for the next month, and then as often as necessary.

A true disciple of Jesus will get to the point, and sometimes fairly quickly, when one no longer has to point to the ministry of death engraved on stones (yes, engraved by the finger of God, but a ministry of death, nonetheless) but can simply point fellow beggars to the Bread and Water of Life.

May you be a true disciple of Jesus, and not a disciple of Moses.

\* All scripture quotations are from: *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001, Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.