

ANSWERING THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

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Readings: Matthew 10; *Apocalypse Explained* 100:2

The Lord has called everyone to be His disciples. The concept of discipleship is just as alive today as it was when the Lord called His twelve apostles. We all have a personal ministry which the Lord has enabled us to perform. There are people that we can reach and have a positive influence upon. These people may be our co-workers, our children, or our friends and neighbors. In His providence, the Lord has led each one of us to associate with people to whom we can present the teachings of the New Church. Indeed, discipleship can be defined as a way of life that confesses the Lord before others.

At times we can perform our mission with words. We will have opportunities where we can actually tell others about our faith and approach to life. This is a good reason to be familiar with the doctrines of the New Church and to constantly develop greater skill in articulating them. We can also spread the New Church by the conduct of our lives. When we are examples of charity, we are helping the New Church to grow. We promote New Church principles when we are faithful and honest workers in our employment. We are contributing to growth when we strive to teach our children the precepts that can genuinely be of service to others. And when we are good and trustworthy friends, the Lord can use our friendship to touch the hearts of others.

The Lord charges us to present Him before other people. This command is given when the Lord says, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). When our lives exemplify what the Word teaches, we are confessing the Lord before others. Often, this way of life requires courage and persistence. However, the more faithful we are in the ministries to which the Lord has led us, the more our lives will become a showcase for His love and wisdom.

The Word is our guide to becoming a successful disciple of the Lord. Through the Word, the Lord has revealed to us what is right and wrong, and what our attitude toward others should be. The more we comply with the Word, the better we are able to confess the Lord before others. Matthew chapter ten, in particular, contains many instructions that teach us what discipleship is. Today, we will focus upon four aspects of being an effective disciple of the Lord:

1. Mission – We must have an understanding of our mission.
2. Persecution – We need resolve to face our personal persecutions.
3. Division – Successful discipleships will result in useful divisions occurring.
4. Reward – The Lord promises rewards for His faithful disciples.

Mission

First, we must have an understanding of our mission. Each of us has unique talents and abilities. Each of us displays the Lord’s love differently from everyone else. However, we all can have the same aspirations. Our ministries should have the desire to fulfill what the Lord told His disciples to do—heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matthew 10:8). We

should strive to bring healing wherever we can. How many times are we in a situation where we can give someone compassion, support, and encouragement? There are countless opportunities to provide hope and comfort to someone who is going through difficulties.

When the Lord asks us to cleanse the lepers, He wants us to bring truths, or a genuine perspective, to situations that we are called upon to deal with. Leprosy symbolizes a person afflicted with false beliefs. One of the harms of falsity is that it results in frustration, disillusionment, and despair. When we have the opportunity to offer a new approach to life's difficulties, we are spiritually cleansing the lepers. The Lord also asks us to raise the dead, by striving to bring life and a spirit of optimism to seemingly hopeless situations. This optimism is not naïve; it comes from the faith and confidence that the Lord can resolve any affliction or crisis. And we can cast out demons by not compromising with any activity or attitude that does not agree with the teachings of the Word.

The mission of healing which the Lord gave to His twelve apostles should be at the core of what we hope to accomplish by the way we live our lives. And all of these forms of healing work best when we have the attitude of giving freely (see Matthew 10:8). Our ministries should be performed without conditions or bias. We should strive to help whomever we can, without any regard as to who they are or what they can offer us in return.

As we pursue our mission, we should recognize that we are completely dependent upon the Lord. Any ability to provide services that promote good is from the Lord, and it is very important that we acknowledge this. This was represented by the Lord's instructions to His disciples not to take any provisions with them, but to trust that their needs would be provided for (Matthew 10:9-10).

Finally, we must use a certain discrimination as we perform our mission from the Lord. If there is a rejection of the message we are delivering, we are to shake the dust off our feet (see Matthew 10:14). If a person chooses an evil way of life, we are to separate ourselves from that decision. We shake the dust off our feet by not endorsing actions which violate what the Word teaches.

Persecution

The second aspect of discipleship is the need to face the attacks which will be waged against us. When we make the choice to be the Lord's servant, we must anticipate and even expect forms of persecution. At times we may have to face rejection and even ridicule from those we are trying to help. However, we will find that most of the battles we are called upon to face are within ourselves. As we strive to be genuine disciples of the Lord and to faithfully perform our mission, we will come into times of discouragement and the appearance of failure. It may seem as if our efforts do not make much of a difference. In fact, sometimes, what we are doing may even appear to make things worse. The hells will try to persuade us to abandon our efforts to perform the Lord's work in our lives. We may feel that either we are too evil or the situation is beyond repair. We may wonder if such an approach to life will really work.

How can we combat these times of disillusionment? We are to heed these words of the Lord: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). The first phrase means that we are to face resistance with prudence and with a resolve that the Lord is our strength. We are to remind ourselves where the feelings of depression and anger come from. This is the prudence that is symbolized by serpents. And to be as harmless as doves means believing that the Lord is

blessing our ministries, even when the opposite appears to be happening. Evil will be conquered when we are able to continue to manifest the Lord's Divinity in our lives.

Division

One result that comes from faithfully performing our personal ministries, is division. This is a third aspect of discipleship: divisions will occur, both within ourselves and in the world around us. Our ministries will cause a separation between what is good and what is evil. Helping to clarify what is right and what is wrong is perhaps one of the greatest services we can provide for others. We see this idea of separation in the Lord telling His disciples to shake the dust off their feet if a household did not receive them (Matthew 10:14). We are not to compromise with what is evil. Instead, by separating ourselves from practices that are against the Lord's Word, we will cause a greater distinction between good and evil.

There will also be divisions within us. Our efforts to bring good to others will be a means of exposing our own weaknesses and disorders. And we must go through temptations to have good separated from the evil in us. When our evils are isolated, they become inactive. Our personal spiritual growth occurs in parallel with our willingness to become a stronger and more effective disciple of the Lord.

If we are faithful in performing the mission that the Lord wills for us to do, we can have the satisfaction and the assurance that our ministries are helping to bring the Lord to people. Having the Lord's Divinity shine before others should be the chief goal in everything we do and say. We are to encourage good in other people and make it easier for them to choose good. The Lord said to His disciples, "Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). We are to instruct the tender loves in others that can affirmatively receive guidance from the Lord. This is like giving a cup of cold water to children.

Reward

When we are committed to this cause, we will be rewarded from the Lord, the fourth aspect of discipleship. This reward is a delight in truth and the affection for what is good and just. When we delight in something simply because it is right and true, we are in a freedom that will enable us to be content with what we are called upon to perform. And this contentment will allow us to not become anxious over things that have no eternal value. When we are active in discipleship, we will develop the proper priorities in our lives.

To become a disciple, we must develop the discipline of sacrifice. We must lose our life to find it. We must resist focusing exclusively upon sensual and material pleasures, and instead base our lives upon spiritual precepts. We all have something of value to offer to the growth of the Lord's church upon the earth. If we are a true disciple of the Lord, our efforts will contribute to this cause. If we strive to accomplish the mission the Lord has intended us to perform, then when we eventually enter our place in heaven, we will be touched by these words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Amen.