

Introduction:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (**Luke 6:40**, ESV). In context, Jesus is pointing out if we pick a bad teacher, we won't be able to rise above it. When we follow the blind, we fall into the ditch with them. However, this principle also applies if we pick a good teacher. In fact, if we pick the Good Teacher, when we are fully trained, we will be just like Him. That is what discipleship is all about: being like Jesus. In fact, the term "Christian" got started because it means "little Christ." The fifth fundamental character trait we see for being a little Christ is abiding in God's Word. Jesus spells this one out very clearly in **John 8:31-32**: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (ESV). Here's the reality. You don't have to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You can be whomever you want to be, go wherever you want to go. But if you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must abide in God's Word.

Discussion:

I. A Disciple abides in God's Word (**John 8:31**).

- A. A disciple dwells in, lives in, resides in, remains in God's Word. Right at the very outset, this should help us recognize a disciple has some Word-based habits and disciplines.
- B. Word-based habits and disciplines.
 1. Disciples read God's Word (**1 Timothy 4:13**).
 2. Disciples study God's Word (**2 Timothy 2:15**).
 3. Disciples meditate on God's Word (**Psalms 1:1-3**).
 4. Disciples memorize God's Word (**Psalms 119:11**).
 5. Disciples compare what they hear to God's Word (**Acts 17:11**).
 6. Disciples obey God's Word (**James 1:22-24**).

II. A Disciple defines truth by God's Word (**John 8:32**).

- A. Not everyone agrees about what the truth is. For a disciple, the greatest evidence to determine what is true is God's Word. Many will argue with that, claiming our greatest source of truth is some other one—e.g. empirical testing, the Koran, personal experience, etc. When people have competing sources of truth, they will find it hard to agree. At least they agree truth exists. That gives a foundation for discussion.
- B. Today the biggest threat against God's Word as truth is not a potentially competing source of truth; it is the post-modern claim there is no such thing as "Capital T" Truth. There is "your truth," "my truth," "his truth," "her truth." We are told, "Live your own truth." This not only removes agreement, it removes a foundation for discussion that could ever lead to unity. However, before we are overcome with fear or a feeling of futility, remember what the Preacher of **Ecclesiastes** says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (**Ecclesiastes 1:9**). Folks are flocking to the post-modern dismissal of absolute truth as if some great new thing has been discovered. But it is neither new, nor great. Post-modernism is simply Pre-modernism repackaged. In **John 18:37**, Jesus explains, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (ESV). That is, those who know the real, absolute, God-established, "Capital T" Truth, listen to Jesus's Word. How does Pilate respond in **John 18:38**? "What is truth?" Post-modernism is the same old tired dismissal of anything true to justify acting in self-interest as Pilate did when he delivered Jesus up to be crucified. Be assured, Jesus's truth has triumphed over this relativism before, it will eventually do so again though the way may be long and difficult.
- C. The competing worldview: Therapeutic Pragmatism
 1. The postmodern notion of relative truth, of each person having his/her own truth or each people group having their own truth, does not, as some would have you believe, stem from respecting everyone and their various opinions. Today, as always, faithful disciples of Jesus love those with whom they disagree and live peaceably, as much as depends on the disciples themselves, with those with whom they disagree. The post-modern concept of relative truth stems from a competing worldview. I call it "Therapeutic Pragmatism" (to my knowledge, I made this phrase up, but it is always possible I read it somewhere and it stuck in my subconscious, ready to rise to the surface at such a time as this; hereafter TP).

2. I call it “Therapeutic” because this worldview’s greatest concern is with the individual’s internal sense of happiness and well-being in any given moment. The problem is life is pain, anyone who says differently is selling something. Or as others have said, “Life stinks, and then you die.” Life, the world, and everyone around me seem to be against my sense of well-being and happiness. Salvation, therefore, is liberation from all the pain, hurt, and oppression acted out against me by others and by life in general. Since salvation is being rescued from all the hurts I’ve endured, religion becomes nothing more than the means by which I console and comfort myself in the face of life’s pain, hurt, and misery.¹ Worship, in this view, is not about declaring the worthiness of God and is certainly not about declaring my own unworthiness. Rather, worship is an experience judged by how good it makes me feel internally in this moment. Thus, worship becomes little more than therapy.
 3. I call it “Pragmatism” because “truth” within this worldview does not refer to what is, but to what gets the Therapeutic job done. That is, if what matters most is being consoled and comforted for all of life’s pain, miseries, and hurts so that I have a personal sense of happiness and psychological well-being, it doesn’t matter how I accomplish that sense. What is doesn’t matter nearly so much as what works. In this system then, truth is not what is, but what works to accomplish my sense of well-being. What works for me, may not work for you and vice versa. Maybe taking solace in my ancestors works for me. Perhaps praying to the Great Spirit works for you. Perhaps becoming one with Mother Nature or following the Five Pillars of Islam or walking the Eightfold Path and believing the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism work for others. Maybe what works for me is a crucified and resurrected Savior promising a home in His eternal kingdom works for me. Or maybe, what works for me is picking and choosing from all these various sources, developing my own thing: Edwinism. I have my truth, you have yours. All that matters is what works to make me feel happy and have a sense of well-being in this moment.
- D. TP is attractive because it allows me to be my own god, pursuing whatever makes me feel good in the moment. TP allows me to tell everyone around me to go jump in a lake. My greatest goal is to just be me and I’m only being the real, authentic me when I am following my desires, urges, impulses without regard to what anyone else thinks of them. However, TP is only useful if there is actually no God. If there is no God, then how we get through this life doesn’t matter. If there is no God, my truth, your truth, his truth, her truth is still not The Truth, but The Truth is meaningless in that setting; so my truth will be good enough for survival. However, if God is real, then let Him be true and every man a liar (**Romans 3:4**). Additionally, the only way we can know what is absolutely true is if God tells us. However, we need to remember what God said through Isaiah in **Isaiah 55:8-11**. His thoughts and ways are above ours. We will not discover them on our own. We will not accidentally happen upon The Truth as God has created it to be. But He has sent forth His Word. His Word accomplishes what He sent it to do. We can rely on His Word to provide us truth. As Jesus prayed in **John 17:17**, God’s Word is truth. A disciple defines truth by abiding in God’s Word.
- III. A Disciple is liberated from sin by God’s Word (**John 8:32**).
- A. Jesus said when we know the truth, we will be set free. However, the Jews pushed back on this. “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” (**John 8:33**, ESV). Two things about this. First, they misunderstood the kind of freedom Jesus was talking about. Second, their statement is simply laughable.
 - B. Working in reverse order. Never enslaved to anyone? The offspring of Abraham had spent more time enslaved than free. They started with slavery to Egypt, then went back and forth being enslaved to Canaanite nations, then were captive to Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and were, at the very moment they were protesting their freedom, enslaved to Rome. However, more importantly, that was not the kind of liberation Jesus was talking about. Jesus wasn’t talking about political, material, or sociological liberation. He was talking about spiritual liberation. He responded, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (**John 8:34, 36**, ESV).
 - C. Do you see the difference between the view of TP and of Jesus? Both recognize life is pain. Both recognize the world is full of hurt, pain, oppression. TP fixates on all the hurt I’ve endured. Jesus, however, focuses on the hurt I’ve caused. In TP, what enslaves me is what everyone else has done to me. According to Jesus, what enslaves me is what I’ve done to everyone else, including God. In TP, salvation is being set free from the sins of everyone else. According to Jesus, salvation is being set free from my sins. Please, don’t misunderstand. We have all experienced hurts and traumas. Many people have been oppressed by others. Governments have often oppressed citizens. The rich have repeatedly oppressed the poor. Masters have oppressed slaves. Sadly,

¹ This working definition of religion in what I’ve called “Therapeutic Pragmatism” is adapted from Philip Reiff’s [The Triumph of the Therapeutic](#).

too often husbands and fathers have oppressed wives and children. Further, it is true if everyone in the world surrendered and gave their allegiance to Jesus Christ, none of this would happen; we would all be free from every kind of tyranny, oppression, and slavery. Additionally, when the kingdom of Jesus Christ is in its final and completely fulfilled state, we will all be set free from every enslavement. However, while this world stands, what Jesus calls us to realize is our own part in the hurt of others, our own part caused by lying, cheating, selfishness, disobeying, gossiping, slandering, hating, injuring, malice, anger, etc.

- D. This had been part of the debate between Jesus and the Jews just moments earlier. In **John 8:21-24**, He had repeatedly warned them they were in danger of dying in their sins. The danger was not dying under Roman oppression. The danger was not dying in poverty. The danger was not even in dying while a slave to a wicked earthly master. The danger was dying in their sins. “Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” Unless we believe Jesus is who? See in **John 8:12**. Unless we believe Jesus is the light of the world. Or as He says in **John 14:6**, the way, the truth, the life. Unless we believe He is the life, the light, the truth, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the salvation from God, we will die in our sins.
- E. This point about Jesus and salvation is found all over the New Testament. We could have sermon after sermon after sermon on passage after passage after passage building this case of salvation in Jesus Christ. For this lesson, we will simply notice **John 10:7-18**. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provides life for the sheep who believe Him and listen to Him by laying down His life for us. He died so that we might live and live for Him. He sets us free from our sin and death. That is salvation. Praise the Lord!

IV. A Disciple abides in God’s Word despite the opposition (**John 8:37-59**).

- A. Despite the promise of salvation and the freedom from sin, Jesus faced opposition. In this passage, we see the evidence of it begin in **vs. 37** in which Jesus explains that those listening want to kill Him. In **vss. 48** and **52**, they accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon. It’s possible that **vs. 41** is even a dig at a personal scandal that may have followed Jesus everywhere He went—the accusation of being the child of fornication because Joseph and Mary were not married when He was born. In case we thought Jesus was misreading the situation when He claimed the people wanted to kill Him, **vs. 59** says they picked up stones to throw at Him.
- B. Notice why the people were opposed to Jesus. In **John 8:37**, Jesus says it is because His word found no place in them. Those who cannot bear God’s word will always be opposed to those who abide within God’s word.
- C. We may think we can escape this opposition. However, Jesus clarifies in **John 15:18-21**. Because we are of the Word and not of the World, the World and those of it will hate us. Connecting Jesus’s experience in **John 8** with this teaching in **John 15**, I hope you see there is no neutral spot. People are either of the Word or of the World, and people of the World are actually of the Devil (see **John 8:44**). No doubt, they will do some good things. No doubt, they will protest their own innocence and kindness and goodness. But make no mistake, there is no third option. We are either of the Word or of the World; our Father is either Yahweh God or the Devil. All this series we have talked about how disciples, when fully trained, will become like their teacher. In that context, we have been talking about growing to act like our Teacher and speak like our Teacher which leads us to honor God, learn from God, love like God, and lead others to God in the same way Jesus did. In this context, however, it is talking about suffering for God like Jesus did. If people will keep Jesus’s word, they will keep ours. If they refuse to heed God’s word, they will refuse to listen to us. They will hate us, persecute us, mock us, belittle us, torture us, and sometimes even kill us. What is amazing is sometimes they will even think they are doing these things in the name of Jesus because they don’t actually know Jesus or the One who sent Him.
- D. My brothers and sisters, our brethren in other countries have already been experiencing this kind of persecution because of the false religions that surround them. We American Christians, however, are being completely shocked as we watch our present culture cross the tipping point due to this TP we’ve been talking about. It seems like things have changed rapidly around us. They have not. We just weren’t paying attention to the trajectory. We must not be caught unawares. We are facing opposition. We are facing increasing opposition. We should not be surprised. Most people around us are not of the Word and they hate us. Their hate is increasing. Sadly, too many Christians think we are fighting a political battle. We are not. Too many Christians are trusting in presidents and prime ministers. Too many Christians think if we can just get the right party in office, we’ll have peace. I’m not trying to be Chicken Little about this. I don’t want to recklessly call out to the town that the sky is falling. However, I want to warn you. We aren’t in a political battle and therefore, it cannot be won through political means. We are in a spiritual battle. It can only be won through a spiritual means. It can only be won by being anchored to the Word of Jesus Christ. It can only be won by abiding in His Word. We must not be cowed by their tactics. We must not be swayed by their opposition. We must stay true to the Word though they mock us, though they belittle us, though they imprison us, though

they torture us, though they kill us. Jesus stayed true all the way through the cross. Let us stay true. In the Greek of the New Testament, you will learn that the same Greek word is used for “witness” and for “martyr.” Why? Because to these ancient Christians, the greatest testimony that the word of God was true was for someone to stay true to it even though it cost the disciple’s life.

- E. My brothers and sisters, this is why we need each other. This is why we need to meet with each other. This is why we need to be involved in each other’s lives. This is why we need to assemble together, why we need to study together, why we need to weep together, why we need to rejoice together. This is why we need to eat together, play games together, celebrate together. If I can just be blunt with you for a moment. It is probably no simple coincidence that just as our culture is cooking up its biggest persecution against us we have gone through a world experience that has too many of us thinking we are getting all we need by watching worship on a computer screen. Please, don’t think that will be enough. We need each other to get through what is coming. We need each other to strengthen us to stick with the Word. Because disciples abide in God’s Word despite the opposition. But we will only be able to do that together.

Conclusion:

A disciple honors God, learns from God, loves like God, and leads others to God all while abiding in God’s Word. This will make us different. This will make us stand out. And there will be plenty of days when abiding by God’s Word is hard. There will be plenty of days when it will be discouraging. There will be plenty of days it will feel like we are losing. But, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, please, no matter what, hang on to God, to His Word, to His Son, our King Jesus. Because, in the end, Jesus wins. The day is coming, I promise you, you’ll be glad you were not swayed by the world. The day is coming, I promise you, when you’ll be glad you remained in God’s Word.