

Discipleship: Light

Bubba Garner

I love cran-grape juice. Which is odd because I don't particularly care for cranberry or grape juice alone. But when you put them together, the result is the perfect combination of sweetness and tartness.

Last week, Melissa asked me to pick up a few things from HEB on my way home from the office. Cran-grape juice wasn't on the list, but it somehow found its way in the basket. When I got home, I poured some into a glass and got ready for that familiar flavor. After the first swallow, I knew something was dreadfully wrong. It was then that I noticed a word on the label that had somehow escaped my attention at the grocery store. Light!

You can buy a lot of things "light" these days: sour cream, cream cheese, ice cream. Basically anything that tastes good comes in a "light" variation. One product even boasts that it contains "all of the taste with none of the guilt." But I haven't found that to be the case with any of them. Because the light version is never as good as the original.

This same concept is prevalent in the religious world. It is the mindset that what God requires is too difficult for us to keep, as when Jeroboam told the Israelites, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (1 Kings 12:28). So as long as we keep some form of religion or semblance of service, God will be satisfied. In other words, we can have all of the taste with none of the guilt.

Many view Jesus' requirements for discipleship as too rigid and narrow. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). This has produced a variation that is similar to the original but not the same: Discipleship Light.

Indulge yourself. You don't have to deny yourself. That's too restrictive. God wants you to be happy and have whatever your heart desires, even if it is contrary to His will. So hold nothing back and indulge your impulses. After all, it's your body, your right, your life.

To be a disciple of someone is to follow after their example, to pattern your life after their life. The early disciples were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26) because of their connection to their Master, their likeness to the Original. That being the case, did Jesus practice self indulgence or self denial? Which steps did He leave for us to follow? The first thing He requires of anyone who wants to follow Him is the willingness to put yourself last. He left the glory of heaven to come down to a sinful world. Is He asking

“too much” for you to leave the things behind that get in the way of fully following Him?

Take up your cross when you can. Conviction often gets crowded out by convenience. It's not a matter of what is right but a matter of what is right now. When it is just not convenient to be a Christian, you don't have to be. Depending on where you are or who you're with, just keep His commandments as best you can. You don't want a religion that holds you accountable. You want one you can control.

The cross was the symbol of commitment. It was the indication of your readiness to face death rather than forsake your convictions. Paul commended Priscilla and Aquila because they “risked their own necks” (Rom. 16:4) for the sake of the cause. It's what Jesus requires from all His disciples: a commitment to “take up his cross.” It implies that there will be tough times ahead, times when it will be more convenient to quit or turn back. But the real follower of Jesus bears his load until “it is finished.”

Follow Him when it fits. His plans for your life may not always fit what you have in mind. When that happens, you are free to go your own way. Follow His will when it matches yours, but take the more attractive path when it appears down the road.

When Jesus asked men to follow Him, He wasn't merely interested in traveling companions. He wants disciples who follow Him in trust. Like a sheep with his Shepherd, you must believe that He is leading you in the right path to safety and provision. And whenever you see a way that you think fits better, have the faith to pray, “not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Only then can He take you to your Father's house.

Discipleship Light may have some similarities with the original, but it does not measure up. True discipleship allows you to “grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is sweet” (1 Pet. 2:2-3). Don't settle for anything less.