

Abiding in Jesus' Word

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

***—John 8:31,32,
English Standard
Version***

AT THE TIME OF HIS

earthly ministry, Jesus came exclusively to the Jewish nation, which was in covenant relationship with God. The privilege of becoming the Lord's disciples was offered first to this nation, and their blessing would be in proportion

as they were faithful to the light that would come to them. Before these blessings could flow, however, it was necessary that Jesus should "redeem them that were under the law," make reconciliation for iniquity, and open "a new and living way." (Gal. 4:4,5; Tit. 2:13,14; Heb. 10:19,20) This he had come to do, but he had not done it as yet. Whoever would come to understand the divine purposes and arrangements, and act in harmony with them, should be made free, and be liberated from the condemnation resting upon them as Jews resulting from the weaknesses of their flesh, and be brought into full accord with God.—Rom. 8:2-4

This great privilege also meant something more than all this. It signified the prospect of being “joint-heirs” with their Messiah. (Rom. 8:16,17) However, all these things were mostly a hidden mystery known up to that time only by Jesus himself, because he had been begotten of the Holy Spirit at the time of his baptism. (Col. 1:26,27) Thus, there were many things Jesus spoke that were hard for his hearers to understand. He often spoke in parables, and in obscure sayings, for the very purpose of making the way of life soon to be opened up a “narrow” way. (Matt. 7:14) We read in the Scriptures that some said of the Master’s words, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”—John 6:60, *New King James Version*

The particularly “hard saying” referred to was that his “flesh is meat indeed,” and his “blood is drink indeed,” and that by eating and drinking of these they might gain eternal life. (vss. 54,55) We read that after this many forsook him and abandoned the thought of being his disciples, rather than following on patiently until a fuller revelation would come.—vs. 66

Jesus was anticipating this condition of things when he spoke these words to them. It was as though he was saying: You have declared that “No one ever spoke like this man.” (John 7:46, *ESV*) Already you have heard words very different from the words of the scribes and Pharisees. Now continue; hold on for a little while. If you will do this, you will grasp the situation in due time. Exercise faith—exercise patience. You have begun to have interest in these things, and as you fully become my disciples you will be granted greater knowledge. This “truth will

set you free” from bondage to the Law of ordinances, ceremonies and traditions under which you presently struggle. Freedom from this will give you all the blessings and privileges that come to the children of God. Greatly blessed were the few who took heed to the Master’s counsel.

BLESSINGS BEGUN AT PENTECOST

Nicodemus was evidently one of those who was sympathetically drawn to the teachings of Jesus. Understandably, however, he was inclined to stumble over spiritual things. For example, he could not see how one could be “born again.” (John 3:1-9) Later, the Gospel writer, John, explains why such statements could not yet be fully understood: “The Holy Spirit was not yet given,” and this would not occur until Jesus was glorified.—John 7:39

Nevertheless, some saw enough in Jesus to attract them to him. These said in their heart: Surely his words are true, and his criticisms of our nation are true. We do not see how he is going to fulfill these prophecies, but he desires that we hold on to our faith, and he promises that we will understand later. Indeed, some did hold on, “above five hundred brethren,” who were witnesses of his resurrection. (I Cor. 15:6) As Jesus had promised, these and others who held to his words were given the privilege of becoming disciples indeed.

When Pentecost came, the Heavenly Father received all who had abided in Jesus’ word, and they were begotten of the Holy Spirit into God’s family. Their minds were illuminated, and they began to understand spiritual things. However, all

the light of the “truth” message did not come at once, but was revealed progressively as the days and years went by. These were indeed Christ’s true disciples, being such followers of Jesus as the Father was pleased to recognize. They were not only made free from their bondage under the Jewish Law arrangement, but were also made free from the “law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:2) They received a new will, a new mind, and the Holy Spirit revealed “the deep things of God” unto them. —I Cor. 2:10

In his prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) By the word “truth” Jesus was here referring to the Father’s revelation of his plan through the Holy Spirit. The sanctifying influence would come through that knowledge, as it was received into an honest heart. This sanctification, or the process of making holy, had its full beginning with the Pentecostal blessing, and still continues to operate in Christ’s footstep followers. This work progresses as long as the individual allows the Truth to have its designed influence in their life.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him.” (John 14:6,7) Jesus, by his words and deeds, taught his disciples how to “know” his Father, as being a God of love. Jesus is the only one through whom we can truly come to know the Father and become his sons. Thus, abiding in the Lord’s word will bring us the grand consummation of our hopes.

OUR SUFFICIENCY

We perceive, then, that Christ is the sufficiency which God has provided for us in all respects. The Apostle Paul said that it is Christ Jesus who “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (I Cor. 1:30) We first received, through learning of Jesus’ sacrificial work on our behalf, necessary wisdom, instruction and guidance, by which we could, through his merit, come to the Father. Jehovah set forth a glorious plan “before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 1:18-20) His plan was suggested in Eden, just after the fall of our first parents. (Gen. 3:14,15) In due time he gave a further intimation of his eternal purpose through Abraham, and still later through Moses and the prophets. (Gen. 22:18; Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22-24) Nevertheless, how the world was to benefit from it was mostly hidden from human understanding.

Not until Jesus came was the way of life opened up and made manifest. Paul states that Christ “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (II Tim. 1:10) Our Lord began to speak the message of the Gospel, but his words were often veiled in parabolic language. It was not until his followers were begotten of the Holy Spirit that they were able to enter into “the deep things of God.” Today, nearly two-thousand years later, Jesus’ wisdom continues to guide and direct his disciples all along their journey in the narrow way.

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION

In addition to his being our source of wisdom, Paul states that Jesus becomes our “righteousness,” or justification. By the imputation of his own

righteousness through the merit of his sacrifice, our Adamic sins are covered. This imputation brings us to a condition of justification, reckoned so by God according to the arrangement which he has been pleased to authorize.—Rom. 5:1,2,8-11

During the present Gospel Age, our Lord does not become the righteousness of everybody, but to those alone who come to the point of full dedication to the Father's will. There is a good reason for this, for only those who offer themselves to become fully his disciples—only the Spirit-begotten—would be profited by a justification by faith. In the next age, the remainder of mankind will be given the opportunity to become justified by works, and by heart obedience to the righteous laws in effect throughout the earth at that time.—Isa. 26:9; Jer. 31:31-34

The step of dedication, or consecration, on the part of those who become Jesus' disciples is the first step in the process that Paul calls "sanctification." However, the sanctification which comes to us through Jesus goes much further. Jehovah instructed the Israelites, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy," and I will "sanctify you." (Lev. 20:7,8) That is, set yourselves apart to holiness, and I will supervise that work by giving you the needed experiences in order for its more complete accomplishment. (I Thess. 4:3,4; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2) Similarly, to all of us who come to the Father through his beloved Son, Jesus not only becomes our righteousness, but through him and the experiences we have by following in his footsteps, we come to complete sanctification. This is only possible through Jesus. It is his grace and advocacy alone that enable us to attain complete and final sanctification.—Eph. 2:4-7; I John 2:1

God, likewise, sanctifies us by begetting us with his Holy Spirit, making us prospective members of the “royal priesthood,” and of the “body of Christ,” the Anointed One. (I Pet. 2:9; I Cor. 12:12-27) This “holy Spirit of promise” is called an “earnest,” or pledge, of our inheritance, which will be experienced to the full when we are changed from the human to the spirit nature in the “first resurrection.” (Eph. 1:13,14; Rev. 20:6) Let us remember, however, that this pledge of our inheritance is given to us for the purpose of our growth in the process of sanctification already begun in us until its completion—that is, even “unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

JESUS OUR DELIVERANCE

Lastly, Paul says that Christ has been made our “redemption.” The thought here presented relates not only to the redemptive merit of Jesus’ sacrifice, but also to full deliverance into the kingdom of God. Those who make satisfactory progress and “abide” in Jesus’ word and example of wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, will experience full deliverance in the first resurrection. Christ thus becomes our deliverance. We shall then “be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

In all these things Christ is the center, and through him alone can we obtain these promised blessings. While the Father is the source of all these, they are given by, or through, his Son, who is the Father’s representative. (I Cor. 8:6) Therefore, we can say with Paul, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”—Eph. 1:3,4

EARS TURNED FROM THE TRUTH

The Lord’s preaching always produced two opposite effects upon the multitudes that heard him. He attracted one class and repelled the other. Those who were full of pride and conceit, and who preferred darkness to light because they realized that if they admitted the light of Truth they must of necessity conform their characters to it—all such were repelled by the teachings of Christ.

On some occasions multitudes received his testimony, but later deserted him, walking no more with him as he continued to preach the lessons of divine Truth. (Luke 4:14-29) At other times the multitudes hung upon his teachings “and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” (vs. 22) Yet, in the end, most forsook him, with only the merest handful remaining. Paul later wrote that many “shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”—II Tim. 4:4

What consternation would follow in the various churches of today, if the professed ministers of the Gospel should follow the Master’s example in similarly declaring the whole counsel of God! How quickly they would become unpopular among their congregations. Many today go to church to be entertained with pleasing sermons from eloquent speakers who presumably know the tastes and ideas of the congregation and will preach to please them. They are quite willing to pay their money for what they want to hear, but most are not interested in hearing the word of Truth.

DISCIPLES INDEED

Jesus' statement in our opening text, "You are truly my disciples," implies a distinction between real discipleship and that which is in name only. Since we desire to continue to be Jesus' true disciples, let us again mark well the expressed condition, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." Merely nominal discipleship is not sufficient for us to be counted acceptable to the Lord.

It is a blessed thing to take the first step in the Christian life—that of acceptance of Christ as our Redeemer and yielding ourselves fully to the Father through him. However, the reward of this step depends upon our abiding continually in his word, in the attitude of true disciples. The tendency of human pride is to wander away from the simplicity of divine Truth and to seek out new theories and philosophies of our own, or those of others. Paul warns us, however, against being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—II Cor. 11:3

The reward of continued discipleship is, as Jesus says in our text, "You will know the truth." It is not, you shall be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (II Tim. 3:7) Failure to abide in the word of the Lord can easily lead to delving into various human philosophies and theories which, either completely or in large part, are not in harmony with the Scriptures. To those who seek for Truth along such lines of human reasoning, it is highly unlikely that they shall find it.

Truth is found only in the divinely appointed way—through the inspired words of the Bible. To continue in the doctrine set forth in the writings of the prophets and the apostles, to study and meditate

upon them, to trust implicitly in them, and to faithfully conform our characters to them, is what is implied in “abide in my word.” This is entirely compatible with the use of the many helps which the Lord raises up from among our brethren, as enumerated by the Apostle Paul. (Eph. 4:11-15) God always has raised up, and continues to do so, such helps for the edification of the body of Christ. However, it is the duty of every member carefully to prove their teaching by the infallible Word, as did the brethren in Berea, and thus “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”—Acts 17:10,11; I Thess. 5:21

If we thus continue to abide in the word of the Lord as earnest and sincere disciples, we shall indeed “know the truth,” and be established in it, firmly rooted and grounded. We shall be strong in the faith, and “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” We will be prepared to “war a good warfare,” to witness “a good confession,” and to firmly “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” even unto the end of our earthly walk. One of our chief battles in this regard will be that of subduing, conquering, and having proper rule over self, “casting down imaginations ... and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—I Pet. 3:15; I Tim. 1:18; 6:13; II Tim. 2:3; II Cor. 10:3-5

We do not come into the knowledge of the Truth at a single bound, but gradually, step-by-step. Each step is one of sure and certain progress leading to a higher vantage ground for further attainments both in knowledge and in established character. The Truth thus acquired, step-by-step, becomes a sanctifying

power, bringing forth in our lives its blessed fruits of righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, love, meekness, faith, patience, and every virtue and every grace, which time and cultivation ripen to a glorious maturity.—Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-8

Not only shall the true disciple thus know the Truth and be sanctified by it, but as the Lord also said in our opening text, “The truth will set you free.” Those who have received the word of Truth know by blessed experience something of its liberating power. As soon as any measure of it is received into a good and honest heart, it begins to strike off the fetters of sin, ignorance, superstition and fear. Its beams penetrate the darkest recesses of our hearts and minds and invigorate our entire being.

GOD’S WORDS GIVE LIGHT

The psalmist wrote concerning Jehovah, “Thy words giveth light.” (Ps. 119:130) Sin cannot endure the light of Truth; ignorance and superstition vanish before it. What a blessed realization it is to be thus liberated! Much of mankind, however, is still under the blinding influence of error. Under its delusions they have been “taught by the precept of men” to fear God as a vengeful tyrant, consigning the vast majority of his creatures to an eternity of torment. (Isa. 29:13) Thank God, we have received the Truth and been awakened from that horrible nightmare, and the bondage of Satan over us is broken. The light has scattered our mists of darkness.

We are made free, too, from the fear that we now see upon the whole world as the great political, social, economic and religious systems are being shaken to the core. Thinking people are in dread of

the possible outcome of anarchy and social upheaval such as has never been seen before. Jesus foretold that near the end of the present Gospel Age there would be “upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity,” and “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” (Luke 21:25,26) Yet, in the midst of all this, and with the fullest assurance of the infallible Word of God as to the trouble through which the world is currently passing, the true disciples of Christ who abide in his Word are not afraid, but rejoice. Jesus tells us, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is approaching.”—vs. 28, *International Standard Version*

Those who abide in Jesus’ Word know that God’s object in permitting this mighty storm is to clear the degrading atmosphere of the world, and that after the present storm shall come, by divine providence, an abiding peace. Instructed in the Truth, these realize the necessities of the situation, and have confidence in God’s Word, which declares that the “wrath of man shall praise” him, and “the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Thus will “all things work together for good,” according to God’s eternal purpose.—Ps. 76:10; Rom 8:28

Blessed promise! “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Having received this wondrous favor from the Lord, shall we not continue in it, bringing forth its blessed fruitage in our lives? Shall we not be faithful to it under all circumstances, defending it against every assault, and bearing its reproach? Let us prove our appreciation of the

glorious light of Truth by our loyalty and faithfulness, working out our salvation “with a proper sense of awe and responsibility,” in full cooperation with our Heavenly Father, who also is working in us that we might have both “the will and the power to achieve his purpose.”—Phil. 2:12,13, *J. B. Phillips New Testament* ■