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"THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP"

LESSON 5 : ABIDING IN THE WORD

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INTRODUCTION

The Lord said to the Jews who believed in him: "if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31).

Abiding in the word of someone, is to be faithful to him whether he is present or absent. It means knowing what the person says, what the person desires, and what he expects. Many wives say they love their husbands but how many of them keep the word of those they claim they love? The observance of words and commandments is a crucial test of love. Love is not just a matter of emotions. And only fools put their trust in feelings. God is not a fool and feelings do not count for anything before him. True love is proven love. No one can prove his love by feelings. But love can be proven by the observance of the commandments and instructions of the person loved. It is for this reason that the Lord said that only those who continue in his words are truly his disciples. The Christian begins in the word of God, for it is by faith that we become children of God.

"So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Romans 10:17). It is by the preaching of the word of God that three thousand people were led to Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is by the preaching of the word that the Ethiopian eunuch gave his life to Christ (Acts 8), although each believer begins in the word, many do not continue in the word. Those who continue in it are disciples. One must continue in the word to be a disciple for the reasons that we are going to see in this lesson.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

1.1. The Power of the Word of God

It is by the word of God that the world and the whole universe were created by his word; God brought into existence all the elements that constitute nature (Genesis 1; John 1:1-3). By his word, the Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (Matthew 21:18-22) and performed many miracles and healings. All these things happened simply at the command of the Lord. By his word he healed the daughter of the young Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24-30). By his word he stilled the storm.

1.2. The Word of God is necessary for victory

The Christian life is full of conflict. Those who are to continue must know how to stand against the attacks of the wicked one. The Bible says, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth.... And take the helmet of salvation, and THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD" (Ephesians 6:12-17).

Jesus used the word to overcome the wicked one. In a dark hour when he was assaulted by the prince of this world, He constantly used the word for victory. He told the wicked one, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

"The word of God is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

1.3. The Word of God is necessary for growth

Food is necessary for bodily growth. If a child who is born healthy does not feed on the right food in the right quantities, he will not grow healthily. The Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Those who read God's word and meditate on it more are those who will make the most progress. Those who do not read it will starve. For many people to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord, there must be an increase in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Bible says, "And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

We live in an age in which people are looking for instant things: instant coffee, machine-operated bank accounts. However, there is no such thing as instant growth. All those who want to grow must dwell on the word. In fact, growing spiritually means growing in the knowledge of the Lord. We know the Lord because he makes himself known to us when we seek him with all our hearts. He himself said, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). So the Lord manifests himself to those who love him and who keep his word. Those who keep the word of the Lord will know the Lord for he will make his home with them,

and make himself known to them. The Lord said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).

II. HOW TO KNOW THE WORD OF GOD

To know the word of God, we must love it. The Bible is a love letter written by the Lord to those who love Him. Just as a lover loves a love-letter written by the one he loves, so all who love the Lord will love His word. The measure with which a person loves the word of God is a reflection of his love for the Lord. Those who love Him most love His word deeply. They feed on it and find their joy in it. The Psalmist expressed his love for the Lord in the following words: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.... More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalms 19:7-10). "My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times" (Psalms 119:20).

"At midnight I rise to praise thee, because of thy righteous ordinances" (Psalms 119:62). "Oh, how i love thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalms 119:97). "How sweet are thy words to ray taste, sweeter than honey to ray mouth" (Psalms 119:103). The love for the Lord will produce love for His word. This love for Him and His word will result in:

2.1. Reading the Word

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). There is cleansing brought about in the believer by simple contact with the word of God.

This can happen as he listens to the word of God being preached or while reading it. The believer who continuously comes into contact with the word of God exposes himself to continuous cleansing; some stains and blemishes of sin disappear, simply as a result of the believer's sustained soaking of himself into the word of God.

A teacher of the word of God illustrated this with a dirty cloth steeped in soapy water. Some of the dirt leaves without the need to rub the cloth, while some stains will only leave upon rubbing the cloth. The Bible must be read by all disciples who can read. It must not be read randomly, it must be read systematically, from Genesis to Revelation. There are people who can read but who have never read a Bible from the beginning to the end, and they hope to enter heaven. So! Rather, they will go to hell for heaven is for Jesus and those who love him. Imagine a man who sends a love letter to his fiancée. But the fiancée is so busy reading other letters that she only reads parts of the one and only letter that her fiancée sent her. If her fiancée learns that she neither had the time nor desire to read his letter, do you think he will go ahead and marry this young girl who shows no sentiment of love for him? No! He will turn to others who love him and he will be right in doing so.

2.2. Memorization of God's word

Those who meditate on the Lord's word soon find that they must memorize it. When the Lord was attacked by the devil in the wilderness He did not say, "Where is my Bible so that I may read a verse of it to the devil?" He used the word that He had stored in His heart. He quoted from memory and quoted correctly! The Psalmist said, "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:11).

A German disciple was being tortured for his faith by religious hypocrites. They took his Bible and burnt it. He said, "You can have it. I have stored all of it in my heart but for a few names in the genealogy of my Lord."

Anyone who does not memorize Scripture and store it up for himself will not stand in the hour of sudden attack by enemy forces. Before he has looked for his Bible, it will be too late!

Something more serious is this; we live on the eve of a major persecution of the lovers of the Lord Jesus. During that persecution, their Bibles will be taken away from them and burnt. What they will have to war with during those bitter months and years will be what they have stored in their hearts. How prepared are you?

To continue in the Lord is to continue in Bible memorization.

2.3. Study of the word

Studying God's word goes beyond just reading it. It includes meditation hanging at it and around it, waiting on God to explain it and applying the whole mind to it. Joshua was told, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Joshua 1:7-8). Joshua was to be one with the word of God, knowing It and obeying it.

That was to be his secret to success. That remains the secret to success for all would-be disciples.

The tragedy of our generation lies in her love of superficiality. Where are those who will take God's word seriously? Where are those who will risk everything on it?

2.4. Sitting under the ministry of a bible teacher

The apostles considered that their primary ministry was the ministry of the word. The early disciples "Devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching" (Acts 2:42). Paul charged Timothy saying, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2). To make good progress with the word, one should have sat under the teaching ministry of a Spirit-endowed Bible teacher. There are many preachers and evangelists but there are very few teachers the world over. These are men who have seized the deep meaning of the word of God, have worked out the practical implications of the word clearly and applied them first to their own lives and by the grace of God are committed to enabling others to understand the word, work out the practical implications and, like the teacher apply it to their lives without any compromise. Bible teachers are righteous people, and often unpopular because of the word of God. All through the ages, true Christians have been persecuted for one single reason: the word of God lived and taught. Those who live according to the word and put it to practice, preferring death rather than compromising the truth have always been the object of persecution. Generally, genuine teachers of the word, by their very conduct, are God's models. They purify themselves in order to become

available instruments in the hands of God and receive from Him the deep truths of the word which they communicate to others, Bible teachers do not recommend themselves by their eloquence or by the gift of oratory, or their diplomas in theology. Above all, they are people who have shown proof of faithfulness in keeping the word of God and because of this have received a mandate from God to transmit it to others.

They must first of all be known by their fruits. Each disciple must therefore be careful that no one makes a prey of him, placing on the disciple burdens that he himself would hardly touch, as the Lord said in Matthew 23:1-5.

III. KEEPING THE WORD OF GOD

3.1. Obeying the word of God,

The ultimate purpose of all true study of the word is that it will lead to obedience. God wants people who obey. Theoretical knowledge must give way to practical knowledge. The servant of the Lord Jesus wrote, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing" (James 1:22-25).

Obedience will lead to experience of the truth and all who experience the truth are free. If you will be a disciple, study the word, know the word, experience the word and then you are free! If you do not do any of these, you have opted out of discipleship.

Before we leave this subject of continuing in the Lord's word, I want to leave you with two more thoughts for you to think about and meditate upon. The first one has to do with obeying the unwritten word. The Bible says, "But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the South to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert road. And he rose and went" (Acts 8:26-27). The Lord spoke to Philip through an angel. He still speaks by angels, dreams, visions, different revelations, and so on. Although we must check to ensure that the voices, dreams visions ... are not the devil's lies, we are not to reject them. When you have sorted out that a certain spiritual impression is of the Lord, you should go ahead and obey and in that way satisfy Him. God bless you along that blessed but steep road!

The second thing is that the word of the Lord, studied, understood, proclaimed and lived will inevitably lead to persecution. The Lord Jesus was persecuted basically for His words. The same thing applies to the first martyr Stephen and all those who were persecuted for the Lord. Persecution always comes because of the word. Are you prepared for that? Continuing in the word of the Lord implies that you continue in that which will lead to suffering and persecution. Will you yet continue in the word?

3.2 The word of God must dwell in us

The Bible says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

The word of God can only dwell among us if, first of all, it dwells in us. Many children of God who visit one another engage in that have

nothing to do with the kingdom of God. By so doing, they spend hours building the kingdom of the Devil "in the name of Jesus", for we know that no word is neutral. Infact, it is for this reason that the Lord declares, "I tell you, on the day of judgement, men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37).

No one who utters careless words will go unpunished, it is not because God delights in punishing men but because of the damage caused by their careless words. All that does not glorify God glorifies the devil. All that does not build the Kingdom of God destroys it. Many will be surprised at the damage they have caused the work of God simply because the word of God neither dwelt in them or among them; as a result they uttered careless words, carried on useless conversations which turned against God. Let no one be self-deceived! Some claim to know the word of God but they also find time for useless pleasures and useless talking. They even create time for gossips, and for slander. Let no one be deceived about this! The Lord said,

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:33-34). When the word of God truly dwells in a person, his mouth ought to proclaim just the oracles of God. The Lord's life was a proclamation of the oracles of God, Each occasion was used for proclaiming the word of God. He had no need to say, like hypocrites, "How is time for enjoyment, later will be time for religion." The Lord had only one thing on his souls, one treasure in his heart, the word of God and he extracted goodness from

it why must believers accept that from the same source come out good water and brackish water? Whereas no single spring can give these two kinds of water. The devil must be kicked out and thus double life must be stopped. Yes, brother, repent. Commit yourself to obey all the word of God. Meditate on it, keep it, let it dwell richly in you. Be a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

The Bible says, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:1-3).

The word of God created the universe, and the word alone can explain all about the living and lifeless creation, visible as well as invisible beings. The word is truth. The word understands man and knows his ways. The word sheds light on the origin of man, the ways of God concerning man. The word was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). The word is the way, the truth and the life. The word having been made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, has become a model that man can understand; it has become accessible for all who believe. The Lord Jesus is the word of God in action. He made the word of God so simple and commonplace that the "wise" missed it and could not recognize him as the word of God. But to all who received him, Jesus gave the power to become children of God; to these Jesus says,

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the will make you free" (John 8 ; 31-32).

Only those who abide in the word of Jesus Christ are truly his disciples. To such the word of Jesus is their code of life and the hallmark of righteousness. They neither turn away from it to the left or to the right and they succeed in all that they undertake (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:1-3). Thus they bear a lot of fruit thus glorifying their heavenly Father.

In lesson 5 we shall study another condition for continuing as a disciple :

"Fruit Bearing"

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1

- 1- What is the simplest way of proving that one loves one's superior?
- 2- On what condition does Jesus make himself known to men?
- 3- On what condition has the heavenly Father decided to make his home in his children?
- 4- Give two things that require that we know the Word of God. Support your answer with bible references.
- 5- How does one show that one has intense love for the Lord?
- 6- According to your answer, can you say you have intense love for the Lord?
- 7- When did you become a child of God?
- 8- Have you read through the bible (from Genesis to Revelation)?
- 9- How many times have you read through the bible?

SECTION 2

N.B. Food nourishes a man's body, while the Word of God does the same to a man's spirit.

- 10- What other benefit does one obtain by reading the bible (other than the ones mentioned in question 4 above)?
- 11- How can we explain the fact that man cannot live by bread alone?
- 12- Mention four negative things that can happen to a body that is not fed
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

- 13- From the answers you gave to question 12 say four negative things that could happen to a person
- a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
- 14- How does the word of God cleanse a person?
- 15- In the Old Testament the priests could enter the holy place after washing themselves with water. What can you deduce from this with regards to the priests of the New Testament (the children of God)?
- 16- Will you accept to marry a girl or a boy who claims to be your fiance but who does not read the letters you write to him/her? Why?
- 17- Will God allow into his kingdom people who do not love his word and who do not read it? Why?
- 18- What is the secret of success of a disciple?
- 19- What danger lies ahead for those who do not memorize the word of God?
- 20- Mention four things which qualify a man to teach the word of God.
- a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
- 21- Mention four characteristics of genuine teachers of the word of God.
- a)
 - b)
 - c)
- 22- Why is it necessary for anyone who wants to be a teacher of the word of God to submit himself to the ministry of a bible teacher?

SECTION 3

- 23- In what way can the knowledge of the truth set someone free?
- 24- In what different ways can God speak to his children?
- 25- What ought our attitude to be when we have the impression that God has spoken to us in one way or another
 - a)
 - b)
- 26- What are the dangers of living a life of obedience to the word of God?
- 27- Are there words that are neutral? Why?
- 28- Why will God punish those who speak carelessly?
- 29- What can we do to avoid falling into the trap of talking carelessly?
- 30- Why does a person's language show the degree of the person's spirituality?
- 31- What double personality do we notice among the children of God despite the fact that the Lord Jesus was completely different?
- 32- Why is the Word of God the sole authority that can explain the whole universe?
- 33- In what form did God send his word in the Old Testament.
- 34- In what form did God send his Word in the New Testament?
- 35- What is the fundamental difference between the two forms?
- 36- Have you got anything else to say about this lesson?