

D-Up: A Series on Discipleship

A Disciple's Obedience

1 John 1:5-2:8

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Text Introduction: This morning I am returning to a series on discipleship. We are calling this series of messages "D-Up!" The "D" stands for discipleship.

We have focused on our initial decision to follow Christ, on baptism and the importance of the church to help us grow as disciples. We next focused on daily reading of the Word, prayer, stewardship, and sharing our faith.

I want to close out this series with several ideas focused on outcomes. As we always talk about, we do not study the Bible for information, but for transformation. In talking about discipleship, we are certainly not talking about what a disciple knows, but what a disciple does.

In the letter called First John, we encounter one of those "hold-on-to-your-hat" passages. We will use this passage as the backdrop for both this week and next. This passage certainly causes us to focus on what are the outcomes of our relationship to Jesus. Now, before we read this passage, I want to remind you that we are not talking about some kind of Superman, radical Christian. We are talking about all who claim to be Christ followers.

Text: ⁵ Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. ⁶ If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say, "We don't have any sin," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. ² He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

³ This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," yet doesn't keep His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: ⁶ The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Introduction: Focus your eyes and your attention on 2:6. Is that even possible? Can we “walk just as He walked?” Can we be like Him? Should we even try? Actually, Scripture teaches us that to be like Christ is one of the purposes of our lives. We were created to be like Christ. We usually call this discipleship.

Most of you know that my favorite Christian author is Max Lucado. My favorite Lucado sentences come from his book, *Just Like Jesus*. Lucado says, “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be **just like Jesus**.”

This is the subject of the opening words of John’s first letter. In the first four verses of 1 John, John gives his testimony. He has seen Jesus and come to have belief in Jesus.

In 1 John 1:5-10, he begins to declare what some have observed as a two-part message to his readers. First, John is writing concerning right belief or thinking. Second, John writes about right behavior or right living. These two themes are absolutely inseparable for John. In verses 5-10, John attacks three wrong philosophical positions of his day.

1. Some questioned that their sin impedes their relationship to God. (5-7)
2. Some questioned that they had a sin nature—that they were suffering from the effects of sin (8-9)
3. Some questioned that they, even though having a capacity to sin, had sinned. (10)

Moving into chapter 2, John addresses the church specific to these false philosophical positions. Regardless of what position they might be falling for, the issue is the same—“This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands.”

Could anything be more clear? We want to look for the loophole. We hope this text doesn’t mean what it appears to mean. There is no loophole. The one who claims to know Him will keep His commands. The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked. This is not perfection and never sinning, but it is the desire and the discipline to keep His commands.

Establishing Obedience as the Gauge of our Discipleship

This is not just John’s theology, this is the theology of the whole of Scripture. There are many passages we could read today, but let’s consider these.

- Philippians 2:5
Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,
- Ephesians 4:15, 4:24, 5:1
But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.
you put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.
Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.
- Colossians 2:6

Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him,

- Romans 8:29

For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers.

- 2 Corinthians 3:18

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.

- 1 Peter 1:15-16

But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.

The record of Scripture is that we walk in obedience—the obedience of Jesus. What does that look like?

Illustrating the Essence of Obedience

- Philippians 2:8

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.

Jesus humbled Himself. How much did He humble Himself? He humbled Himself to the point of obedience—obedience that took Him to the cross. If we choose to be Christ's disciple, we will choose to walk in obedience. If we choose to be His disciple, there should never be a time when we would say, "I know what Christ wants me to do, but I am going to do something else."

4 Tools God Uses to Help us Become Obedient:

I want to show you four tools (all of which can be found in the earthly life of Jesus) that God uses in our lives to help us to become like Christ. That is to say, there are things that God uses in our lives to mold us into the image of Christ.

1. *The Truth of God's Word (Matthew 4:4)*

But He answered, "It is written:
Man must not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes
from the mouth of God."

Just as we have physical food to develop our physical bodies, God has given us spiritual food to develop our spiritual bodies. God's Word is that supernatural instrument that as the writer of Hebrews says, "is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and the joints and the marrow, and is a discernor of the thought

and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) God’s Word leads us to all the truth and helps us to become like Christ.

If you have fallen into some consistent pattern of sin, I would venture to guess that you have fallen out of the discipline of being in God’s Word.

2. Trouble (Mark 14:32-34, 36)

³²Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and He told His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and horrified. ³⁴Then He said to them, “My soul is swallowed up in sorrow—to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake.”

³⁶And He said, “*Abba*, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

We see in Jesus’ life how He encountered trouble. We gain a new perspective about our trouble when we recognize that God allows trouble into our lives, not to punish us, but to shape us into the very image of Himself. Some of you have recently experienced trouble. Rejoice in that trouble, because God is using that trouble to mold you into the image of Christ. Are you allowing that to happen or are you resisting?

As you go through this trouble, remember that God always knows when enough is enough.

3. Temptation (Matthew 4:1)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

Third, God uses temptation in our lives to make us more like Christ. As odd as it might seem, temptation is a part of the process. We can’t say we are like Christ, until we have faced temptation and defeated it.

Notice that Jesus was led by the Spirit, but tempted by Satan.

Just as you cannot know that you have faith until you have trouble, you cannot really know that you have obedience until you have temptation.

4. Trespasses of others against us (Matthew 27:39-44 and Luke 23:34)

Those who passed by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and saying, “The One who would demolish the sanctuary and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him and said, ⁴²“He saved others, but He cannot save Himself! He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³He has put His trust in God; let God rescue Him now—if He wants Him! For He said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” ⁴⁴In the same way even the criminals who were crucified with Him kept taunting Him.

³⁴ Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

The final tool is the trespasses of others against us. To be like Jesus, we must be willing to say, “Father, forgive them.” There could be no better experience than for you to be able to forgive someone who has wronged you.

So What?

1. Death of Christ—In order for you to be conformed to the image of Christ, He had to die upon the cross. Without the cross, our Christ-likeness would be impossible. Don’t think you can do this by yourself. Christ did not die just to forgive you, but to free you from sin. You are saved by grace, and you will obey by grace. But this doesn’t mean we do nothing.
2. Decide to follow Christ—We must come to a place of firm decision that we choose to follow Christ. The Bible calls this point of determination repentance.
3. Discipline yourself—Just as Christ submitted His will to the Father, we must submit our will to Christ.

Remember this: “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be **just like Jesus.**”

Some of you are willfully and knowingly living in sin. You claim to be a child of God. You claim to be saved. But, you have taken God’s grace to the extreme. You have declared that God will forgive, so you keep on sinning.

Hear these words: This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands.