

## **Discipleship to Jesus Christ: Keep His Commandments**

### **Doctrine of Christ Conference**

**September 9, 2016**

**Boise, ID**

We have gathered at this general conference because of our love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Doctrine. This conference is dedicated to Him and to understanding more fully His efforts in our day. This conference also represents an opportunity for us to become stronger and more dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ, and I would like to make a few remarks on that topic tonight.

The word *disciple* appears in each of the standard works for a total of 330 times. The word disciple is of Greek origin and means “a learner, student, or pupil” who “follows one’s teachings” (*Strong’s Bible Concordance, Greek 3100-3102, p.154-5*). A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who seeks to become like Him by emulating Him (John 8:31; 15:8) and abiding by His word at all times (John 8:31; 13:35; 15:8). A disciple of Jesus Christ is ultimately able to pass on His teachings to others. Thus, discipleship means much more than just the transfer of information, it involves the transformation of the individual.

The early disciples of Jesus Christ certainly included the 12 Apostles, but such a title was not restricted only to them (John 6:60-67). For example, Joseph of Arimathea and women such as Tabitha were identified as disciples of Jesus in the New Testament. The Book of Acts describes disciples as being those who simply believed upon and confessed Jesus Christ (Acts 6:1-2,7; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 19:1, etc).

### **Call of Discipleship**

Our path to Heaven includes coming to know and obey Jesus Christ, and then following Him faithfully until the end. Discipleship is about having an ongoing and living relationship with the Lord. So, how can you be a disciple of Jesus Christ today? As we believe and participate in the Doctrine of Jesus Christ we embark on this path of discipleship. We have faith on His name, repent of our unbelief and lack of knowledge, are baptized by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by one holding priesthood authority...and then Christ promises He will baptize us with His Holy Spirit. That is the Doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Then, you will have His Holy Spirit to lead you. You will know and understand what God wants you to do with your life. He will put His words into your mind and in your heart, which you must listen and respond to. You can be guided and directed in the narrow path unto Eternal Life by following His Spirit on a daily basis. By listening to and obeying His Spirit, you can be further transformed into a new creation and become more like the Savior. You can become sanctified so that your body indeed becomes the temple that it is so that He can abide with you: “*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Then, the Lord will place you in His vineyard and you will become His servant. You will have the honor and privilege of having His Spirit with you at all times. And because you will know that Jesus Christ is with you, you will be able to speak and preach His gospel with much confidence and help bring others to Him. People whose lives you can touch will be placed into your life and you will be able to minister to them. After embarking on this path of discipleship, you must then endure to the end of your life as His disciple, being true to the light and truth given you.

Your good works alone cannot save you. Even if you have done many wonderful things that have led to the conversion of many people, that won't save you if your personal life and conduct is not right with God and if you haven't come to know the Lord. You can write many books or blog posts, make inspiring movies, and baptize many people, you can fill every minute of your life with volunteering and service and with positive platitudes and smiles, but if your focus is not on the Savior and being His disciple, then those efforts will not save you. Your personal life needs to be in order according to the will of God. Where your mind goes, where your heart is, what your desires are...these are all important. If you have lost your way or have back-slided or have been carousing around in all kinds of unrighteousness, but have now realized the error of your ways...hallelujah...cry out to the Lord to help you. You can repent and overcome through His grace and mercy. Get on your knees and fully dedicate yourself to Christ. Promise to give your life to the Lord fully. You may have been baptized, you may have felt the Holy Spirit from time to time, but you may not be fully sanctified because you have not committed fully to follow Jesus Christ 100%. Do not give up seeking His presence and His Spirit. Christ can pull you out of the darkest abyss and free you. He will remember the covenants you have made with Him earlier when you took upon you His name. He can cleanse you and make you free. Joseph Smith taught: *"You must be innocent, or you cannot come up before God: if we would come before God, we must keep ourselves pure, as He is pure. The devil has great power to deceive...Iniquity must be purged out from the midst of the Saints; then the veil will be rent, and the blessings of heaven will flow down—they will roll down like the Mississippi river"* (History of the Church, 4:605).

Once cleansed, then the Holy Spirit can abide with you fully and freely, and it will be your guide and your teacher. No longer will you need to follow other paths, gurus, false teachers and prophets, or even your own aspirations, desires, or lusts anymore...as you abandon these things in all areas of your life you will be better able to only follow Christ. However, the Lord will not force anyone into this path. If you are more interested in chasing after your own goals, dreams, and talents, or too busy being involved in a zillion other things or if you find yourself sitting on the fence, then He will not force you to be His disciple. But you will not be following Jesus Christ if you continue to follow your own desires and will, instead of the will of God. It is 100% your decision, your choice. You have to give your life over to Him and He will open the way for you.

## **Requirements of Discipleship**

This is the way of the disciples and apostles of Christ. It involves complete and total dedication to the Lord...all your heart, might, mind, and strength...not just a trite phrase, but a true dedication that sets you apart from others. It is not always easy to follow the Lord. Although He is merciful, He calls His disciples into an “all-or-nothing”, exacting, complete, unflinching, and deep commitment and obedience to Him that permeates all aspects of our lives. Matthew 16:24 *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.”* Discipleship involves giving Him preeminence over the closest of our human relationships and over the desires and goals we have set for our own lives:

JST Luke 14:26-27,33

*26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, or husband, yea and his own life also; or in other words, is afraid to lay down his life for my sake, he cannot be my disciple.*

*27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.*

*33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

The word **hate** in the first verse is not used in an emotional sense, but means to have a higher preference or regard for Christ over other relationships...and the word **forsake** means “to renounce or to leave” (*Strong’s Bible Concordance, Greek 657 and 3404, pp. 39 and 165, respectively*). These are stringent criteria. We have to leave behind our old ways and desires and our own will and trust in the Lord and love Him above all things. So, paradoxically, a disciple of Christ chooses to give up that which he or she cannot ultimately keep, in order to become a joint-heir with their Master, Jesus Christ, and receive all that He has instead. If we don’t make that choice, we risk losing all in the end anyway, so why not just determine within yourself to fully follow Christ?: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”* Matthew 16:25.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is also commanded to love others and to care for the poor and needy: *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you”* (John 15:12).

*“And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple.”* (D&C 52:40)

### **Path of Discipleship**

As Christ’s disciple on His narrow path, it is important that you get to know Him. As you get to know Him, He will abide with you. You can know Him by studying His words carefully and prayerfully without biases of others or your own. You can fast and pray in His name diligently, listening for His voice to guide you. If you cannot hear His voice, then pray that your heart will be softened and that your eyes and ears will be opened. Don’t give up until you come to know His voice. Expect false voices and deceiving

spirits to try to lead you astray...pray for the gift of discernment and ground yourself in the foundational bedrock of the scriptures. Stay squarely on the narrow path and do not deviate from the rod of iron.

D&C 93:1 provides a framework for our discipleship:

*“Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am;”*

Later in this section verse 19 says:

*“I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.”*

There is an interesting phrase in that verse: “How to worship”. There is really nothing included between verses 1 and 19 about how to worship using our voices, the geometrical positioning of our bodies, what attire to wear, what symbols to use, or what other activities to engage in during our worship, at least in terms of what we might traditionally view or imagine as our “worship” of the Lord. The only “commands” or instructions apparent in these verses are included in verse 1, which are, again:

1. Forsake sins, 2. Come unto Him, 3. Call on His name;

Those 3 could be conceived of as a part of our repentance.

Then, 4. Obey His voice, and 5. Keep His commandments.

Calling on His name, obeying His voice, and keeping His commandments could be conceived of as part of our discipleship. Thus, our worship of Jesus Christ entails our repentance and our discipleship. Then in verse 20: *“For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of His fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace.”*

What are His commandments? Is Christ only speaking in these verses of His universal commandments applicable to all mankind? The 10 commandments and so forth? Does a commandment need to be written in stone by the hand of God in order for it to be a commandment? No, a commandment can include any directive, impression, answer, or suggestion from the Lord to you. So, the Lord is also speaking in this verse of His personal commandments to you, as His disciple. He is speaking of the things He has asked you to do through communication of the Spirit. The commandments you have received are very likely different from the commandments that other people have received. As we keep His commandments to us individually, we can ultimately receive the same fulness from the Father that Christ also received. In verse 27 it reads: *“And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth His commandments.”* Likewise, Christ also said in John 8:31 *“If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”* Additionally, from D&C 41:5 *“He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple...”*

Therefore, one way to worship the Lord is to obey His voice and keep the commandments He has given you. Christ taught us that we show our love for Him by keeping His commandments (John 14:15). In speaking of the building of the temple in

Nauvoo in 1841, Joseph Smith declared: *“Let those who come up to this place be determined to keep the commandments of God . . . and then they will be prospered—the intelligence of heaven will be communicated to them, and they will, eventually, see eye to eye, and rejoice in the full fruition of that glory which is reserved for the righteous”* (History of the Church, 4:273).

The scriptures are full of the accounts of individuals who received a commandment from God and acted upon it. That is what most of scripture entails....story after story of individuals hearing God’s voice and obeying it. When Christ asked Peter if he loved Him, and Peter replied yes, Christ commanded Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17). That was Peter’s work, that was Christ’s commandment to him. When the rich young man came to the Savior asking what he should do to have Eternal Life, Jesus told him to keep the commandments. When the young man replied that he kept the commandments and asked about what he still lacked, the Savior commanded him to sell all that he had and then come and follow Him. When the ten lepers asked Christ to heal them, He commanded them to go to the priest. Christ gives commandments to those who follow Him so that they may know Him and show Him that they love Him. In John 15:5-10 we read:

*5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

*6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

*7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

*8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

*9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

***10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.***

We come unto Christ by doing His will and receiving Him...receiving His commandments and obeying them. When disciples of Jesus Christ obey His commandments, blessings come for both them and for those they serve. We must come to regard the directives that the Lord gives us as commandments. JST John 6:44 *“No man can come unto me, except he doeth the will of my Father who hath sent me. And this is the will of him who hath sent me, that ye receive the Son; for the Father beareth record of him; and he who receiveth the testimony, and doeth the will of him who sent me, I will raise up in the resurrection of the just.”* Then, we can be like Nephi and pursue the Lord’s commands until we have accomplished them, even in the face of extreme hardship or trials. *“I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them”* (1 Ne. 3:7). Expect set-backs, delays, illness, opposition, but persevere in faith and dedication, with reliance on the Lord, trusting that He has spoken to you. If you fail to do what He asks of you, He will of course still love you and work with you in other ways, but as CS Lewis so eloquently puts it: *“Whatever you do, He will make good of it.*

*But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed him.” (C.S. Lewis, Perelandra).*

During a particularly busy time during the Kirkland period Joseph Smith wrote: “No month ever found me more busily engaged than November; but as my life consisted of activity and unyielding exertions, I made this my rule: When the Lord commands, do it.” (History of the Church, 2:170; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book B-1, p. 558, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.)

### **Fruits & Rewards of Discipleship**

Jesus was quick to remind the inquiring disciples that there was a reward for following him (Mark 10:28-30):

*28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.*

*29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s,*

*30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

Interesting promises...an hundredfold in this lifetime...a community of fellow sojourners, striving also to follow and know Christ, a family...and also persecutions...but also eternal life in the world to come! Discipleship brings us into the family of our Lord (Matt. 12:47-50):

*47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.*

*48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?*

*49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

*50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

As we come to know more fully our Savior Jesus Christ, we become more like Him. We begin to look, feel, and act more like the Master. “*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*” (2 Cor. 3:18). And also, from the 5<sup>th</sup> of the Lectures on Faith, in describing the “*Mind of the Father, or in other words, the Spirit of the Father: which Spirit is shed forth upon all who believe on his name and keep his commandments: and all those who keep his commandments shall grow up from grace to grace, and become heirs of the heavenly kingdom, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ; possessing the same mind, being transformed into the same image or likeness, even the express image of him who fills all in all: being filled with the fulness of his glory, and become one in him, even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.*”

And again from D&C 93:1, the Lord provides the ultimate promise that you “*shall see my face and know that I am*” when you obey the Lord’s voice and keep His commandments.

### **Conclusion**

Christ doesn’t just want converts to this movement...He wants disciples that will help Him do His work. It is our choice. It is hard either way...either you follow your own will, which generally leads to darkness and despair, or you follow His will and keep His commandments. Doing His will may cause you to leave your comfort zone, change your behavior, and do things that are personally difficult. Christ’s disciples were always doing things that were contrary to the practices of the religion and traditions of the day...eating bread with unwashed hands, supping with sinners and publicans, fasting in a different manner than others, doing things differently on the Sabbath day. His disciples frequently offended other people with their practices, but they paid only respect to the commands of their Lord because they were focused on obedience to Christ alone.

Christ commanded His disciples (Matt. 11:29-30): “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*”. The demands of discipleship to Jesus are impossible for anyone to fulfill by themselves, unaided. However, He has not left us alone in this effort as there are reassurances along the way. We promise to “*always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given*” as we participate in the ordinance of the sacrament, which we will do in a few minutes, and in return He promises His spirit to be with us. We are far, far better when He abides with us than we could ever be without Him. If you love the Lord, then do His will, keep His commandments, and obey His voice. What does God want from you? If you want to find yourself in the same company as the other disciples and apostles of the Lord who have gone before you...then deny yourself of all ungodliness, pick up your cross, and follow the Lord as His disciple. The greatest calling, the most fulfilling challenge, and the greatest source of joy, both in this life and beyond, is found in discipleship to Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Addendum:

John 14:

**15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.**

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall **give you another Comforter**, that he may **abide with you for ever**;

17 *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: **I will come to you.**