



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

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The Lord's Day, February 17, 2019

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“Lite” Discipleship Luke 6:39-49

“Lite” salad dressing, “lite” mayonnaise, “lite” cheese, “lite” ice cream, “lite” salt, “lite” potato chips, even “lite” light bread! They all promise to give you all the taste, but with less calories or fat or sodium or carbs or whatever . . . And a lot of it looks like the real thing. It even looks very appetizing. And then you bite into it, and well . . . Does the word “cardboard” come to mind?

You know, when I look at the lives of some who profess to be Christians—followers of Jesus Christ—this whole idea of “lite”—L-I-T-E, not L-I-G-H-T—seems to be an accurate description. It seems that many want to practice a discipleship that is, as one preacher put it, “all you’ve ever wanted in a religion, and less!” You know what I mean. Get all you can as far as benefits, with a minimum of commitment and obedience. It’s what someone has called “*lite* discipleship.”

Many years ago, *Leadership Journal* ran a cartoon by Jim Berkley and Gerry Mooney about “The Lite Church.”¹ It pictured a church building with a sign out front that said:

The Lite Church

24% FEWER COMMITMENTS,
HOME OF THE 7.5% TITHE,
15-MINUTE SERMONS,
45-MINUTE WORSHIP SERVICES.
WE HAVE ONLY 8 COMMANDMENTS — YOUR CHOICE.
WE USE JUST 3 SPIRITUAL LAWS . . .
EVERYTHING YOU’VE WANTED IN A CHURCH . . .
AND LESS!

Now “lite” products may deliver good taste with less of what’s bad for you (although in recent years that’s proving to be debatable—both the taste and the health benefits!). But does “lite” discipleship really cut it? Is it really discipleship at all?

If we want the real answer on this, maybe we need to look at what Jesus said. Our text this morning is a good place to look.

What Jesus said . . .

In Luke 6, Jesus was speaking to a large crowd of His disciples *and* a great multitude of people who had come from all over Palestine to listen to Him. His disciples had at least *begun* to follow Him; the others wanted to hear what He had to say.

Jesus didn't pull any punches. He set forth the claims of His rule over persons very plainly and without any apology. The focus of what He said that day was on relationships. He had already talked about loving one's enemies, being merciful, forgiving others, and giving generously to those in need.

Then in our text, Jesus went on to teach those listening to Him that His disciples are all on the way toward becoming like Him. He said that a disciple is never above his or her teacher, but that when fully trained (the Greek word can mean equipped or restored), the disciple will be like the teacher.

In the meantime, Jesus said, disciples should be aware of their own faults rather than critical of others' failings. The blind can't lead the blind, and a person with a plank in their own eye must remove it before they can help a fellow-disciple with a speck in theirs! Because after all, becoming like Jesus involves being obedient to the Father, and merciful just as the Father is merciful.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus' focus here is not on the disciple learning certain items of knowledge from the teacher, but on becoming *like the* teacher? To emphasize that, Jesus goes on to use the image of bearing fruit. Just as people know what kind of tree a tree is by the kind of fruit it bears, the fruit seen in a person's conduct and character bears out the validity of their confession to be a follower of Jesus. Good actions come from a good heart, while evil actions come from an evil heart. The overflow from a person's heart is what comes out!

So Jesus said to those listening to Him, **"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"**² In other words, Jesus was saying that our confession and our conduct must be consistent! He gave them this picture to make His point: The one who comes to Him, listens to His words, and puts them into practice is **"like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on the rock."** When the rainy season came and the stream overflowed and beat against that house, it stood, because it was built solid on a secure foundation. On the other hand, the person **"who hears Jesus' words and does not put them into practice is like the man who built his house on the ground without a foundation";** when the raging waters beat against it, it collapsed in complete destruction. Jesus was saying that confession without a pattern of obedience won't stand in the storms of life or at the judgment!

You see, according to Jesus, discipleship is much more than just confessing Him as Lord with our lips. *Jesus demanded that His disciples live under His Lordship as well as confess it.* Jesus demanded that those who *confess* Him as Lord *obey* Him as Lord! He had absolutely no use for "lite" discipleship. The fact is that "lite" discipleship is not genuine discipleship. It's not authentic. It rings hollow. It's not *real*.

Isn't that what this text is all about? Isn't it saying to us that to be His disciples, *we must confess Jesus as Lord by our works as well as by our words?* Our confession that Jesus is Lord must be borne out by the way we live!

An understandable mistake . . .

Some years ago a member of the church I was serving at the time sent me a great story that was going around on the internet. It goes like this.

A driver had done the right thing, stopping at the school crosswalk even though he could have beaten the red light by speeding up to get through the intersection. The tailgating woman behind him went ballistic, though. She was pounding on her horn, screaming and gesturing in frustration because she missed her chance to get through the intersection with him.

In the middle of her rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to get out of her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed and placed in a cell. After a couple of hours, another officer approached the cell, opened the door, and escorted the woman back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

As he returned the woman's belongings, he said to her, "I'm awfully sorry for this mistake. You see, as I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, making gestures at the guy off in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him, I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' license plate holder, the 'Follow me to Sunday School' bumper sticker, the chrome plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk and the 'My Boss is a Jewish Carpenter' decal on your back window . . . Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

Lite discipleship.

A radical commitment . . .

Being Jesus' disciple is not an easy thing. He demands a radical commitment—*absolute loyalty*. He lays claim to *everything*—even our most sacred obligations and our most precious relationships must be under His sway!

Our problem is that we want to have some *flexibility* in all this—you know, we want to be Jesus' disciples, but not exclusively. We want to follow Him, but on our own terms—*lite discipleship*. We want to be like the *flexitarians*. They're the vegetarians who still like to eat a little meat once in a while. As one woman put it, "I usually eat vegetarian. But I really like sausage . . . I really like vegetarian food, but I'm just not 100 percent committed."³

Lite discipleship won't cut it with Jesus, though. It isn't real. Oh, it might look pretty good, but when people sample it, it just isn't fully the real thing.

Real discipleship, *authentic* discipleship, is following Jesus as Lord. He lays claim to our absolute, ultimate loyalty. He demands that we confess Him as Lord by our works as well as our words. Because you see, real discipleship means that we follow Jesus, learning from Him, putting His ways into practice, ultimately *becoming like Him*.

Now that doesn't happen overnight. John Stott has put it well in his little book *Basic Christianity*:⁴

You can become a Christian in a moment, but not a mature Christian. Christ can enter, cleanse, and forgive you in a matter of seconds, but it will take much longer for your character to be transformed and molded to his will. It takes only a few minutes for a bride and bridegroom to be married, but in the rough-and-tumble of their home it may take many years for two strong wills to be dovetailed into one. So when we receive Christ, a moment of commitment will lead to a lifetime of adjustment.

Do you think – nah, we'd never be guilty of it, would we?

Do you think we sometimes try to get by with "lite" discipleship *in our relationship to Jesus as Lord*? Do we truly seek to trust *and* obey Him? Is He Lord of our conduct and character as well as our confession?

Or *in our relationship with His people, the church*, as far as our participation in the life and ministry of the church, or our stewardship of our life, our spiritual gifts, and our material possessions? Or our role in fulfilling the church's mission to know Christ and to make Him known by living as an authentic community of followers of Jesus Christ that embodies His presence to the world through our worship, our witness, and our way of life as His disciples?

Or what about *in our relationships with fellow believers* on an individual basis, so far as bearing one another's burdens, forbearing and forgiving one another, and encouraging one another in our walk with Christ?

Are we trying to get by with *lite* discipleship *in our relationship to the world*? Are we, as Jesus said we should be, in the world, but not of it? Are we loving our enemies, doing good to them? Are we really being salt and light in a dark and corrupt world?

What I'm saying here applies equally to all who claim to follow Christ.

But on this Baptist Men's Day, I want particularly to challenge the men of Temple Baptist Church to practice authentic discipleship in your relationship with Jesus Christ and His church. Let your behavior be consistent with your belief, your conduct with your confession! Learn from Jesus and become like Him in your character and in how you relate to Jesus as your Lord, to His church as a whole and to individual fellow believers, and to the world. Don't be guilty of trying to practice "lite" discipleship! Jesus has no use for it! And the world sees right through it!

Don't you hate to bite into something that looks good, promises all the taste without the calories and stuff that's bad for you, and then it tastes like cardboard?

†MEG

¹ <https://www.preachingtoday.com/media/cartoons/2004/april/church-that-demands-less.html> (accessed 02-11-2019).

² Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011 edition).

³ "Are You a 'Flexitarian'?" MSNBC.com (03-16-2004),

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2004/june/15380.html> (accessed 02-11-2019).

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 126.