

Marks of a True Disciple

“If Ye Continue in My Word...”

The Continuance of the Disciple

John 8:31-32

In the first message in this series, we considered The Call of the Disciple. We saw that Christ does not invite men merely to admire Him, but to follow Him.

Then, in our last message, we considered The Cost of the Disciple. The Lord Jesus made it plain that following Him is not something to be entered into lightly.

That raises an important question: “What does a true disciple look like over time?” This question is what we will consider answering in this message.

Before we get into the message, we need to consider the setting of this text. Jesus is speaking “to those Jews which believed on him” (v. 31). From a casual reading, that sounds encouraging. It sounds like a group that has responded positively to Christ. But as the chapter unfolds, something becomes very clear. These same people are found resisting His word, rejecting His authority, and ultimately opposing Him.

In other words, their belief was not what it appeared to be.

It is to this very group that Jesus says: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” Jesus is drawing a distinction between those who make a profession and those who are truly His disciples.

This is truth that is repeated throughout the New Testament.

John 6:66

⁶⁶ From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked

| no more with him.

Not all who begin continue, and not all who profess truly possess.

The issue before us is: “Are we continuing in His Word?” According to Christ Himself, continuance reveals reality; marks true discipleship; leads to truth; and truth leads to freedom.

I. A SETTLED ABIDING — V. 31A

A. The condition of true discipleship

| “If ye continue in my word...”

1. Everything that follows — being His disciple indeed, knowing the truth, and being made free — depends on this.

The word “if” sets a condition. Jesus is defining the distinguishing marks of a true disciple.

2. The word “continue” (μένω) carries the idea of abiding, remaining, or dwelling. It speaks of a settled abiding, or ongoing persistence in the Word of Christ — the word comes to dwell in him.

| John 15:7

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.

B. The object of continuance — “My word”

1. To continue in His Word means:
 - a) To receive it as authoritative
 - b) To submit to it as final

- c) To order life according to it
2. A true disciple is marked by a settled relationship to the voice of Christ.

John 10:27

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

C. The nature of this abiding

This includes:

1. A believing abiding

The Word is received as truth, not debated as theory.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

2. An obedient abiding

Continuing in the Word means living under its authority.

James 1:22

²² But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

3. A persevering abiding

This is where the emphasis of the text really lies.

Colossians 1:23

²³ If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was

preached to every creature which is under heaven;
whereof I Paul am made a minister;

The true disciple doesn't follow Christ only when it's easy, or convenient, or accepted. He continues when it's costly, difficult, and unpopular.

D. The contrast is seen in the temporary followers

The statement given by Christ here implies a contrast to those who hear the Word, receive it outwardly, and appear to follow Christ, but they do not continue.

Matthew 13:20–21

²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

E. Clarifying the doctrine

1. This is not teaching we earn our salvation by continuing, or that our perseverance causes us to become disciples.
2. This is teaching that continuance is the evidence of true discipleship, not the cause of it.
3. A true disciple continues because he has been changed by grace; has a new relationship to the Word; and now desires what he once resisted.

1 John 2:3

³ And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

II. A SURE IDENTITY — V. 31B

A. The conclusion drawn by Christ

“...then are ye my disciples indeed”

1. The word “then” is critical — it connects directly back to what Jesus has just said: “If ye continue in my word...” — “then...”
2. In other words, Jesus is drawing a conclusion: “Continue — and it will be shown that you truly are.”

B. “Indeed” (ἀληθῶς) — genuine, real, authentic

1. Jesus is making a distinction between professed disciples and proven disciples.
2. The Jews being addressed are described as believing on Him, yet as the chapter unfolds, they resist His teaching (v. 37), reject His word (v. 45), and oppose His person (v. 59). They are not genuine.

C. The difference between profession and possession

1. As pointed out on several occasions in our discipleship study, there are those who make a profession of following Christ; associate themselves with Him; and even appear to follow outwardly — but they do not truly belong to Him.
2. 1 John 2:18-19 demonstrates this difference — the departure of those mentioned reveal their true condition.

1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

3. Matthew 7:21 shows a kind of discipleship that is only verbal.

Matthew 7:21

²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

D. The nature of true discipleship

1. A true disciple is defined by a relationship that endures.
2. This does not mean perfection. True disciples may struggle; or fail; or need correction, but he cannot and will not abandon the word; walk away from Christ; or settle into rejection of the truth — because something has fundamentally changed.

E. The inward reality behind the outward evidence

1. Continuance does not produce discipleship — it reveals it.
2. A true disciple continues because he has been born again. That means he has a new nature and a new relationship to Christ and His Word.

1 John 3:9

⁹ Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;

for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

(Not sinless perfection, but a changed pattern.)

III. A SAVING KNOWLEDGE — V. 32A

A. The result of abiding

“...and ye shall know the truth”

1. If you continue — then you are My disciples indeed (genuinely) — and you shall know the truth. This is the result of abiding.
2. The one who abides in Christ’s Word comes to know the truth of that Word.

B. The meaning of “know” (γινώσκω) — experiential, not merely intellectual

1. This speaks of personal knowledge, experiential understanding, and a lived acquaintance with truth.
2. Salvation itself is described as knowing God.

John 17:3

³ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

C. The object of knowledge — “the truth”

“...ye shall know the truth”

1. “Truth” here is not abstract — that is, it’s not philosophical speculation, or human reasoning, or cultural consensus. “Truth” is revealed by God — and ultimately centered in Christ.

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, **I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**

2. Truth is not merely something Christ teaches — it is something He is.

D. There is a connection between the Word and the truth

1. Notice the progression: continue in My Word and you will know the truth. This shows the Word of Christ is the means by which truth is known.
2. Truth is not discovered apart from Scripture — it is revealed through it.

Psalm 119:160

¹⁶⁰ Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

E. The nature of this knowledge

1. A saving knowledge

This is the truth about sin, righteousness, judgment, and Christ as Saviour.

John 1:12

¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name:

2. A sanctifying knowledge

This knowledge continues to shape the believer's life.

John 17:17

¹⁷ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

3. A clarifying knowledge

The one who abides in Christ's Word is not left in the confusion and deception of the world. He comes to discern truth from error; see clearly what is right; and understand reality as God defines it.

F. The danger of superficial knowledge

There are many today who know Bible knowledge; who understand Christian concepts; who can discuss doctrine.

But they do not truly know the truth. Why? Because they do not continue in the Word, nor submit to the Word, nor abide in the Word.

IV. A SANCTIFYING LIBERTY (v. 32B)

A. The outcome of knowing the truth

"...and the truth shall make you free"

This is not theoretical truth — it is liberating truth.

B. The meaning of "make you free" (ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς)

The term carries the idea of being set at liberty; released from bondage; or delivered from slavery.

The question is: "Free from what?" The rest of the passage answers this question.

C. The context — freedom from sin (vv. 33-34)

The bondage Christ speaks of is the bondage of sin.

D. The nature of this bondage

1. The power of sin

Sin is not just something a man does — it is something that rules him.

2. The practice of sin

Jesus says, “committeth sin” — a continual pattern.

3. The penalty of sin

Sin not only enslaves — it condemns.

E. The source of true liberty — “the truth” (v. 36)

The truth that frees is not abstract — it is the truth revealed in Christ.

F. The nature of this freedom

1. Freedom from sin’s rule (Rom. 6:14)

2. Freedom to obey God (Rom. 6:18)

3. Freedom of a new relationship (v. 35)

G. The connection to discipleship

1. True discipleship is not a life of restriction without purpose or a life of burden without benefit. It is the pathway to true liberty.

2. The world says, “Follow yourself and be free.”

Christ says, "Follow Me — and I will make you free.

Conclusion:

In these verses, the Lord Jesus has shown us what marks a true disciple:

- A Settled Abiding — continuing in His Word
- A Sure Identity — revealed as His disciple indeed
- A Saving Knowledge — knowing the truth
- A Sanctifying Liberty — being made free

And all of it begins with, "If ye continue in my Word..."

The question is: Are you continuing in His Word? If there is no continuance, then there is no evidence of true discipleship.

The One who calls us to continue is the One who is the Truth. The One who commands us to abide is the One who sets men free.

And He still calls today — not just to begin, but to abide, to follow, and to remain in Him.

So let every one of us ask honestly before God:

Am I truly His disciple indeed?