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To Follow Jesus

When Jesus tells us we must come to him, believe him, and follow him, he speaks first and always as the Son of the Father. And I mean this in the active sense—*as an obedient Son*—not merely as one who claims sonship because he is a son, and so an heir. He is the Son of the Father who obeys the Father, as the Son who came expressly and only to do the will of the Father, as the messenger whose delight is to do the will of him that sent him.

At the same moment Jesus says, "Follow me," he is following the Father. His face is set homeward. He will have us follow him because he is bent on the will of the Father.

It is nothing to think of him merely as the Son, except as we believe in him—and that implies action. To believe in him is to do as he does, to follow him where he goes. We must believe in him practically—altogether practically, as he believed in his Father. Our belief must not be in an impersonal "deity" concerning whom we have to hold certain views, but in one whom we have to follow out of the body of this death into life eternal. To follow him is not to take him in any way theoretically, to hold this or that theory or opinion about why he died, or wherein lay his atonement. Such things can be revealed only to those who follow him in his active being and the principle of his life—those who do as he did, lived as he lived. There is no other way to follow him.

He is all for the Father. We must be all for the Father, too, otherwise we are not following him. To follow him is to be learning of him, to think his thoughts, to use his judgments, to see things as he sees them, to feel things as he feels them, to be of the same heart, soul, and mind, as he is—that we also may be of the same mind with his Father.

This is what it is to deny self and follow after him. Nothing less is to be his disciple—even if it be working miracles and casting out devils. Busy from morning to night doing great things for him on any other grounds, we will only earn the reception, "I never knew you."

When Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you," he does not mean a yoke that he would lay upon our shoulders. It is his own yoke he tells us to take and to learn of him. It is the yoke he is himself carrying, the yoke his perfect Father gave him to carry. The will of the Father is the yoke he would have us take and bear also with him. It is of this yoke that he says, "It is easy," of this burden, "It is light." He is not saying, "The yoke I lay upon you is easy, the burden light." What he says is, "The yoke I carry is easy, the burden on my shoulders is light." With the Garden of Gethsemane before him, with the hour and the power of darkness waiting for him, he declares his yoke easy, his burden light.

There is no magnifying of himself. He first denies himself, and takes up his cross—then tells us to do the same. The Father magnifies the Son, not the Son himself. The Son magnifies the Father.

The Cunning Self Will Deceive Us if It Can

We must be jealous for God against ourselves and look keenly to the cunning and deceitful self—ever cunning and deceitful until it is informed of God—until it is thoroughly and utterly denied. The self will attempt to have its way with us until God is to it also All-in-all—until we have left it quite empty of our will and our regard, and God has come into it, and made it—not a shrine, but a gateway for himself.

Until then, the self's very denials, its very turning from things dear to it for the sake of Christ, will tend to foster self-regard, and generate in it a yet deeper self-worship. While self is not denied, only thwarted, we may, through satisfaction with conquered difficulty and supposed victory, minister yet more to its self-gratulation.

The self, when it finds it cannot have honor because of its gifts, because of the love lavished upon it, because of its conquests, and the "golden opinions bought from all sorts of people," will please itself with the thought of its abnegations, of its unselfishness, of its devotion to God, of its forsaking for his sake.

It may not call itself a saint, but it will soon feel itself one, a superior Christian, looking down upon the foolish world and it

s ways, walking on "high above" the crowded byways of "average" Christians—all the time dreaming a dream of utter folly, worshiping itself with all the more concentration that it thinks it had yielded the praises of the world and dismissed the regard of others; even the are no longer necessary to its assurance of its own worth and merits!

In a thousand ways self will delude itself, in a thousand ways befool its own slavish being. Christ sought not his own, sought not anything but the will of his Father. We have to grow diamond-clear, true as the white light of the morning.

Hopeless task!—were it not that he offers to come himself and dwell with us.

Take Up Your Cross

I have wondered whether the admonition, "take up his cross," was a phrase in use at the time. When the Lord first used it he had not yet told his disciples that he would be crucified. I can hardly believe this form of execution such a common thing that the figure of bearing the cross had come into ordinary speech.

As the Lord's idea was new to people, so too I think was the image in which he embodied it, I grant that it might, being such a hateful thing in the eyes of the Jews, have come to represent the worst misery of a human being. But would they be ready to use as a figure a fact which so sorely manifested their slavery under Rome? I hardly think so. Certainly it had not come to represent the thing he was now teaching, that self-abnegation which he had only recently brought to light in his teaching—no, hardly to the light yet—only the twilight. And nothing less, it seems to me, can have suggested the terrible symbol.

But we must note that, although the idea of the denial of self is an entire and absolute one, yet the thing has to be done daily. We must keep on denying self.

It is a deeper and harder thing than any one-time effort of the most herculean will may finally bring about. For indeed the will itself if not pure, is not free, until the self is absolutely denied. It takes long for the water of the life that flows from the well within us to permeate every outlying portion of our spiritual frame, subduing everything to itself, making it all of the one kind, until at last, reaching the outermost folds of our personality, it casts out disease, our bodies by indwelling righteousness are redeemed, and the creation delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Every day until then we have to take up our cross; every hour we must see that we are carrying it. A birthright may be lost for a mess of pottage, and what Satan calls a trifle must be a thing of eternal significance.

Trying to Find Some Comfortable Middle Ground

Is there not many a Christian who, having begun to deny himself, yet spends much strength in the vain, foolish, and evil endeavor to accommodate matters between Christ and the dear self? He seeks to save that which by such a tactic he must certainly lose! But in how different a way from that in which the Master would have him lose it.

It is one thing to have the loved self devoured of hell in hate and horror and disappointment, but another to yield it to a conscious possession by the loving God himself, who will raise it then first and only to its true individuality, freedom, and life. With its cause within it, then, indeed, it shall be saved! How then should it but live?

Here is the promise to those who will leave all and follow him: "Whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake, the same shall save and find it."

What speech of men or angels will serve to shadow the dimly glorious hope! To lose ourselves in the salvation of God's heart! To be no longer any care to ourselves, but to know that God is taking the most divine care of us, his own! To feel and to be just a resting place for the divine love—a branch of the tree of life for the dove to alight upon and fold its wings! To be an open air of love, a thoroughfare for the thoughts of God and all holy creatures! To know one's self by the reflex action of endless brotherly presence—yearning after nothing from any other, but ever pouring out love by the natural motion of the Spirit! To revel in the hundredfold of everything good we may have had to leave for his sake—above all, in the unsought love of those who love us as we love them—circling us round, bathing us in bliss—never reached after, ever received, ever welcomed, altogether and divinely precious! To know that God and we mean the same thing, that we are in on the secret, the child's secret existence, that we are pleasing in the eyes and to the heart of the Father! To love nestling at his knee, climbing to his bosom, blessed in the mere and simple being which is one with God, and is the outgoing of his will, justifying the being by the very facts of the being, by its awareness of itself as bliss! What a self is this to receive again from him for that which we left, forsook, refused!

We left it in paltry, low, mean. He took up the poor cinder of a consciousness, carried it back to the workshop of his Spirit, made it a true thing, radiant, clear, fit for eternal dwelling and indwelling, and restores it to our having and holding for ever!

The Imperfection of Symbols

All high things can be spoken only in figures. Yet these figures, having to do with matters too high for them, cannot fit intellectually. They can be interpreted truly, understood aright, only by such as have the spiritual fact they are trying to convey already dwelling in themselves.

When we speak of a man and his soul, we imply a self and another self interacting with each other. But we cannot divide ourselves so; the figure suits but imperfectly.

It was never the design of the Lord to explain things to our understanding, nor would that in the least have helped our necessity. What we require is a means, a word, whereby to think with ourselves of high things. That is what a true figure will always be to us, for a figure may be true while still far from perfect.

But the imperfections of the Lord's figures cannot lie in excess. Be sure that, in dealing with any truth, its symbol, however high, must come short of the glorious meaning it is intended to hold.

It is the low ignorance of an unspiritual nature that would interpret the Lord's meaning as less than his symbols. The true soul sees, or will come to see, that his words, his figures will always represent more than they are able to present. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the heavenly things higher than the earthly signs of them, though they may be as good as signs ever may be.

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