

CHAPTER 8: OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

8.1 DISCIPLESHIP

8.1.1 – “Disciples of Christ are called to obedience.” Does obedience compel you? Is this a word that still means what it used to mean? Does God want obedience without questioning or a more dialogical, heart-felt relationship? Isn't commitment a better word than obedience, commitment to the relationship of learning, growing and deepening as a disciple of Jesus?

There is a paradox in giving ourselves totally (obedience) and discovering a freedom in such self-giving. What do you think? What is the relationship between committed service and freedom? In his “The Freedom of a Christian” The Reformer Martin Luther writes of the paradox of a Christian who is both a “slave and servant of all” because they love, but also are totally “free” from all because they are bound by no human “have-tos” or “shoulds” other than the authenticity of love as the only worthy motive for service.

8.1.2 – We are to bring Christ's “healing presence” and his “peace” to the world. Does this express your understanding of your purpose in the world as a disciple of Christ? To what extent is the believing community an important factor in your discipleship?

8.1.3 – This section addresses the reality of struggle in the spiritual life. Is this true to you? How would you express your struggle? What is the relationship between struggle, doubt and growth in the spiritual life?

8.1.4 – This section is on prayer. “Prayer is openness to the presence of God... prayer is the focussing of our lives towards God.” Is this meaningful to you? Does it explain prayer for you? Prayer is with words or the absence of words. Have you ever thought of prayer as happening in you even when you're not verbalizing anything? When you weep or carry distress for the welfare of another or when you feel joy at their well-being or success, is that a kind of prayer of lament, supplication or gratitude and praise? If we think of our lament or praise as a prayer does it make a difference for us?

8.1.5 – This is on the scriptures and their importance for the life of a disciple. But unless scripture is interpreted and within a trusted community, can it also become a tool for harm toward others? Think about slavery, racism, misogyny and homophobia all backed by very particular readings and interpretations of scripture over the centuries.

8.1.6 – Sunday is referred to as “the weekly festival of the Resurrection.” It is also referred to as a day for worship, for rest, and for “enjoyment of God's world.” What do you think? Is the “sabbath” about a day or sacred time that may be set aside on any day? How important is Sabbath time for you?

8.2 – THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

8.2.1 – Christian family is a biological reality and a spiritual reality. Is the church a family for you?

8.2.2 – “God's purpose for us can be realized in both single and married life.” The aim of this section seems to be to affirm singleness as equally a full life as marriage. This is important as our society seems to privilege people paired up, although this is changing in North America anyhow, and for a younger generation.

8.2.3 – Christian marriage is defined as a commitment of two people, male and female, to love and support one another faithfully for life. Adultery undermines marriage and is linked to disloyalty. Is loyalty the best word here, or is “trust” a better word?

Do we need to name gender at all? Isn't the commitment of two people adequate since we are coming to understand today that gender is fluid and on a spectrum as is sexuality? The philosopher Judith Butler says that gender is a “performance”. What she means is that how we live out our gender is completely learned. Body parts and biology have nothing to do with how we express ourselves as gendered beings. We learn that through society and our environment. We learn how to be “masculine” or “feminine” and we judge those whose expression doesn't match their biology as we have learned it. What do you think?

The joy of marriage includes sexual union, which also provides mutual joy, comfort and the means of creating new life. This definition of marriage clearly wants to emphasize many qualitative values for marriage beyond the production of children. Do you think this statement is good? Is it adequate? Is marriage legitimate between male and female only? Why not two persons no matter their gender?

8.2.4 – This section focusses on the duties of parents toward their children. Parents are “mediators of God's love and discipline.” What is God's discipline? Is discipline a good word today? The importance of raising children within a spiritual community is also emphasized.

8.2.5 – This section focusses on the challenges of married life. Forgiveness is important, but also, the recognition of the fact that sometimes forgiveness is not enough. In some cases, separation and divorce are being suggested as better alternatives than continuing conflict that forgiveness cannot overcome. The reality of divorce also raises the bar on expectations for marriage. People deserve more from their partners even if they/we need to learn how to live together and enjoy one another. What do you think? Should we settle for less just to stay together?

8.2.6 – This section focusses on the church as a family supporting all members through whatever they are going through and celebrating each other's joys. How real is this of your church experience? Should we expect more from church or just live and let live?