

Volume

4

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING

**By GbileAkanni, adapted by
Paul Jinadu**

Understanding the
Conditions for
Discipleship

Contents

Introduction.....	3
What is self?	4
Human Nature (self) is our inheritance.....	4
Life in the Flesh: The enemy of Godliness	5
The works, activities and manifestations of the human nature	6
God's Judgment on the Human Nature.....	8
The Human Versus the Spiritual	8
Personal Assessment Questions	11

Introduction

Terms for Discipleship

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me”, (Mt 16:24).

- a) Deny himself
- b) Take up his cross
- c) Follow Me

The terms of discipleship are the same whether in the new or the old testament.

i) Abraham faced the same terms in Gen 12:1-3. The future is never too clear when disciples decide to follow their Master. It is always unconditional surrender in faith.

ii) Moses in Heb 11:24-27. What was the implication of his declaration in v.24: “I am not the son of Pharaoh’s daughter”. I do not belong to that class any more. I must respond to the heavenly call.

How does this fit into the general terms for discipleship? (vs 25-27). What are the challenges on your own life? Are you able to stand up to peer pressure and parental dreams on your life, and let them know what you are meant to be for God?

iii) Look at the Levites in Exo 32:26-29.

They were fulfilling conditions for discipleship just like we find in Lk 14:26.

Look at Elisha in 1Kgs 19:19-21, which also compares well with Lk 9:57-62. We see what Elisha abandoned, and what he chose to become in order to be a vessel for God.

Let Him Deny Himself

You may have prayerfully and diligently desired a victorious and vibrant life in the Spirit. Yet all are still a distant dream. Perhaps you have claimed God's promises and made numerous faith confessions, still no tangible and consistent spiritual breakthrough. By God's grace through this study we will discover self, the hidden cause of all our problems, and find ways to live the victorious life.

1. What is self?

(Eph 4:22; Col 3:9; Gal 5:16; Rom 8:7)

The self is just being oneself – living, thinking, acting and reacting as a normal human being. Some Bible translations refer to it as the Flesh, Old man, Carnal nature, Lower nature, Human nature, Sinful nature, Old sinful life.

2. Human Nature (self) is our inheritance.

(Job 15:14; Ps 58:3; Jn 3:6; Ps 51:5; Rom 8:8; 1Pet 1:18)

We inherited it at birth. In fact it is unnatural for a man, born of human parents not to commit sin (Jn 3:5) “..and they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). 1Pet 1:18 also speaks of the human nature as “empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers”

Fasting, giving, praying, teaching, preaching notwithstanding, ‘that which is born of the flesh is flesh’, and they that are of the flesh cannot please God. Even though Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisee who fasted at least twice a week, prayed at least three time a day, gave alms and was a teacher of scriptures, Jesus still

pointed out that he was being hindered from seeing or touching anything of the kingdom of God because of his lower nature.

Everybody has the human nature in him, not because of what he does or does not do, but because of who he is: **he is born of the flesh.**

3. Life in the Flesh: The enemy of Godliness

a) What does it mean to be in the flesh? Rom 8:5-8,

“And so a man becomes an enemy of God when his mind is controlled by human nature, for he does not obey God’s law and in fact he cannot obey it. Those who obey their human nature cannot please God”.

So a man is said to be living in the flesh not just when he commits sins but when he allows his mind and subsequent actions to be led or controlled by the human nature, the old fallen nature of man.

b) How does God view the activities of the flesh?

Acts 9:1,5; Mt 16:13-17, 21-23. Peter looked no less than Satan because he was thinking as natural men think, and not as God thinks. A man becomes an enemy of God whenever he allows his human nature to direct him. It is apparent in the above scriptures that God abhors the flesh no matter the disguise under which it appears. It may appear as blatant sins of disobedience or in the display of self-life or human wisdom, no matter in whom it manifests.

4. The works, activities and manifestations of the human nature. (Gal 5:19-21; Rom 8:7-8; Eph 4:22,25-29,31; Eph 5:3-6; Col 3:5-9)

The works of the flesh are quite clear.

“What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy and indecent actions, in worship of idols, and witchcraft. People become enemies; they fight, become jealous, angry and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies and do other things like these...”

Whether in the church, in the ministry or in the market, in prayer meetings or political parties, on the pulpit or the lecture hall, in the choir or fellowship executive meetings, what the human nature does is quite obvious. It can easily be known, and wherever it appears we know who is responsible – the old man. So whenever you notice any manifestation of the human nature in you, do not explain it away, but rather acknowledge that it is the flesh, the old Adamic nature at work.

“It shows itself in”

This means that if one is worshipping idols and another is fuming with anger and quarrelling in the deacons’ meeting, it is still the same nature at work in all of them. You do not need to see all its manifestations in your life before you know it’s there.

Look over these scriptures again, and then look into your life. Remember that the flesh does not only manifest itself in negative, detestable things, but in seemingly good things as well. Behind every self-will, self-identity and self-defence tendencies in your

life is Mr Self, the human nature. When you seek self-praise, when you fight against being taken for granted, when Mr 'I' in you does not want to receive any damage, it is all indicative of the flesh alive and working in you.

Self is a very diverse and deceptive fellow. When you are highly secretive and too protective of your own things; when you quarrel with someone and you exonerate yourself (even if you are justified), it means Mr Self is very much around.

Self can manifest in false humility (inverted pride), depression, and over-excitement. Self loves achievement, acquisition, pleasures, fame and honour, and always seeks personal attention. Self makes you feel ashamed when you meet your friends unprepared. Self does not want to be criticized or embarrassed or disgraced. It does not want any discomfort or lack. It does not want to make mistakes, not because he fears God, but because of himself. He thinks of what would become of his integrity and honour. When you find it difficult to forgive, it is self.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin they began to defend themselves. They did not repent when God confronted them about it. Self will not apologise; it prefers to die than face shame.

Many prayers are not answered because it was flesh that prayed. Self always wants to impress, even on religious matters. It likes to present a good public image, but reverts to norm in private.

Self is behind the feeling of insecurity and the cause of strain in human relationship. Self always insists on his own way and rights.

5. God's Judgment on the Human Nature

Discussion Point

- a) *John 3:3, 5,6. Why did Jesus conclude like that?
Is it not possible for that which is born of the flesh to be managed along with the kingdom (new creation, spiritual) life? The answer is emphatically, "No".*
- b) *Rom 8:6-8 and Deut 21:18-21. What did you discover about your human nature? God seems to say with finality that the flesh is "a stubborn and rebellious son" that must be put to death.*
- c) *Life in the flesh is an impossible road to heaven (1Pet 1:18)*
- d) *Job 14:14; Gal 5:21; Rev 21:8; 1John 3:8. What is the end result of a life lived in the flesh? Plainly God's verdict on "Mr Flesh" is that it is corrupt and should die if you want to see God. So there is no need for you to pamper him, cage him or to want to improve upon him and still hope to please God.*

6. The Human Versus the Spiritual

Rom 7:7-25, 8:2; 1Cor 15:39-50; 2Cor 5:16,17; Gal 5:17.

What did you discover?

There are two levels of life and there is a sharp difference and an eternal disagreement between them. They are two separate lifestyles, which cannot be lived simultaneously. Flesh cannot inherit (experience) the kingdom life. That which is corrupt cannot inherit that which is incorruption. You can now see why God insists on the termination of self-life if the new creation life is to be truly experienced. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters". It is not possible to be controlled by the human nature and also by the Spirit of God at the same time.

Whatever action, ideas or wisdom is born of (originate from) the carnal mind, is corrupt in God's sight and can never be manifesting together with the new creation life at the same time. Self cannot be led by the Holy Spirit, and neither will he be used by the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Point

Discuss both lifestyles in each case, and the effect of the man (or men) that represents the natural life, or the spiritual.

- i) Adam and Jesus (1Cor 15:45-50; John 7:19-26)*
- ii) Cain and Abel (Gen 4:8-15)*
- iii) Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 21:8,9; Gal 4:28,29)*
- iv) Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37:8-36)*

Adam and his children persecuted Jesus, Cain persecuted and slaughtered Abel, Ishmael mocked and persecuted Isaac, and Joseph's brothers persecuted him. So also the natural life persecutes and seeks to destroy the spiritual life. However little part of your natural life you leave untouched will eventually destroy your spiritual life, no matter how long you spend building up your spiritual life.

Time to Pray

Before we proceed to look at God's remedy and a way of escape from the human nature, we need to pray. Humbly search out your heart and confront the presence of the old nature in you. Any indication of the presence of the old man must not be taken lightly at all.

As you approach the throne of grace the Lord is able to deal with the self-life when you hand it over to Him. To die to self does not

mean a man has to kill himself, but God has already made provision for us to live the victorious, spiritual life. May the Lord show you yourself now, in Jesus name.

Personal Assessment Questions

1. *In the light of this study on self, what specific aspects of the self-life have been rearing up themselves in your life?*
2. *What efforts have you made at dealing with them?*
3. *In your own assessment, would you claim a clear victory as yet?*
4. *In what areas has this 'Old Man' affected your life?*
 - a) *In your relationship with your wife (husband)? Give instances. Any solution yet?*
 - b) *In your ministry or career?*
5. *What is the yearning of your heart regarding these experiences? For what do you want us to stand with you in prayer before God?*