

What is Biblical Discipleship?

B. P. Harris

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Chapter One

The Great Commission

“...the commission to the apostles was this: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” **J.G. Bellett**

Our Saviour, in Matt. 28:19-20, commands his apostles to “ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen.” This is the first incidence, after our Lord’s resurrection, where He instructs His disciples concerning the importance of discipleship, and thus it would be important for us to consider this commission.

The first question that must be asked is, “What does our Lord mean by the phrase to *make disciples*?” It should be mentioned that in the King James Version the word is translated “teach” whereas in more modern translations as the NKJV and the NASB it is translated “make disciples.”

When one compares the phrase with other uses of the same Greek verb (Matt. 27:57NKJV; Acts 14:21NKJV), the better translation seems to be “make disciples”. For example, in Acts 14:21, if the verb is translated “taught” as in the KJV, then the verse is not telling us whether Paul and Barnabas were successful. The verse would be telling us they

“preached” and “taught” the Word, but we would not know whether anyone believed. This would be unusual, for Luke normally tells us the results of their preaching. If, however, it is translated, as in the NKJV, “made many disciples,” we know immediately that their preaching was successful. This is, of course, confirmed for us in Acts 20:4 where we find out there was a disciple from Derbe, named Gaius.

Another point in favour of “makes disciples” is that it makes more sense when considering the tense of the verb. The Greek verb is written in the aorist tense. In the Greek, the aorist tense indicates a punctiliar occurrence. This tense tells us the Lord is not necessarily referring to an ongoing process (as the present tense would imply), but to a punctiliar action by the apostles. Translating the verb as “teach” would indicate an ongoing process, whereas translating the verb as “make disciples” would indicate punctiliar action, and since the Holy Spirit utilized the aorist tense, “make disciples” would seem to be the better translation.

Consequently, if the Greek verb is better understood by the translation, “make disciples”, then one can see why this verse is greatly misunderstood when it is used to support discipleship programs.

The Lord is not telling His apostles to “disciple” other people. Discipleship involves an *ongoing process*, and if that is what the Holy Spirit was trying to convey, the present tense would have been the perfect way to express it. No, by using the aorist tense, the Holy Spirit is telling us that making

disciples is a one time occurrence. The phrase “make disciples” then, *means to lead someone to the Lord.*

An example of this would be when Andrew led his brother Peter to the Lord (Jn. 1: 40-42). By that action, Andrew was “making a disciple”. The Lord is not telling His apostles to disciple people in the Great Commission, *rather He is telling them to bring people unto Himself, so that He can disciple them* (cf. Jn. 4:1-3). And this leads us into another important point. To whom is the Lord directing the Great Commission?

It is very important to “rightly divide” the Word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Peter reveals this important biblical hermeneutic to us in Luke 12:41 - “Peter said, ‘Lord, are you addressing this parable to us or to everyone else as well?’”

Portions of Scripture must be understood within the context of the passage. In addition, it must also be understood that, while some portions might be applied to every believer in a “general” sense, some portions of Scripture were meant to “specifically” apply only to certain ones.

For example, Jn. 16:12-14 (KJV) is specifically spoken to the apostles and not to every believer.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.”

At the time our Lord spoke, all things had not been spoken to the apostles because they could not bear them, but assuredly that does not apply to believers today, for all things have been spoken to us. There is no more revelation for the Church. All things have been revealed to us in Scripture. But that had not yet occurred with the apostles, for the New Testament had not yet been written.

Nor does the promise “He will shew you things to come” apply to believers today. That was a specific promise made to the apostles. They were told the Holy Spirit would reveal future prophetic truths to them. We now have those truths recorded in Scripture (e.g. Matt. 24, I Cor. 15, I Thess. 4&5, The Book of Revelation, etc). The Church should not expect any further prophetic revelation except what is recorded in Scripture. And so, one sees that *this promise also was specifically given to the apostles, and not to every believer.*

Another example is Jn. 14:26, where Jesus promises the apostles “...He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Now obviously that cannot be applied to believers today because Jesus never spoke directly to us. We cannot have a memory recalled which was never a memory. We were never with the Lord by Galilee, or present at the Sermon of the Mount.

But who would deny that this verse can be applied to every believer in a “*general*” sense - that the Holy Spirit will lead his people into the truth of the Scripture and bring remembrance to our mind of certain verses we have read in the past. Or who can

deny that the Holy Spirit will guide His people into all truth and glorify Christ.

“Specifically” these promises were just given to the apostles. It was spoken to them and not to all believers, but obviously, if we keep this principle in mind, these promises can be applicable to all God’s children in a “general” sense.

In this same way, we should keep this principle in mind when considering the Great Commission. In a “general” sense this commission was given to every believer. *Specifically this commission was given only to the apostles.* While every believer has a “specific” commission to preach the gospel to all mankind (as we will see later in Lu. 24:33-53), the commission in Matthew is not such a commission. This commission was specifically given only to the Eleven.

I think we will see this demonstrated by realizing that the following two participles in the verse are written in the present tense. This is telling us that baptism and teaching are to simultaneously occur with the command of the main verb to “make disciples.”

In the Greek language, when relations of time were meant to be conveyed to the reader in regard to participles and the main verb, the following rules were “generally” observed. If antecedent time was meant to be conveyed in relation of the main verb then the participles would generally be in the aorist or perfect tense. If simultaneous time was meant to be conveyed, then the participle would be in the present tense, and if subsequent time was meant to be

conveyed, then usually, the participle would be in the future case. (See “A Manual of the Greek New Testament”, Dana and Mantey, Sec. 202, pg. 230).

In the verse before us, the participles “baptizing” and “teaching” are in the present tense, showing us that the baptism was to be done in a simultaneous manner following the belief and salvation of the believer (cf. Acts 8:29-38; 10:44-48).

The command of Christ in the Great Commission was not just to make disciples, but also, to baptize, and then to teach them. All three things were joined together into one command. We cannot divide these aspects and make them into three different and separate commands with three different subjects. The Greek syntax suggests otherwise.

Consequently, if one wishes to apply this Commission to him or herself, then such a one must realize they are not really fulfilling the Commission unless they are also the ones that baptize their new converts and the ones who then teach them. We cannot pick and choose which of the three aspects we desire to observe. We cannot say, for instance, “I will make new disciples, but I will let someone else baptize them.” If we do that, we cannot claim that we are obeying the Great Commission of Matthew 28.

Thus, if one believes that the Great Commission was intended for every believer then one must believe that every believer, men and women alike, are commanded to baptize and then doctrinally instruct their new converts. This, of course, is rarely done. In fact, it is interesting to note, it was not even done by Paul. It seems he rarely baptized those he

led to the Lord because, apparently, he didn't recognize the Great Commission as being applicable to himself. He was given a different Commission.

Paul clearly speaks of his commission when he tells us in I Cor. 1:17 that Christ "sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul was not commissioned to baptize, like the Eleven were commissioned, but was commissioned simply to preach the Gospel. Now, of course, this did not mean that he did not baptize or have others baptize, it just meant he did not recognize it as part of his Commission.

If the Great Commission was meant for every believer, then Paul would not declare to us that Christ had not sent him to baptize! By so doing, he would not be fully obeying the Commission of the Lord, for the Lord clearly sent out the ones in Matt. 28:19 to not only make disciples but also to baptize disciples! No, the Great Commission was specifically intended for the Eleven apostles and was not intended for all believers. It didn't even apply to the apostle Paul!

The Eleven were given specific promises and commissions that could only apply to them. *They had a unique standing within the Church because they laid the first foundation of the Church.* They were not only commissioned to make disciples of the nations, they were also commissioned to baptize the new disciples and they were also specifically commanded to teach the new disciples all the things they had "personally heard" Christ teach.

Who else could fulfill such a Commission? The apostle Paul could not. There were only a few

disciples who were with Christ during His entire ministry - not just in the public occasions, but also in those private occasions – that could teach those things they had heard Christ teach (see Acts 1:21-23). Remember, the Gospels had not yet been written.

The Eleven had a ministry that was unique. They were commissioned to “make disciples” through the preaching of the gospel, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and “teaching” them the things they had heard Christ teach. By fulfilling this Commission they would lay the first foundation of the Church.

Indeed, even unto eternity, the original apostles will have a unique standing, for who else will have their names written on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14)?

But let’s go on. If this line of thinking is wrong and the Commission was, indeed, given to every believer, then we would expect all would be called and gifted by God *to be teachers* (like the Eleven), so they could teach all things which Christ commanded them (which we now have recorded for us in the Gospels). Scripture, of course, says the opposite. It tells us all are not teachers (I Cor. 12:39). We must remember, God commands us to teach by gift, not by talent.

Secondly, if this commission was specifically given to every believer (which, obviously, includes men and women alike) then the sisters would be expected to baptize and teach doctrine to those whom they lead to the Lord.

As we demonstrated before, in the Greek

construction of the verse, the baptizing and teaching are to be done in a simultaneous manner with the making of disciples. The one who makes disciples is the same one who is to baptize and teach them.¹

¹ Some claim this is not true because they think Peter, in Acts 10:48, had the believers baptized by those who accompanied him from Joppa. It should be noted, however, that the infinitive is not in the active voice, but in the passive. If Peter was commanding those from Joppa to baptize the new believers, then the infinitive would have been in the active voice and the pronoun “them” would have been added after the infinitive to complete the thought. It would have then read, “And he commanded them to baptize them in the name of the Lord.” But the Holy Spirit did not use the active voice, nor did He put in an extra pronoun after the infinitive. No, Peter is simply commanding, “them”, meaning those “who heard the word” (vs. 44) to now be baptized, much in the same way that he commanded those at Pentecost to now repent and “be baptized” (cf. Acts 2:38). He is simply bidding, or commanding, the new believers, who had just believed the gospel, to now receive baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

It must be admitted that most commentators have not noticed these distinctions, and many believe those men from Joppa baptized the new converts. However, one who has noticed this distinction is R. C. H. Lenski in his Commentary on the New Testament, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1998) Acts, pg. 434-35.

He states the following, “...We should notice the passive, ‘that they be baptized,’ and that Peter does not say ‘to baptize them,’ active...It is this passive infinitive that prevents us from agreeing with those who say that Peter ordered the disciples from Joppa who had accompanied him to baptize these Gentiles and then cite I Cor. 1:16, and John 4:2 with the remark that the apostles considered it less their duty to baptize than to preach, and overlook the fact that this does not agree with Matt. 28:19, where Jesus puts baptizing and teaching (two participles) on the same plane...Peter first asked whether any one of them was able

Therefore, if this Commission was meant for every believer, then when a sister “makes a disciple,” the sister would then be commanded to baptize and teach them. But never do we have an example in Scripture where this occurred. Why? Because this Commission was not given to the sisters *since it was not given to every believer*, but was reserved for the Eleven and applied to every believer only in a “general,” limited, fashion.

Obviously, in a general sense, we are to all share the good news and thus “make disciples”, but in its primary and specific sense it was meant just for the Eleven. (We have our own commission to share the good news, as we will presently see.)

To apply the Commission in Matt. 28: 19-20 to every believer would be like applying the “commission,” that was specifically given to the apostle Peter in John 21: 15-17, to every believer. Obviously, this cannot be the case because every believer is not called to be a pastor or elder. We might apply it to every believer in a "general" sense - in that we should all seek to minister to each other in love - but obviously it would not apply it to every believer in a specific sense.

Now, if we recognize this in regard to the specific commission given to Peter in John 21, why can we not understand it in relation to the specific commission given to the Eleven in Matthew 28?

We all understand the commission in John 21

to offer valid objection, and none could. Then he called for water and baptized the Gentiles. A strange thing, indeed, if he had not done so with his own hands!

cannot apply to every believer because every believer is not gifted to be a “pastor/ teacher” (Eph. 4:11). In the same way, we should understand that the Commission in Matthew 28 cannot apply to every believer because every believer is not given the “gift of teaching” (I Cor. 12:28-29).

When we apply this Commission to every believer, we confuse the gifts of God, and ultimately cause people to act, not according to gift, but according to natural talent and/or personal desire, and God does not desire us to operate apart from the spiritual gifts He has given us.

Let us remember we are all brethren and each of us has a specific gift given for the edification of the assembly. The original Apostles were given specific gifts to fulfill *a specific ministry within the Church that was never to be repeated* (cf. Acts 1:17, 25). They were given specific instructions and specific commissions that the Lord never intended for every believer. We must ever remember this if we would rightly divide the Word of God.

Nevertheless, as we mentioned before, the Lord has given every believer a “Specific Commission.” It is given to us in Luke 24: 33-53 - *it is our own “Great Commission,” if you will!*

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the Eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things *were done* in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the

midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his* hands and *his* feet.

And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me.

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Every believer, in this passage, is given their own Commission to preach the gospel because they were all witnesses of Christ's death, burial, and

resurrection. Notice, though, that it does not include *the direct command to also baptize and teach*. This is the “Great Commission” for the entire Church. This is the Commission for every believer - brothers and sisters alike.

In Matthew 28: 16-20, Jesus is privately speaking to *the Eleven* in Galilee, but in Luke 24: 33-53 Jesus is speaking, not just to the Eleven, but also to *those that were with them* (vs.33). And, of course, from the information in Acts 1: 12-15, we learn that the total of that gathering, men and women included, consisted of about 120 souls, who subsequently formed the very first church in Jerusalem.

In Matthew - He is in Galilee, but in Luke - He is in Jerusalem. The commission in Luke, which was given to every believer, occurred at a separate time and place and should not be confused with the private commission given to the Eleven in Matthew.

Because of the commission in Luke, we should realize that all believers (brothers and sisters alike) are called *to preach the Gospel*, but they (brothers and sisters alike) are not all “commissioned” *to baptize and to teach*. Why? - Because the commission in Matthew was a very specific commission given to the Eleven - not to every believer - while the commission in Luke was given to every believer.

Please do not misunderstand the point that is being made. We are not saying that the Church is not responsible to baptize or to teach. We should baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our

Lords commands should be taught to new disciples. She accomplishes this through the spiritual gifts bestowed upon her by the Holy Spirit. The brothers who are given the “gift of teaching” have a responsibility to teach these things within the assembly. The assembly does this because she is told to give heed to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42; I Cor. 4:16, 17; I Cor. 11:1-2; Phil. 3:17, 18; Heb. 2:1-4; II Pet. 3:2).

The apostles showed us how to baptize a new believer, and we should give heed to their injunction. They recorded for us the commands of Christ. They should be taught by those who have the gift of teaching. She applies these verses in a general sense by comparing Scripture with Scripture. This is the important point we must keep in mind.

The same would apply on the missionary front. Not all are called of God to be evangelists or missionaries,² but for those who are called and so

²It should be remembered that distinction of priesthood has never been an assembly principle. There is no distinction between clergy and laity in Scripture. We are all priests to God in the fullest sense. However, it should also be remembered that while distinction of priesthood has never been an assembly principle, distinction of gifts has always been. F. Roy Coad once succinctly said: “In principle, the ideal, which characterises brethren, substitutes for the distinction between ‘clergy’ and ‘laity,’ or between ‘the ministry’ and ‘the people,’ an entirely different distinction, based upon function. It is where this distinction is not grasped, and a vague idea that all men can do the same job takes its place, that abuses arise. The new distinction does not deny that some men are called to full-time preaching, evangelism, teaching or pastoral work...No difference of status between individuals, [however], is involved

gifted, they should go forth like the apostles, preaching the gospel and making many disciples, baptizing and teaching them the things of the Word. We are not questioning the carrying forth of the Commission by the Church; we are only questioning its application to every believer.

The reason we are giving so much emphasis to this point, is because many modern day discipleship programs make some believers *feel guilty if they do not enroll in a discipleship program*. They are told if they do not do so, then they are not obeying the Great Commission of Matt. 28. They are told they are grieving the Holy Spirit and that they are displeasing the Lord. *Fear, intimidation and guilt are used, in many cases, to elicit their commitment*. (The author has personally witnessed this many times.)

Since, however, Matt. 28:19-20 is not a command to every believer, *these dear saints are not disobeying the Lord!* Nor do they need to fear, or feel guilty that they are displeasing the Lord! And what is ironic is that many times the very ones who institute such programs do not obey the very Commission they are making others feel guilty for not obeying.

They castigate the saints for not obeying the Great Commission, while they themselves are not obeying the Great Commission. In what way you may ask? – Because they are not going into all the world. Many times the very men, who chastise the saints, live and die in the same country, province, and state or, in some cases, in the very same city of their birth.

in this distinction.” (A History of the Brethren Movement, F. Roy Coad, The Paternoster Press, 1968, pg. 271)

If they believe the Great Commission is to every believer, then they are disobeying the Lord if they do not “Go into all the world!” By their own judgment they must be displeasing to the Lord, because they are not fully following the precept.

The truth of the matter, however, is they are not disobeying the precept because the precept was never given to them. *The Lord never commanded every believer to go into all the world.* He commanded the apostles to do so.³ The Church, or if you will, the believers in the Church have the freedom *to go or not to go* as they are led by God. The apostles did not have that freedom. They were commanded to go! They did not have to pray to the Lord to find out if He wanted them to stay or to go. They knew it was the will of God for them all to

³ Some may say that this is not a command. The word “go” is actually a participle and would be better translated “having gone”. This is true. It is a participle, and it is in the aorist tense. And as was said above, when an aorist participle is used with the main verb it generally assumes an antecedent action. The command of the main verb to “make disciples of all nations” was to be done after they had already gone! So while it is true that this word is not in the imperative mood (as the English suggests) it still was understood as a command, incumbent on the apostles, to go out into the world among the gentiles so that they could begin fulfilling their Commission. Obviously, if they did not go into all the world, they could not obey the command to “make disciples of all nations.” It must be remembered, that earlier, they were told not to go to the nations (gentiles), but only to the house of Israel (Matt. 10: 5-6). Here, the Lord changes that command and tells them they are now to go to the nations, even to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

eventually go!

Consequently, the saints are not displeasing the Lord because they are not enrolling in a discipleship program. The Lord never gave them this commission. It is wrong to make them feel guilty. Our commission - given to every believer - is to be a witness for Christ wherever we might find ourselves.

The Commission in Matt. 28 was given to the apostles and they were the ones who were expected to go into all the world. And as we know, they obeyed the Commission, (some died in far distant lands), and made disciples of all nations, and baptized them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and taught them to observe the commands of Christ our Saviour.

So, in conclusion, it should be understood that Matthew 28: 19-20 does not teach discipleship as is commonly taught today, and while the Commission might be applied to every believer in a “general” sense, it is not a “specific” Commission given to every believer. Luke 24:33-53 is the specific Commission given to every believer.

Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, not even the Eleven were given a Commission *to disciple* believers, as is understood today, but they were given a Commission to “make disciples.” Discipling others was reserved to one Person only and that was the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is to that point we would like now to turn our attention.

Chapter Two

What is Discipleship?

In order to have discipleship there needs to be three things. First of all, there obviously needs to be a Rabbi or Master; secondly, there needs to be a disciple or learner, and lastly, there needs to be a course of instruction. Without all of these three things one does not have a biblical discipleship.

Luke 6:40 KJV tells us,

“The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”

The word “perfect” should be understood as “fully trained,” or “perfectly trained” as seen in the NASB and the NKJV. The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is “fully trained” shall be as his master.

The master fully trains his disciple. There is a course of instruction that, in the end, will find the disciple fully trained. However, two things need to be realized, as is shown in this verse.

First, the one doing the discipling, (according to the biblical model), *is known as the master or Rabbi.*

Second, the course of instruction, does not just entail the impartation of knowledge or facts, but refers to the *impartation of the character and life of the master.* When the disciple is fully trained he will have the character of the master. He “...shall be as

his master”, as Luke tells us.

The disciple is more than just a student or pupil; he is what used to be called in the crafts – an apprentice. Discipleship entails more than just a student/teacher relationship; it entails an apprentice/master relationship.

So, if one wants to biblically “disciple” another believer, he, *by biblical definition*, is that *disciple’s master*. He is responsible to impart not just knowledge to his disciple but also his character, and when that disciple is fully trained he will be like his master, or discipler. This is biblical discipleship!

A Christian must realize that if he or she desires to disciple someone, according to the biblical model, he or she, by biblical definition, must be their “master” or “Rabbi”. *Otherwise, one is making up a different model not found in Scripture*. However, the question that must be asked, “Is the Christian ever commanded to do this”? The answer, I think we will see, is no!

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:8 KJV tells his disciples

“But be ye not called Rabbi; for One is your Master, *even Christ*; and all ye are brethren”.

The Lord in this verse makes a startling statement. He tells His disciples that unlike the other discipleship programs of their time, they would never graduate!

To fully understand this startling statement we have to understand that at the time the Lord spoke

these words, it was the common expectation that once a disciple was fully trained, once a disciple graduated, so to speak, such a one would then become a Rabbi or Discipuler himself. There was a long history of disciples and Rabbis extending back, some believe, even to the time of Ezra. Disciples would graduate and become the Rabbis of the next generation. The apostles would have been aware of this, and most assuredly would have known some of the great Rabbis like Hillel, Simon, or Gamaliel. All these great men were once disciples themselves, but, when they graduated they themselves became Rabbis, and were thus expected to raise up their own disciples and repeat the process.

But our Lord is telling his disciples that such would not be the case for them. They would not become Rabbis. Why? – Because their training would never end. They would never be fully trained in this lifetime, and as such would remain brethren, or fellow disciples.

Sanctification is a life time process. We only become fully or perfectly trained when we are glorified and meet the Lord face to face. And because the apostles would never be fully trained in their own lifetime or become *fully conformed to their Master's image*, they would never graduate. *They could not become Rabbis or Masters themselves.* They would be disciples their whole life.

In understanding this truth, how precious it is to read of Mnason in Acts 21:16 who was called an “old disciple,” (not meaning he was an old man, although he most probably was), but meaning that he

had been a disciple for a long, long time. During our time of pilgrimage on this earth, we never graduate from our Lord's school of discipleship. And since we will never end our instruction in this lifetime, and become "like our Master" as Luke tells us, we will never be qualified to be our own Rabbi or Disciplex. The Lord's standard to be a Disciplex or Rabbi is high. The standard is none other than Himself. Who can measure up?

Consequently, how can some institute discipleship programs for believers, putting disciples through a program for two or three years, and then expect them to become a Disciplex or Rabbi themselves who are then expected to disciple others? *This is not true biblical discipleship!* True biblical discipleship takes a whole lifetime. That is why the Lord made a promise to his disciples in Matthew 28:20, "and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen." They were to go and make disciples to Jesus, and He, Himself, would not only be with them, to continue to disciple them, but He also would be with the new disciples, to disciple them unto the end of the age.

Our Lord never abrogated the position of Rabbi and Master. He never abrogated the responsibility of discipleship. He continues to disciple all who come to Him with great love and patience, and (by the discipline of the Holy Spirit) imparts to them His own life and character. Why would we want to be discipled by anyone else? And why would we *presume* to usurp His place as Disciplex and disciple other believers?

Perhaps, it is because the Evangelical Christian still carries much baggage from the *roots of the Roman Catholic Church*. The concept of “vicar” and “hierarchy” still pervades the mentality of many believers, not in the sense of “pope,” but in the sense that God *completely relegates* His work to a representative of Himself. Remember, by biblical definition, the one who disciples someone, becomes that disciple’s Master or Rabbi. Our Lord never relegates his authority of Rabbi or Master to anyone else, and, as such, Jesus forbids the formation of new discipleship programs. His own discipleship program has never ended.

But let us now turn our attention to the root of this thinking by looking at the history of all the discipleship programs that have, unfortunately, been instituted by man in the many centuries of Church History.

Chapter Three

The History of the Discipleship Movement within the Church

When one begins to trace the history of discipleship programs within the Church one invariably is led back to the Roman Catholic Church. Many Christians do not realize that there is still much within the Evangelical circle that can still be traced to the Roman Catholic Church. We will look at this root a little later, but it can be traced back even further than that. It can be traced back to the early church, for that is when it began.

Paul gives a warning to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:30, that after his departure “from among their own selves” men would arise...“to *draw away disciples after themselves.*” Paul was warning them that a false discipleship mentality would be instituted by some of their own in the future. But this was not surprising to Paul, because all through his ministry he was struggling against such a mentality.

We are told by Scripture that when Paul was saved, he was advancing in Judaism way above his contemporaries:

“And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” Gal. 1:14

And in Philippians 3:5, Paul says that he was,

“...circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law a Pharisee.”

And finally, in Acts 22:3, Paul tells us he studied under the great Rabbi Gamaliel:

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.”

Paul was disciplined by Rabbi Gamaliel, and, as was common, he was expected to become a Rabbi himself and raise up his own disciples.

Paul would have been one of the great Rabbis of the first century. In fact, by the time he went to Damascus we are told in Acts 9:25 NASB that “his disciples” took him and let him down in a basket through the wall in order to escape capture. Apparently, Rabbi Saul, as he would have been known then, had already raised up some disciples around himself. Apparently, some of the men who accompanied him to Damascus (Acts 9:7) were some of his “own” disciples. But something changed his life. Something caused him to cast away all his ambition and fame. On the road to Damascus he met a Rabbi much greater than Rabbi Gamaliel. He met Rabbi Yeshua, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul, thinking he was finished with his education, all of a

sudden realized that he was just beginning anew with a new Rabbi who would be his Master for the rest of his life.

It is interesting to note, that after Paul left Damascus and was brought to the apostles in Jerusalem, we never hear of Paul's disciples anymore. Most assuredly the apostles would have told Paul of the Lord's command, "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher and you are all brothers", and Paul from that day determined never to raise up disciples unto himself anymore. He determined to *not "disciple" another human being, but instead he determined to "make disciples"* unto his new Rabbi – the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are told that whatever things were gain to him in his former manner of life of Pharisaical discipleship he counted as loss, for he had a new Rabbi.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ." Phil. 3:7-8 KJV

Paul was completely transformed, but that old manner of life came back *from others* to afflict Paul many times. Many brethren from the church of Jerusalem refused to give up their Rabbinical system of discipleship and continued to attempt to raise up disciples unto themselves. You ask how could such men do so and ignore the clear command of Christ. The answer is the same then as it is today.

Today, good men ignore the clear command of Christ, and attempt to set up discipleship schools, albeit they will not call themselves Rabbi or Master, yet the fact remains as was stated before, if you disciple someone you are by biblical definition their Master. (However, even though they may not call themselves Master or Rabbi, it is interesting that many will still call those that they teach “*my disciples*,” thus betraying their unbiblical mentality). How unfortunate it is that the clear command of Scripture is misused today as it was then. But let us return back to the brethren from Jerusalem.

These were the same brethren that dogged Paul’s every step. They were the brethren in question in the Galatian churches who attempted to draw away the disciples after themselves, (as Paul would later warn the Ephesian elders that some would seek to do).

Paul tells us in Gal. 4:17, “They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will *seek them*.” This is classic Rabbinical discipleship. Disciples were shut out from “sanctioned service” if they did not take their place of submission within the program. This was done so that they would be impelled to take their rightful place “under someone” which would, consequently, cause such a one to seek out the ones above them for the direction and guidance of their lives.

These were also the same manner of men of high reputation referred to in Gal. 2: 6:

“But from those who were of high reputation

(what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – well, those of reputation contributed nothing to me.”⁴

These men of high reputation were Christians! We see this fact in Acts 15:5 where we are told they were of the sect of the Pharisees, yet a few verses later we see James addressing them as “brethren”. They had to be believers for James and Peter and John would never have let unbelievers remain in the church of Jerusalem, especially in a place of high reputation. These were believers of high reputation who still gloried in the Mosaic Law and *who still practiced Pharisaical or Rabbinical discipleship in the implementation of that Law* – Christians, indeed, but not spiritual Christians.

They were preaching a different gospel by proclaiming a salvation based upon the works of the law.⁵ And as such Paul pronounced an anathema on

⁴ It should be noted for sake of clarity, that the “they” referred to in the next verse -verse 7 (KJV) were not these men of high reputation, but rather were the apostles James, Cephas, and John. They, in contradiction, to those of high reputation recognized the grace given to Paul and thus gave him the right hand of fellowship. James, Cephas, and John were not known as men of high reputation - men who set themselves high upon a pedestal - but were rather known as pillars of the church - men who did not lift themselves up, but, instead, were the foundational strength of the early church. Years later, in the council of Jerusalem the apostles, once again, opposed the same group.

⁵ The men referred to in the book of Galatians, must be distinguished from a different group of men referred to in the second book of Corinthians. The men referred to in Galatians,

them.⁶ However, Paul was not just concerned about

although they preached a different gospel, still preached the same Jesus. They were like the brethren of the sect of Pharisees referred to in Acts 15. However, years later another group arose, who not only preached a different gospel, but also preached a different Jesus (II Cor. 11:4). These men were historically known as Ebionites. They did not believe in the deity of Jesus, and as such were identified by Paul as “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” (II Cor. 11:13). He says that they were servants of Satan (II Cor. 11:14-15). The Ebionites were not believers. They were unsaved. The false brethren in Galatia, however, were believers, not false in that they were not really brethren, but false because their practice and teaching were wrong.

⁶ Anathema, in this passage, does not mean cursed in hell. The word means to be made “ineffective,” “no longer devoted to the Lord.” It is used as such in the LXX in Joshua 6:18. We are not being told that Israel was to be cursed to hell, but rather that they would be made ineffective in God’s eyes if they did not observe the ban. They would be under the disapproval of God and as such would not be useful in His service. This is, of course, what happened when Achan brought the anathema upon Israel, by keeping the beautiful mantle, the silver and gold.

We also see this usage in I Cor. 16:22. Paul is not saying let anyone who does not now love the Lord, be cursed in hell. Paul would never do that. His whole desire of his heart was that men be saved. The love of Christ constrained him to desire the well being and salvation of every soul, even to their last breath.

What Paul is saying is let everyone who does not continually love the Lord (this brings out the full force of the Greek present tense), be kept “ineffective” in the service of God. Paul is referring to Christians who are not leading a holy life of obedience to the commands of Christ. Paul prays that they not have much influence among believers.

And so in the same way, as in the passage before us, Paul prays that the false brethren in Galatia may no longer be useful in the work of God so that others may escape the error of their teaching and practice.

the different gospel, he was also concerned about the Pharisaical discipleship that was the means of disseminating and enforcing that gospel (Gal. 4:16-17; 5:1, 7-13; 6:1-5). He was opposed to any discipleship system that was not based upon the liberty of the Spirit under the discipleship of the Lord Himself. The Lord put an end to any other type of discipleship. Such discipleship should not be condoned, for it replaces the discipleship of our own Saviour.

It is important to understand the seriousness of setting up a discipleship system parallel to that of the Lord's. For a modern day Christian to set up a system, where he becomes a "discipler" in place of the Lord Jesus Christ, is no different, in principle, than a modern day Christian deciding that he is going to be a High Priest, in place of the Lord Jesus.

What would be our feeling about such a one? Would we not think it presumptuous? Even if such a person refused to be called *high priest* and said, "I'm not a high priest", but, at the same time, still encouraged other believers to come to him to tell him of their sin so that prayer could be made on their behalf – what would we think of such an activity? I think we would all say such practice should never be condoned. Why? – Because *we have only one High Priest*, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14-16; 5: 1-4).

Dear brethren, in the same way *we have only one Rabbi, or Discipler*, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:8).

“But be ye not called Rabbi; for One is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren”.

If we would never condone someone infringing upon the *High Priestly Office* of our Lord, why would we not have the same attitude to someone who attempted to infringe upon the *Rabbinical Office* of our Lord? May we never, as disciples of Christ, seek to usurp our Lord’s office as Discippler or Rabbi either in name or in our practice.

Now back to the issue in Galatians. The problem of Galatianism was more than just the fact that they were seeking to put believers back under the Mosaic Law. *The believers in question were of the sect of the Pharisees and, as such, continued to practice the system of rabbinical discipleship.*

In order to be a respectable Pharisee in the New Testament one had to embrace the system of discipleship. If one was considered a leader, it meant he not only practiced discipleship, but was one who also was expected to “raise up many disciples” unto himself (See Tractate Avot).

Paul opposed not merely the idea of the continuance of the Mosaic Law in the life of the gentile believer; he also opposed the rabbinical discipleship that was the vehicle to disseminate that form of teaching.

However, it must also be noted that while Galatianism always included discipleship, *not all discipleship programs can be charged with the same error of the brethren in Galatia*, and so should never be considered to be under the anathema of Paul.

Corinth, for example, was beginning to

practice discipleship (before the arrival of the Ebionites), but Paul never anathematized them, although he certainly censured them for their practice.⁷ Or, if we look at today – many discipleship programs are not legalistic in their practices as the false teachers in Galatia were, and so they could never be under the anathema of Paul – nevertheless, Paul would still be against their usurpation of our Lord's role as Discipler.

Paul continued through his whole life in combating this system. As was mentioned before, when the concept of rabbinical discipleship first appeared in Corinth it almost split the church. All of a sudden many believers were turning away from the Lord Jesus as their sole Master and Rabbi and began viewing Apollos, Peter, and Paul as their Rabbis or

⁷ It should be noted here that just because this system of rabbinical discipleship was forbidden in the New Covenant, does not mean it was not permitted under the Old Covenant (e.g. John the Baptist's disciples). In the same way, just because the continuance of the Mosaic Law is forbidden in the New Testament, does not mean it did not have its rightful place in the Old Testament. Israel was expected to keep the Mosaic Law.

Discipleship was sanctioned by the Lord as a means of spiritual growth, because He became a Rabbi himself and raised up many disciples. The problem is that believers do not realize that rabbinical discipleship was summed up in the final Rabbi - the Lord Jesus Christ, in the same way that the Mosaic Law was summed up in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is good when practiced within the Lord's discipleship program. It is detrimental when practiced outside His discipleship program. Discipleship is good when we are under the one Rabbi - the Lord Jesus Christ. It is detrimental when we are under some other rabbi or discipler, no matter how well spoken that Christian may be.

Teachers. They said, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Apollos.” They were boasting to each other that they were the disciples of Paul, or of Apollos,⁸ but Paul called such behavior fleshly and told them “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (I Cor. 1:31). He is your Teacher and Master.

This system of rabbinical discipleship continued to plague the early church, and unfortunately, (even though Paul was able to keep it in check during his lifetime), soon after his life the system completely pervaded the church. It was common by the end of the first century to read of the “disciple of Polycarp,” or the “disciple of John,” or the “disciple of the apostles.” Christians became known, more and more, as the *disciple of some other named Christian*. And since rabbinical discipleship involved a hierarchical system, it was not long until it gave impetus to the creation of the monarchical bishop form of church government, and with this, the church took one more step of departure from the simplicity and purity of the original churches of the first century.

This system continued on down through church history and soon developed into the monastery

⁸ In the Greek culture, men did not have the concept of Rabbi, (unless they were Jewish). Their men, who acted like Rabbis, were called - Teachers (see John 1:38 NASB). But in the Greek culture, Teachers (in this sense) refers to a specific type of teacher, a *discipling Teacher*, much like the Teachers of the Greek Philosophies who all had their own disciples, like Socrates, or Plato, or Zeno. This was a system unto itself and must be kept distinct from teachers, gifted in the assembly (I Cor.12:29), who are called by God to simply teach the doctrine of Scripture and not to form Schools unto themselves.

movement of the fourth century. Monasteries were built across the Roman Empire and monks took their place as disciples under the authority of their superior. From that system there soon developed different systems of Spiritual Direction which continues even to the present day in the Roman Catholic Church.

Spiritual Direction is just another name for that ancient form of rabbinical discipleship. Under this system, however, it is taken a step further with the development of a complete hierarchy, within which, the disciple is now expected to give complete submission. Confession of sin is now directed away from the one mediator between God and Man – the Lord Jesus Christ, and is now directed to the disciple's Superior, usually a priest who would, through the sacrament of Penance, pronounce forgiveness of sin.

These added aspects to the discipleship systems soon were transferred in subtle ways into the discipleship programs of the Protestant Church, which grew out of the Spiritual Direction system of the Roman Catholic Church, and is now known today as the Shepherding Movement within many Evangelical Circles.

There are many other nomenclatures given to these various systems of discipleship, but it is not the purpose of this paper to enumerate each and every one. But let it be simply stated that they all have one common aspect – the creation of a hierarchy where each disciple is under an immediate superior, which invariably leads to one person at the top of the

hierarchy, who, while not taking the name of Rabbi, or Master, holds such a position, as do others in the hierarchy.

When such a system is instituted it can lead to all types of dangers, and it is to that we will now like to turn our attention.

Chapter Four

The Danger of Discipleship Programs

Discipleship “programs” have always had certain things in common (whether known as Galatianism, Rabbinical discipleship, Spiritual Direction, Mentoring or just plain Discipleship) which markedly differentiate them from the true discipleship carried on by our Lord. These common aspects are rooted back to the time before our Lord’s birth, and it is these aspects which present a danger to the spiritual well being of the believer.

Restrictiveness

The opening command in the Mishnah Tractate Avot 1:1, whose origins can be traced back to the time before our Lord, included the phrase, “Raise up many disciples”. This command was taken up both by the House of Shammai, and the House of Hillel. However, they both differed in their means of accomplishment.

The House of Shammai, believing that a disciple must “commit” to a vigorous course of instruction, did not want to waste time and effort recruiting disciples from among the poor who would later be forced to drop out. They preferred restricting

Torah study to the wealthy.”⁹ They held that a man “should only teach someone who is intelligent and cultured, from a good religious family, and wealthy.”¹⁰ Hillel, on the other hand, believed in teaching all men.

This original air of restrictiveness – of not wanting to waste one’s time on a difficult disciple or one that is not fully committed – has continued on down through the centuries in the many different forms of discipleship.

How different from our Lord’s call of discipleship,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.” Matt. 11-28-30 KJV

Our Lord is very patient and open to all people. He patiently disciplines the most “difficult” person with love, wisdom, and mercy. *The Lord would never tell someone He can’t disciple them anymore because time is precious, and it is not wise to spend time on someone who is not fully committed.*¹¹ Time is not a factor to our Lord and He will never restrict his discipleship to a restrictive few

⁹ Yitzhak Buxbaum, *The Life and Teachings of Hillel* (Jason Aronson, Inc. Northvale, NJ, London) 1994 pg. 128

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pg. 127

¹¹ This is not some irrelevant statement. A popular discipleship manual of the day instructs a Disciple to do this very thing.

who narrowly meet some standard. Our Lord never asked someone to stop being disciplined. The opposite was true, the disciple would quit, not our Saviour. Look at the time, love, and effort the Lord put into discipling Judas Iscariot, even though He knew he would ultimately betray Him.

This restrictive attitude, however, is found in most discipleship programs of today, and if one finds this type of thinking in such programs, *either in their practice, or in their course literature*, a believer should realize that it is just a root from the House of Shammai, that grew into the Rabbinical discipleship of our Lord's day; the Galatianism of Paul's day; the monastery movement of the fourth century; the Spiritual Direction of the Roman Catholic Church and, finally, to the many discipleship programs of today.

It is a root that is not biblical and should never be condoned. Many lives of believers have been damaged and ruined because a "*Discipler*" *did not have the time to spend on a difficult person*. Such is not walking by love, but is a consequence of trying to institute a program the Lord never asked his Church to do.

Because, we are finite, *it is true that we don't have time to waste*, but that is why the Lord never asked us to disciple someone, but only asked us to "make disciples" unto Himself, the One who has *infinite time, love, and patience*.

Spiritual Elitism

This root of restrictiveness has also led to another danger within the Church – the formation of a spiritual elite within the assembly that leads to a hierarchy that threatens the unity of the Body of Christ. This root ultimately will lead to the abandonment of the plurality of elders, in practice, if not in name. *Just as non-biblical discipleship led ultimately to the monarchical bishop in the early church, so may modern day discipleship programs lead to a “one man pastoral system” within the assemblies.* If assemblies do not abandon such programs, I’m afraid many assemblies will wake up in twenty to thirty years and find themselves abandoning the concept of a “plurality of elders” and instead will adopt a “chief elder,” or an elder that is “first among equals,” or maybe even a “Senior Pastor.” History will repeat itself. This is one of the real dangers facing assemblies in years to come; all because of the introduction of non-biblical discipleship programs.

When discipling is restricted to a few, rather than the many, or when the concept is taught that all believers are disciples, but only a few are “disciples indeed”, then one is on his way to creating such a spiritual elite that will ultimately affect the unity of the Church, and create such a false hierarchy within the assembly.

This thinking is taken from a misapplication of John 8:31 KJV, where Jesus states: “If ye continue

in My word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed.” The thinking goes that only believers, who are willing to sacrifice all, and are totally committed are in this narrow group, and it is to those who are known as “disciples indeed.” But the Holy Spirit never makes such a distinction, and it is wrong for us to do so.

Take for example, Judas Iscariot (John 12:4-6), who was *not* continuing in the Lord’s word, and was not willing to sacrifice all (he was stealing from the common purse), yet the Holy Spirit still lists him with all the other disciples. The Holy Spirit did not call the other eleven, “disciples indeed“, and Judas just a disciple. They were all considered “disciples” of the Lord.

According to today’s standards, the Lord should not have wasted time on Judas and instead should have just concentrated on the other eleven, who were “disciples indeed.” Obviously, this is a false distinction, and can lead to much harm in the lives of individual believers, and to the life of the assembly.

What the Lord simply meant in John 8:31 is that if a disciple is obeying the Word of the Lord, he is acting as a true disciple. The Greek word we translate as “are” in our English versions, is written in the present tense. It means such a one “is being” a true disciple. He is acting as a disciple should. It does not mean that he is transferred out of the “general” group of disciples, and now becomes a member of a secondary group known as “disciples indeed.” It simply means that among our Lord’s disciples, *some are more mature than others, but they are not given*

some special status.

There should not be this mentality that “disciples indeed” are the only ones worthy to be disciplined. Indeed, it is the immature ones who need help in their lives, not the mature ones. As Jesus says, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” (Matt. 9:12).

Are we not glad that the true discipleship program of our Lord does not restrict discipleship to a special group who are “disciples indeed”, but *lovingly disciplines the weak, and infirm, with a love, patience and tenderness that only our Saviour can demonstrate*. He truly is the Good Shepherd, who will leave the ninety and nine to seek the “one.”

Accountability

The next danger of the discipleship programs of today comes from a mistaken view of accountability. The common thinking is that the disciple must become accountable to his Discipler for successful character development and growth. It is expected that the disciple will confess his weaknesses, temptations, and failings to his Discipler.

If one is confronted with this component of most modern discipleship programs he or she should run away from it with all their might, for it is not biblical, and will weaken ones spiritual life because it will create a dependence for one’s spiritual well being

on someone other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

Scripture never tells us that we are accountable to someone else. In fact, Paul tells us in Gal. 5:1 KJV to,

“Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Yet a common feature of the rabbinical discipleship of Paul’s day was to hold disciples accountable to the Discipler and thereby bring them into subjection or bondage.

This danger was happening in the Church in Corinth. He relates the following –

“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.” II Cor. 11:20 KJV¹²

¹² This is not to imply that every accountability program today acts in the same way that Paul is referring to in this passage (although many do!). There are many godly Christians, who truly seek the well-being of the disciple, and do not seek to take advantage of such a one. But the question, must still be asked, “Why institute a program that the Lord never asks His Church to institute, and why usurp His rightful place as our Master?”

Spiritual strength results from being accountable to the Lord, but *spiritual weakness* is the ultimate result from being accountable to a discipler other than the Lord. Such accountability may help bring *morality* in the life of a believer, but can never bring spirituality. Only accountability to the Lord can make us spiritual Christians.

This is the same reason why the Pharisees questioned the authority of Jesus, *because He was not accountable to some Rabbi (Discipler)*. They asked Him where did He get His authority to teach (Matt. 21:23).

This accountability, that was an important feature of rabbinical discipleship, continued in all the various forms of discipleship programs through the centuries. A disciple was accountable to his Rabbi, a monk was accountable to his Superior, a disciple under Spiritual Direction in the Roman Catholic Church was accountable to his or her Director, and today you will find in most discipleship programs a disciple is notified that he must be accountable to his Discipler.

This accountability is the glue that holds the hierarchy together. That is why you will find difficult persons asked to leave or put off their discipleship, because it breaks down the harmony of the system. And in most programs you will ultimately find someone at the top, unto whom, all are expected to be accountable, both in their doctrine and practice.

Some openly admit and embrace such accountability, as in the Roman Catholic Church. All are to be accountable to the priest, to the Bishop and ultimately to the Pope. They make no apologies for it. However, in many other modern day accountability programs, people will deny that there is any hierarchy, but once one is in the system, it will not be long until that person knows who is the one above him and the one to whom he or she must be accountable.

In order to maintain this structure, a disciple must be mollified by delving into the weakest aspect of their lives – the sin which so easily besets them. They are encouraged to confess their sins, weaknesses and character flaws to each other, especially to their Discipler, so they can be sanctified and grow in their Christian life.

A favorite verse of such programs is James 5:16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed...” But this verse is taken out of context to justify such a practice.

In commenting on this verse, even our brother William MacDonald says this,

A casual reading of this statement might give the impression that we are to tell other people all about our secret sins. But that is not at all the thought! Primarily James means that when we sin against someone else, we should be prompt to confess this sin to the person we have wronged.¹³

Of course, many do not realize that this idea of confession or laying bare one’s soul to his or her Discipler arises out of the Roman Catholic Church with their Sacrament of Penance. It is a common practice to be accountable to the priest and confess one’s sins and weaknesses to him. How unfortunate that among many Christians this unbiblical thinking has been transformed into an important aspect of their

¹³ MacDonald, William, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville) 1995, pg. 2244

discipleship programs. They do not realize that it arose out of the damaging system of the Roman Catholic Church. Remember, there is only one Mediator between man and God, the Man Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5). The word “mediator” means so much more than just one who reconciles us to God. It refers to one who comes to our aid. It refers to one who understands our weaknesses and needs (Heb. 4:15-16). It refers to one who not only understands our failures, but one who can deliver us from our weaknesses. He saves to the uttermost, those that come to Him (Heb. 7:24-25). This is not just the salvation of justification, but also the daily salvation of sanctification, and ultimately, glorification.

He is the one given to us by God to help us grow unto spirituality. He is the one given to us by God to be our Disciple. He is the one who can truly help us in all our needs. Lay bare your soul to Him. Why would we want to come to someone else?

Scripture tells us that we are accountable only to Christ. He is our only judge. Paul speaks of this in I Cor. 4: 1-4,

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”

It is to the Lord that we are accountable, not to some other person. We must give account to Him not

to man.

“Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Rom. 14:4

“So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” Rom. 14:12

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.” Matt. 12:36

Nowhere in Scripture are we told to be accountable to another person other than our Master. That is part of the liberty we have in Christ Jesus. It is for our well-being. We are to hold fast to Him and to no other (Col. 2:8-9)!

The only time we are told that we must be held accountable in our spiritual walk to one other than the Lord, is in regard to a Christian who sins against another Christian and will not repent when he or she is privately confronted by the one to whom he or she has wronged and in regard to a Christian who is living in continuous sin (I Cor. 5). If such a Christian will not ultimately listen to the church, he or she will then be held accountable for their actions (Matt. 18:15-17; I Cor. 5:3-5). But, even in that, his or her accountability is to the church as a whole, not to an individual.

Perhaps, a better way to look at this issue is to realize that we are *accountable* only to our Master,

but we are *responsible* to all.¹⁴

Paul tells us in Rom. 14:3:

“Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls. And he shall be made to

¹⁴Some may wonder about Heb. 13:17 and like verses where believers are told or to obey or submit to their elders. First of all, it should be recognized that these verses do not refer to an “individual,” but to a plurality of men. Scripture only recognizes a plurality of elders within the assembly, never a sole individual as “Pastor.” Secondly, the word “obey” in Heb. 13:17 does not refer to the type of obedience one might expect of a child to his or her parents. Children are accountable to their parents. We are not talking about the accountability of children to their parents, or the accountability of the saints to Scripture (II Thess. 3:14), but we are talking about the accountability of the saints in their own spiritual walk. The word “obey” used for children (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20) is never used in the same way for the saints. The word translated “obey” in Heb. 13:17 in our English versions actually means “to be persuaded.” Elders are told they should not demand accountability or blind obedience, but instead are told they should be persuasive in the things of the Lord, leading by example, not lording over the saints (I Pet. 5:2-3). The saints on their part are admonished by the Holy Spirit to be submissive to such men. They are admonished to “be persuaded” by such exhortations. Such persuasion entails the response of a free will dwelling in the liberty of Christ Jesus. The word “persuasion” precludes any thought of blind obedience or enforced accountability, but rather bespeaks the response of a willing heart in love. As Christians, we are never exhorted to submit to leaders in contradiction to our own consciences or in contradiction to the leading of the Holy Spirit within our own hearts (I Cor. 16:12). Nor, as Christians, are we exhorted to submit to leaders in contradiction to Scripture, but are ever exhorted to submit with hearts freely and fully persuaded by the truth (I Cor. 11: 13-16; cf. Gal. 2:5 & II Cor. 1:21-24).

stand; for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Rom. 14:3
Darby

And in Gal. 5:13 Paul says,

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

We are *accountable* only to our Master, but we are *responsible* to love everyone. Although “accountable” and “responsible” are both considered to be synonyms, if we look at the etymology of the words we can see a marked difference.

“Accountable“, or “account”, derives from the Latin meaning “to count.”¹⁵ In other words, one needs to have things add up correctly. One is called to *account* for one’s behavior. He or she needs to *measure up* – things need to *add up to a perceived standard*. “Responsibility”, or “respond”, on the other hand, derives from Old French and Latin and means to “give back in return.”¹⁶

We are accountable only to the Lord. Throughout our lives we must *daily give account to Him*, confessing our sins, admitting our weaknesses, and seeking His mercy and strength. And our Lord, because of His infinite wisdom, love and knowledge, will know exactly *how to disciple us* and cause us to grow and mature in our Christian life. But He will

¹⁵ Funk & Wagnalls, *Standard Dictionary of the English Language*, (J.G. Ferguson Publishing Co. Chicago, IL), 1976, vol. 1, pg. 10

¹⁶ Ibid. vol. 2, pg. 1073

accomplish this according to His own timetable through the discipline of the Holy Ghost. And He will never fail! He loses no disciple. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and so, we will all ultimately, be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:28-39). We shall be “as our Master” (Lu. 6:40). How glorious is our Saviour’s discipleship program!

During this life, however, even though we are accountable only to Him, *we are responsible to every believer*. We “give back to each other,” not from a place of being *under someone*, (as in a hierarchy), but we give back from a *place of equality*. Remember the Lord said, “But be ye not called Rabbi; for One is your Master, *even Christ*; and all ye are brethren.” (Matt. 23:8 KJV).

Since we are all brethren, we should respond to each other from a place of equality. We should bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). We should *respond* to each other in love and kindness. We should *respond* to each other with grace and mercy. We should *respond* to each other with a mutual respect and honour that will not demand that we “toe the line”, but instead will encourage and admonish one another with the same love and forgiving spirit our Saviour manifests.

If we act in such a way, close friends will be able to share and help each other in their discipleship to the Lord from a place of equality and freedom, not from a place of subjection and forced expectation.

When we have such a mindset, those who are older in the Lord, will not seek to lord it over those who are younger, but will instead seek to lead by

example (II Cor. 1:24; I Pet. 5:1-3). They will seek to bear the burdens of others from a place of equality, rather than lay burdens on the brethren from a place of hierarchy (Gal. 6:2-5; cf. Matt. 23:4). They will always seek to “give back to each other” in humility and love. They will not call others to account, but, instead, will help bear the burdens of others. They will weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). It was Paul who says to carry one another’s burdens.

Accountability, in reality, places burdens on others. Responsibility, on the other hand, helps carry the burdens of others.

To bear the burdens of others requires us to have a servant’s heart. Servants were those who bore the burdens of others. When Paul tells us to bear each others burdens, he is telling us to be servants, not masters of each other. It is in that way we fulfill the law of Christ, for it was Christ who said –

“...You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.” Matt. 20: 25-26

“For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.” Lu. 22:27 NKJV

How unlike this is to the concept of discipleship or the Spiritual Direction in the Roman Catholic Church, whose spirit has infiltrated many modern discipleship programs. Listen to their concept

of accountability.

“In the technical sense of the term, spiritual direction is the function of the sacred ministry by which the Church guides the faithful to the attainment of eternal happiness. It is part of the commission given to her in... (Matthew 28: 19 sq.). She exercises this function both in her public teaching, whether in word or writing, and in the private guidance of souls according to their individual needs; but it is the private guidance that is generally understood by the term “spiritual direction”. In one way, the Church *requires all her adult members to submit to such private direction*, namely, in the Sacrament of Penance. For she entrusts to her priest in the confessional...*the part of a director of consciences...* He must instruct the penitents if ignorant of their duties, *point out the wrong or the danger in their conduct*, and suggest the proper means to be employed for amendment or improvement. The penitent, on his part, *must submit to this guidance...*[and]...Since...the Holy Ghost speaks through the sovereign pontiff and the bishops of the Church, the work of the private spiritual director *must never be at variance with ...[their]... infallible guidance.*”¹⁷

May we never submit to such false mentality, remembering the admonition of the Apostle Paul as he appeals to the saints to “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1 NKJV).

May we only be accountable to our Lord and

¹⁷New Advent, Catholic Encyclopedia: Spiritual Direction, www.newadvent.org/cathen/05024a.htm. (Italics ours)

Master, but be responsible to all. May we once more study the Epistle of Galatians, understanding its stand against Rabbinical discipleship and stand fast in the liberty of our salvation (Gal. 1: 1-24); the liberty of our service (Gal. 2: 1-10); the liberty of our sanctification (Gal. 2: 11- 3:29); the liberty of our consciences (Gal. 4 - 5:12); yet all the while, never forgetting the *responsibility* of our precious liberty *to walk in love and mercy with each other* (Gal. 5: 13 - 6: 18).

Chapter Five

How then does the Lord disciple us?

There can be no discipleship if there is not time spent with the disciple. When the Lord was discipling the apostles, He spent all day and night with them. They would hear every word from His lips. They would witness His movement and actions. They would hear His teaching and be able to question Him minutely about what He meant. They would see His life and character continually tested by unprincipled men, and through it all the apostles witnessed a sinless and totally perfect life. The Lord's character and life was always being impressed upon their own life and being, and they were always being challenged by His admonition and encouragement.

Without such an immersion of disciple and Master, there would not be biblical discipleship. This is why many modern day discipleship programs encourage as much time be spent between the disciple and his Discipler. Their motives are good, but their understanding is deficient.

When the Church today sets up a discipleship program, they are saying, by their actions, that they need to improve upon the discipleship program of the Lord. They are in reality saying that the Master needs a vicar to represent Himself on earth and perform the discipling. It is no different in principle, than a pope being set up in the Church to be a vicar of Christ on

earth to perform his sole Bishopric, or when the plurality of elders is ignored and a Pastor is set up over the elders to be a representative of Christ within His church to perform the “Chief Shepherding,” or in today’s parlance a Senior Pastor among his associate Pastors. All these aberrations of the New Testament pattern are set up, I fear, because today we do not really believe the Lord is literally discipling His children, or shepherding His saints.

In practice, the Church almost sees the Lord as a figurehead. Christ is indeed acknowledged as Rabbi, or Chief Shepherd, but in our practice, we deny it. It shows a lack of faith. Christ never relegated His role as Chief Shepherd, or His role as Rabbi to other men.

Christ is indeed our sole Master and He is indeed discipling His saints. He promised to be with the apostles, and conversely with the Church until the end of the age (cf. Matt. 18:20). He has only one “vicar”, if you will, on earth, and that is none other than the Holy Spirit. Christ is with us every moment of every day, just as He was with His original disciples, except now He is even closer with us, because He is with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18). As such, He daily disciplines us every moment, imparting His life and character to us; teaching and explaining, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the precious words of Scripture.

The reason we prefer, I’m afraid, to have someone physical to disciple us, is because it takes too much of the cross in our lives; too much of the discipline of the Holy Spirit in our walk, to be able to

hear the voice of the Saviour. It is not because He is not speaking, it is because we are not listening (Rev. 3:22).

If we would hear the voice of the Saviour, we must have a strong spirit, filled with His Spirit; otherwise, we will not be able to discern His voice. It is much easier to listen to a Disciple or Director with our physical ears, than to try to hear the voice of the Master with spiritual ears. It is much easier to have someone physically disciple us, than to allow the Master, who is spiritually present, disciple us.

Yet true spiritual maturity cannot be attained by completing a course of discipleship that might be offered by some church or organization, even though, at the completion of such a program, a person might have much knowledge and zeal.

One can know all mysteries, have much zeal, have a total commitment that would even cause one to live a martyrs life; one might even be so committed that he or she would give all their money to charity, but it would avail nothing and would all be burned up in the end if such a person did not have Christ's love (I Cor. 13:2-3). Christ's love flows from Christ's character, and Christ's character is imparted to us by having Christ disciple us and form Himself in us (Gal. 4:19).

Modern day discipleship programs cannot form Christ in you. It cannot be done today, anymore than the Rabbinical discipleship programs of the Paul's day could. It was tried in the churches of Galatia and failed (Gal. 4:19). It was tried in the monasteries of the fourth century and failed. And it

fails in our modern day discipleship programs.

A truly, moral, sincere, and zealous Christian may be produced in such a program, but not a truly spiritual Christian that has Christ formed in them. Why is this so? – Because Christ’s life can only be imparted by Himself, not by His servants. We cannot form Christ in someone’s life. Only Christ can do that, and He accomplishes it through His own personal discipleship program. He does it by the working of the Cross, the providential ordering of our lives, and the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

Christ still seeks to disciple the brethren. Have you enrolled in His program? He still is speaking to His saints. Are you listening? He has promised to speak to the Church till the end of the age. Remember the words of the Lord, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 3:33).

So if it is necessary to be disciplined by the Lord, and not by some other discipleship program in order to *fully mature* in our Christian life, how do we go about it?

First, we must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow *only* Christ (Matt. 16:24; I Cor. 3:21-23). Secondly, we must learn to spiritually hear the voice of the Saviour – in our hearts – in His providential ordering of our circumstances – and in our study of Scriptures. And lastly, we must partake of His life in the assembly – the body of Christ.

This is the Lord’s discipleship program that should never be supplemented or replaced. He has never relegated His position as Discippler. So with that

in mind let's look at all three of these means of our Lord's discipleship.

The Call of The Cross

The Lord Himself tells us in Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This involves a resolution, a discipline and a trust. If one wants to be discipled by the Lord one must resolve to deny oneself.

This bespeaks a consecration of your spirit, soul, and body (I Thess. 5:23). A *resolution* must be made to allow one's being to be humbled under the mighty hand of God (I Peter 5:6). God dwells with one who is of a broken and contrite *spirit* (Ps. 34:18; Isa. 57:15).

One must be willing to renounce the things of the world, not conforming one's *soul* to all that the world has to offer (Rom. 12:2), but learning not to love the world or the things in the world (I John 2:15-16). Indeed, if one would deny oneself, one must learn never to love oneself (II Tim. 3:2).

And finally, one must be willing to present his or her *body* as a living and holy sacrifice to the Lord (Rom. 12:1), setting one's mind on the things above, not on the things of the earth (Col. 3:1-11).

Next, a disciple must learn to take up his or her cross daily. This requires a *discipline*. Paul says it this way:

"...indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves

so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” II Cor. 1:9

And,

“...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” II Cor. 4:10

When we take up our cross daily, it is to die, to become helpless, and to be weak. Our Lord desires this so that we would learn to trust in Him and not in ourselves (II Cor. 1:9). We must never believe or trust in ourselves, but in God. We must never have confidence in our own natural abilities or talents, but in the God who raises the dead. Soulical Christianity teaches you to love yourself, to esteem yourself, to pamper yourself. It teaches you to believe in yourself and to be self-confident. But Spiritual Christianity will teach oneself to do the opposite. Taking up one’s cross is given to us by the Lord to free us from self through death. O the blessedness of the cross, “through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 6:14).

And finally, we must *follow* the Lord as our Rabbi and Master. This involves a *trust*. We must be willing to say, “not my will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). We must go where He leads. It is by following Him that we are disciplined. It is realizing that He has our lives ordered, (Ps. 139: 16-17) and that all things work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). It is learning to walk by faith, trusting in His presence every moment of the day.

Resolution, discipline and trust – If we deny our self-life, take up our cross daily, and follow only Him, we will grow in our Christian lives, and His life will be formed in us. This is our Lord’s means of discipleship.

The Hearing of His Voice

Next, we must learn to spiritually hear the voice of the Saviour, first in our heart, secondly in the providential ordering of our circumstances, and, finally, in our study of Scriptures.

The Lord still speaks to His disciples, just as surely as He spoke to His apostles on the dusty roads of Judea. But we must have spiritual ears, not physical ears to hear. How can we minister within the assembly if we do not believe the Lord still speaks to our heart? How can the Holy Spirit lead our worship, if we do not listen for His leading? The Lord still disciplines His children by speaking to their spirits. As the Saviour says, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know me...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10: 14, 27).

Part of the reason, I’m afraid, discipleship programs have become so popular is because we cannot hear the voice of the Shepherd. *We have not learned to cultivate our heart to discern His voice.* So much of Christianity today has become mechanical and rational. Why? – Because we serve Him in our souls with all our natural abilities and wisdom, rather than serving Him in our spirits (Rom 1:9). Many

Christians do not even know the difference between their soul and spirit (Heb. 4:12). But if we would hear the Lord in our spirit we must exercise our hearts to have a strong spirit (Luke 1:80; 2:40 KJV) capable of discerning His still small voice in order that we might be fully disciplined by Him (I Kings 19:11-12; Mk. 2:8; Acts 16:6; 19:21; 20:22; Rom. 8:16; Rev. 3:22).¹⁸

In addition, if we as Christians have been called to this life of fellowship with the Master (I Cor. 1: 9), we must ask ourselves, “How can we have fellowship with Him if we never talk to Him?” He is with us every moment of every day and desires to share in all that we do or say. He talks with us, and we should talk with Him. How can we fellowship with Him if we only talk to Him once or twice a day?

If a friend decided to spend a day with us, would we only speak to him or her in the morning and ignore them the rest of the day? Yet the Lord is closer to us than a friend. He desires to spend every day with us. Do we only speak to Him in the morning, and then ignore Him the rest of the day, or do we constantly talk to Him throughout the day?

The early Christians talked to the Master so often that they became characterized as those who are continually *calling upon the name of the Lord* (Acts 9:21). We should be praying, talking and fellowshiping with the Lord all through the day, asking Him this question or that question, or asking Him for wisdom on this issue or that issue.

¹⁸ For further study on this point, see “Press on to Spirituality”. Available from Assembly Bookshelf, P.O. Box 15086 Sacramento, CA 95851 USA

Let's consider David, for example, he talked to the Lord seven times a day, praising His name (Ps. 119:164). That was his practice, but let me ask, "How often do we praise Him?" (Test yourself one day and count how many times throughout the day you take a pause from the things you are doing and give praise to the Lord Jesus). Could we not decide to at least match the practice of this Old Testament saint and praise the Lord Jesus at least seven times a day?

Look at Peter. He, apparently, continued that Old Testament practice of Daniel by praying and fellowshiping with the Lord at three set times a day (Acts 3:1; 10:9; cf. Dan. 6:10; Ps. 55:12). How often do we? (And this was not just saying grace at our meals, but was a time set apart for prayer, thanksgiving, and fellowship). Should we not, at the minimum, decide to at least match the practice of that Old Testament saint?

But, dear brethren, if we would be honest, (as disciples of the Lord), we should not be content just with three times or seven times a day, but we should be in constant communication with our Master. We should be in such fellowship with Him that every day we begin and end our day in praise.

"From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised." Ps. 113:3

We should be in such fellowship with Him, that after having begun our day in praise, every word and deed that we do throughout the day should be done with a prayer of thanksgiving on our lips.

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Col. 3:17

Indeed, we should be in such constant fellowship with our Master that we are *continually* giving praise to His name (Heb. 13:15).

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.” Heb. 13:15 KJV

Moreover, if we live our lives in constant communication with our Master, we have a special promise that He will always be near us (Ps. 145:18), and if He is near us we know He will disciple us unto the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Dear brethren, do we hear the voice of our Master discipling us throughout the day? Let’s make a commitment to speak to our Saviour *every hour of every day*, fellowshiping with Him about every aspect of our life, and seeking His love and guidance in all that we say or do.

It may take much diligence to begin this habit of *constant conversation* with the Master, but once such a habit is formed it will lead to a precious life of discipleship with the Lord and a precious *walk before God*. It may, indeed, take much discipline of spirit, but, remember, His grace will ever assist us in such a commitment and His *precious voice* ever lead us in the way we should go (Jn. 10: 2-4).

Secondly, we must also hear the voice of our

Master in the providential ordering of our lives. As we said before, the Lord orders our days (Ps. 139:16-17 NASB). He orders our circumstances in order to wean *ourselves from ourselves*, so that He might form *Himself* in our own selves. We must realize that all things, *when accepted by faith as being from His hand*, will strengthen us and make us like Him (James 1:2-3). This is how He disciplines us.

The reason many Christians do not experience the disciplining of the Lord is because they do not understand this principle. They resist the providential ordering of God. Instead of hearing the voice of the Lord in their circumstances, they see nothing but dismay and heartache. They murmur about the things that cause discomfort and pain – (much like the children of Israel of old, I Cor. 10:10-11) – not realizing that all circumstances have been ordered by God for our good. When we trust in His goodness and sovereign will (see Gen. 50:20) we are then able to confess with Paul,

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” II Cor. 4:7-10

It may not be easy, but once we understand this truth, *we will look for the hand of the Lord in all our circumstances*, and thus will be disciplined by Him

as we listen to His voice.

Paul learned this in Acts 16: 6-8:

“They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”

Paul, knowing the Lord did not want them to travel to Asia, perceived that the Lord wanted them to proceed to Bithynia, but while trying to thus proceed, something hindered them. Perhaps, it might have been a swollen river that was impossible to cross, but whatever it was, Paul realized the Spirit of Jesus was speaking to them and telling them, “My children, do not go that way.”

How precious it is to hear the voice of the Saviour in His providential ordering. May we all attune our hearts to hear His voice. When we realize that nothing happens to us except by His sovereign will, we will grow in our discipleship because we will know that He lovingly orders our ways.

Many spiritual lessons can be learned if we just learn to hear the Lord speaking to us through our circumstances. When we open up our hearts to His penetrating eyes, He will remove all the dross. We will recognize that the Lord allows certain things to happen to us, *because something might need to be corrected or given up* in our lives.

George Muller understood this aspect of the Lord’s discipleship. He understood that all things that

happened in his life were ordered by the loving hand of his Master. He understood that the Lord allowed certain things to happen in his life in order to strengthen his faith, whether it was sickness (for long periods he was sick), extreme poverty (many times they were straitened in the daily necessities of life – they would live from day to day in dependence on God’s loving care), or in some cases rumor and false reports (their life of faith was maligned by other brethren). In it all he grew in his discipleship to the Lord. He understood this lesson so well, that he called his narratives of these experiences – *The Lord’s Dealings with George Muller*.

He relates the following about this type of discipleship –

“If we, indeed, desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and, therefore, through the trial, be strengthened. In our natural state we dislike dealing with God alone. Through our natural alienation from God we shrink from Him, and from eternal realities. This cleaves to us more or less, even after our regeneration. Hence it is, that, more or less, even as believers, we have the same shrinking from standing with God alone, – from depending upon Him alone, – from looking to Him alone: – and yet this is the very position in which we ought to be, if we wish our faith to be strengthened. The more I am in a position to be tried in faith with reference to my body, my family, my service for the Lord, my business, etc., the more shall I have opportunity of seeing God’s help and deliverance; and every fresh instance, in which He helps and delivers me, will tend towards the increase of my faith. On this account, therefore, the

believer should not shrink from situations, positions, circumstances, in which his faith may be tried; but should cheerfully embrace them as opportunities where he may see the hand of God stretched out on his behalf, to help and deliver him, and whereby he may thus have his faith strengthened...”

“...The last important point for the strengthening of our faith is, that we let God work for us, when the hour of the trial of our faith comes, and do not work a deliverance of our own. Wherever God has given faith, it is given, among other reasons, for the very purpose of being tried. Yea, however weak our faith may be, God will try it; only with this restriction, that as, in every way, He leads on gently, gradually, patiently, so also with reference to the trial of our faith. At first our faith will be tried very little in comparison with what it may be afterwards; for God never lays more upon us than He is willing to enable us to bear. Now when the trial of faith comes, we are naturally inclined to distrust God, and to trust rather in ourselves, or in our friends, or in circumstances. We will rather work a deliverance of our own somehow or other, than simply look to God and wait for His help. But if we do not patiently wait for God’s help, if we work a deliverance of our own, then at the next trial of our faith it will be thus again, we shall be again inclined to deliver ourselves; and thus with every fresh instance of that kind, our faith will decrease; whilst, on the contrary, were we to stand still in order to see the salvation of God, to see His hand stretched out on our behalf, trusting in Him alone, then our faith would be increased, and with every fresh case in which the hand of God is stretched out on our behalf in the hour of the trial of our faith, our faith would be increased yet more. Would the believer, therefore, have his faith strengthened, he must especially, give time to God, who tries his faith in order to prove to His child, in the end, how willing He is to

help and deliver him, the moment it is good for him.”¹⁹

This is how the Lord disciplined George Muller. This is how the Lord will discipline you and me; and this is the same way the Lord disciplined His twelve apostles. He would bring circumstances into their lives in order to try their faith and thus allow them to grow. When they listened to His voice, they grew. When they did not listen to His voice they fell.

Our loving Master disciplines us in the same way. He orders our circumstances in order to wean us from all that is harmful in our daily living. He *deals* with us, His disciples, through the providential ordering of our lives in order to increase our faith; and, when we walk with Him in this life of discipleship, when we learn to *deal* with Him, hearing His voice in every circumstance of our life, we grow in our faith and become more like our Master, our Rabbi, our Discipler.

Last of all, we must hear His voice in our study of God’s Word. Study of Scripture must never become a mere intellectual exercise. As was said before, we may know all doctrines, but not be a spiritual Christian (I Cor. 13:2). Our Lord desires us to *grow spiritually through our study of Scripture, not just intellectually*. Again, let me state, knowledge alone does not guarantee spirituality. Completing a discipleship program does not guarantee spirituality. Attending a Bible College or even the most prestigious Seminary in the world does not guarantee

¹⁹ Muller, George, *A Narrative of some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Muller*, (J. Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 455-56

spirituality. Only our Lords program of discipleship can guarantee spirituality.

The Lord disciplines us through the use of Scripture. He opens our eyes to *see our self* in the light of His Word. However, in order for us to hear His voice in such a way, we must approach our study of Scripture not just as an intellectual exercise, but with a prayerful humbling spirit that cries out to God, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Ps. 139:23-24 KJV).

We must realize that the primary purpose of Scripture is not just to give us knowledge, *but to correct us, reprove us, and train us* (II Tim. 3:16). Many times we just focus on the doctrine intellectually, *not realizing that there is much in our lives that needs to be corrected spiritually*. As was once said by a wise Christian, “Love is blind, and self-love, being the strongest and most subtle, is blinder still.”

So many times we forget that doctrine is only one of four things we are told that Scripture is profitable for. We forget the other three – reproof and correction and training²⁰ – to the detriment of our spiritual lives.

We should come to God’s Word humbly realizing that we may be blind to our own defects, all

²⁰ The word translated here as “training” in the NASB, and “instruction” in the NKJV is actually a Greek word which means “chastening” and which is so translated in most cases (cf. Heb. 12:5,7,8,11).

the while knowing that He will speak to us about those defects, if we just listen for His voice. We need *to hear the voice of our Master speaking to us in the Word*, so that His life may be imparted to us as He corrects that which is wanting in our lives.

A.T. Pierson, in his biography of George Muller, tells us of George Muller's example in such an approach to God's Word:

"...He now began himself to read the Word of God upon his knees, and often found...great blessing in such meditation and prayer over a single psalm or chapter... [such a] habit [was] a constant reminder and recognition of the need of spiritual teaching ... [and a] self-searching... comparison of [his] actual life with the example and pattern shown in the Word..." [Such a habit] "... mould[s] the character into the image of God... The prayer habit, on the knees, with the Word open before the disciple, has thus an advantage which it is difficult to put words: It provides a sacred channel of approach to God. The inspired Scriptures form the vehicle of the Spirit in communicating to us the knowledge of the will of God...It therefore becomes a channel of God's approach to us, a channel prepared by the Spirit...and unspeakably sacred as such."²¹

And he states the following in his own words:

"Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was, to give myself to the reading of the word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted,

²¹ Pierson, Arthur T. , *George Muller of Bristol*, (James Nisbet & Co., Limited London) 1902, pg. 130-141

encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning early in the morning...searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul...When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation.”²²

Let us believe by faith that the Lord is with us. Our Master is ever by our side, ready to disciple the willing heart. May we be careful to hear that still small voice, as He speaks in our hearts day by day; as He providentially orders our circumstances; and as we prayerfully study His Word. Such will be a blessed life of discipleship.

Partaking of His Life in the Assembly – The Body of Christ

When we were saved and became disciples of the Lord, we were baptized into His body (I Cor. 12:13). As such, being members of His body, we are told that we must hold fast to Him as the head (Col.

²² Muller, George, *A Narrative of some of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller*, (J. Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 405

2:19). By holding fast to Him as our only head we will grow in our Christian walk, for His life will be supplied to us through the proper working of each and every part (Eph. 4:16). By holding fast, Christ will be formed in us and His character will become our character. The life of the assembly is another form of our Lord's discipleship program.

Paul tells us in Col. 2:6-9 the following:

“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

The only way to grow according to Scriptures is to hold fast to Christ in the assembly of the saints, not to a vicar of Christ, not to a representative of Christ, not to a Pastor, not to an Elder, no, not to another person who disciples us, but only to Christ. If we hold to someone other than Christ we will not grow unto full spiritual maturity.

Assembly life is God's means of growth for the Christian. When a person becomes a Christian, a new disciple of the Lord, he should be introduced into the assembly life. *That is how to nurture a new Christian.* Once a person becomes a Christian *the Lord begins to disciple Him.* He will do this by

bringing the disciple into the circle of fellow disciples. This is what He did all those years ago in Israel during His sojourning on earth.

When one was brought into the circle of disciples all those years ago in Israel, they would take their place as a fellow disciple *with equal standing before the Lord. The disciples were all equal. They were all brethren.* In fact, the Lord chastised them when they tried to change this equality (Mk. 9:33-37; 10:41-44).

When the Lord would send out His disciples He would always send them out two by two. Not as a disciple/Discippler, but as two equal disciples serving their Rabbi. The Lord encourages such equality and friendship. We need to make friends with new believers as *equals*, not enter them into a discipleship program where they are “*under someone*”. We must remember that we are all brethren.

As we hold fast to Christ in the assembly we will also realize that we all have different spiritual gifts given to us by God in order to facilitate our growth as disciples. Elders will love and lead by example, not lording over the saints, but serving as equals, *not demanding submission*, but patiently trying to persuade the saints in the things of God.

The new convert will also learn humbleness by the example of the deacons who willingly put themselves last, rather than first, in their service to the Lord.

Ones gifted with the gift of exhortation will encourage the new convert during the times of difficulty that will inevitably arise, and the new

convert will learn of Christ's commands through the faithful ministry of teachers.

He or she will learn to be generous by the example of those that have the gift of giving, and will learn to be gracious through the example of those with the gift of mercy. He or she will mature in their Christian life when a fellow disciple with the gift of wisdom imparts to them the answer to a troubling or difficult question, or they will learn to walk by faith, when they see those with the gift of faith stand courageously on the promises of God's word and witness the faithful answers of their prayers.

By being introduced into such a biblically based assembly, the disciple will then be able to seek their own place in the assembly, and learn to function as a fellow member of the body of Christ.

Such an assembly life will aid the disciple to hear the voice of the Saviour as they, themselves, learn to function as a gifted member within the body.

In the worship of the assembly the new disciple will learn that as a priest he or she is expected to be led by the Spirit in giving back to the Lord the praise that is due His name. Such an opportunity of worship will strengthen their spirits as they seek to worship in spirit and truth.

The sisters will learn what it means to give up one's rights (as our Lord did in His incarnation) when she willingly remains silent during the times of ministry and teaching in the assembly of the saints (I Cor. 14: 34-35; I Tim 2:11-12).

The brothers will learn patience by giving preference to other believers in the assembly. They

will learn humility, when they stand up to read from the Word at the same time another disciple stands up, and so sit back down and let the other disciple speak or pray. They will then question themselves if it really was the Holy Spirit leading them to stand up, or was it just their own desire. By such an experience the new disciple will learn better to distinguish between the Lord's voice and his own voice or desires.

On the other hand, the new disciple may come to the conclusion that the Lord, indeed, led him to stand up at that time, but the Lord also wanted to teach him that as a disciple, he must learn to give up his right and be willing to take the last place (cf. I Cor. 14:30). Did not our Saviour do that many times?

In Bible studies, disciples will be able to seek answers, as the disciples did at first with our Lord, knowing that the Lord will just assuredly respond to such inquiries, if only we seek His will and truth with a honest, patient and respectful heart (I Jn. 2:27).

The Lord's character of love will be worked in the heart of new disciples as they realize that the *basis of our unity is life, not light*. They will learn to open their straightened heart in love to all God's children, receiving all whom Christ has received (Rom. 15:7).

They will learn the strength and courage of the Lord as they learn to contend earnestly for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (see Jude 3). By so doing, they will learn to walk in truth, contending uncompromisingly for those doctrines that are essential for our salvation.

However, with doctrines that are not

essential for salvation, they will learn grace, respect, and forbearance by giving liberty to other believers who may not interpret certain verses the same way they do.

In so doing, they will learn that those doctrines which are not necessary for salvation (e.g. prophetic views, election, etc.), while important, should never divide a church.

Partaking of the life of the assembly is an important part in the life of the disciple, and it is an important aspect of our Lord's discipleship.

Remember, the main purpose of discipleship *is not just to impart knowledge; it is to impart the life and character of the Discipler*. What better way for the character of our Lord to be imparted to His disciples than by bringing them into the circle of fellowship of other disciples – the assembly – the body of Christ, of whom He is the head and source of all life for every member.

Henry Craik, one of the early brethren from the first part of 1800's, and, one who was a fellow elder with George Muller in the assembly in Bristol, said it this way concerning the one who was newly saved, the one, who as he said, had "been enabled to embrace Christ for salvation."

"We will go with you, for the Lord is with you,' ought to be the response of all who have been enabled to embrace Christ for salvation. It is the privilege of believers, while walking together in Christian communion, to be instrumental in advancing one-another's spiritual good. Their calling is to edify, comfort, instruct, reprove, encourage, help, and uphold one-another in the ways of Godliness. This calling implies the diligent use of the appointed means whereby we may be aided in cultivating our

own personal Christianity. The reverential reading of Holy Scripture, incessant prayer for the teaching of the Divine Spirit, watchfulness over our own hearts, maintaining a course of life correspondent with our profession, tend not only to our own individual blessing, but are calculated to render us meet to be used of God in ministering to the blessing of others. The well-being of the whole body is to be promoted by that which every joint supplieth. Happy, indeed, will be that community of Christians among which every several member is alive to his high privilege of seeking to be ‘a vessel meet for the Master’s use.’ Instead of looking merely to receive from others, each ought to be ready to bestow, according to that wherewith he has been intrusted. ‘See that ye excel to the edifying of the Church,’ is the exhortation addressed to all. How various are the modes in which Christians may aid the well-being of one-another. The more instructed may lead on those who are deficient in knowledge. Those who have had long experience in the Divine life may counsel those who are as yet but babes in Christ. Those who, having passed through trial and found that God has manifested Himself as their Deliverer, may encourage the hearts of afflicted ones to put their trust in Him, even when outward things look dark and gloomy. Those who are themselves favoured with a season of outward tranquility can intercede for those who are under the sore pressure of some heavy affliction. Those to whom may have been granted an abundance of the things of this life, or even, for a time a larger measure of such things than many around them may express their sympathy for their poorer brethren by liberally contributing to their temporal necessities. Those who have had their own children brought to know the truth may help, by their intercessions, those who are often bowed down with heaviness on account of the spiritual condition of those who lie very near their hearts. Every spiritual endowment, every mental power, every capacity of service may be brought into vigorous and healthful action, in seeking to promote the spiritual prosperity of those with whom, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, we may find ourselves associated.”²³

²³ Craik, Henry, *New Testament Church Order* (Snow & Co., Paternoster Row, London 1863) pgs. 36-37

In conclusion, may we all truly learn the admonition of Paul when he says, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” (I Cor. 11:1). May we imitate Paul’s example of forsaking the discipling systems of men, and seek only to be discipled by the Lord. May we refuse all attempts of putting ourselves over someone – to disciple them – as Paul refused to put himself over the believers in Corinth when they sought to make him their Rabbi, or discipler. May we, instead, declare with Paul, “Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”...”Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord!” (I Cor. 1:13, 31).

And, finally, may we all encourage one another to be discipled by the Lord Jesus Christ until that day comes when we meet Him face to face and find ourselves made perfect by His loving hand and faithful guidance. May that day come quickly. Amen.

**“But be ye not called Rabbi; for One is your
Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren”.
Matthew 23:8**

Appendix

Questions and Answers

Q. Does not Paul teach discipleship for the Church in II Tim. 2:2 which says, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

A. This thought is based on two presuppositions: 1) This epistle was written to every believer, and thus the aforementioned command is incumbent on all to observe, and, 2) Paul is speaking about discipleship.

It is important to understand that we must maintain a literal hermeneutic if we would properly understand Scripture. If we do so we will realize that this epistle was not written to every believer – men and women alike. It was written to an individual. It was written to Timothy, a fellow-worker of Paul, and an Evangelist.

Now, of course, as with the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20, this epistle can apply to the Church in a “general” sense. We can take “spiritual principles” from this book, just as we can take from any part of Scripture.

For example, while we may take “general” principles from the Old Testament, it would be wrong to assume that what was written specifically to Israel could ever be applied directly to the Church.

In the same way it would be wrong to assume that the Epistle to Timothy could ever be applied to every believer (unless the passage explicitly states it is for every believer – e.g. I Tim. 2:8 and II Tim. 2:14). These were commands given by Paul to a specific individual. They were specific commands given to one who was *gifted and called by God to be an evangelist*.

William Kelly speaks of this distinction in his commentary on Timothy.

“...these Pastoral Epistles let us into the confidential communication that passed between the wise master-builder and his associates...and shews us, *not what the assembly has to do in given circumstances, but the duty of a man of God like Timothy or Titus.*” (An Exposition of the two Epistles of Timothy, William Kelly, Bible Truth Publishers, 1983, pg.4).

If Paul was not writing instructions for every believer, then, obviously, this verse in question cannot be used indiscriminately as a charge applicable for every believer. This verse was for one particular Christian who was gifted as an evangelist and given an apostolic charge to correct heretical teaching (I Tim. 1:3-4).

Perhaps, one might use the example of a modern day CEO giving instructions to one of his branch managers. If the employees of the company obtained a copy of those instructions, would anyone assume that he had the right to implement those instructions? Or would any employee assume that the instructions given to the branch manager were also

instructions to them? If, for an example, the CEO told his manager to fire someone, would an employee think that he or she had the same right to do the same? Of course not. Why? – Because it was written to the manager, not to the employees. (It is acknowledged that this might not be the best analogy to utilize, since Paul never exercised the authority like a CEO, nor was Timothy a manager or Pastor of the church. But it simply demonstrates, in modern parlance, the need to recognize – in our study of God’s Word – *to whom* is the portion of Scripture written for?)

The Pastoral epistles were written to men who were co-laborers with Paul in his apostolic ministry. They were men who were uniquely gifted by God for that service. They are epistles for similarly gifted men today – men who are gifted like Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. They should not be used indiscriminately for any or all believers without regard to this distinction.

However, that being said, of course, every believer may glean many spiritual principles from these epistles (much in the same way an employee could glean from a letter written to a branch manager, the desires and business ethics of the CEO).

Therefore, Paul was not giving instructions to the Church on how to disciple someone. It was not written to a church, but was written to an individual. However, as we will now see, Paul wasn’t even giving an individual, named Timothy, instructions on how to disciple someone.

The second presupposition made concerning this verse is that Paul was speaking about

discipleship. But let's look at this verse from a literal hermeneutic. Nowhere in this verse is the word discipleship mentioned, nor does Paul even use the word "teach" (in Timothy's case). What he does say is for Timothy to "commit", "entrust" or "set before" certain men the things he had heard from Paul.

In the KJV this Greek word Paul uses is translated 9 times as "set before", 3 times as "commit", 3 times as "commend", 2 times as "put forth", once as "commit the keeping of", and once as "allege".

One might better understand this verse if one translated it thus, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these things "set before" faithful men who will be able to teach others also.", or "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these things "commit the keeping of" to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Paul was not telling Timothy to disciple certain men. He was not even telling Timothy *to reason* with certain men. He was simply telling Timothy to safeguard the truth of the Word for future generations *by setting it before* certain faithful men. He was told to preserve the truth by *committing the keeping of* it to faithful teachers in the assembly.

It must be remembered that before the close of the Canon of Scripture, many imposters preached and wrote things that were in error. They were wolves in sheep clothing. Paul, himself, in I Tim. 1:3, charged Timothy to instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines in the Church in Ephesus. He also warned

Timothy that some were teaching things contrary to the “wholesome words” of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Tim. 6:3). He reminded him to –

“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 1:13 NASB).

In Second Timothy 2:17-18, he warns Timothy about the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus that was spreading like gangrene. Paul tells Timothy that they were men who had gone astray from the truth, teaching that the resurrection had already taken place.

We must remember the only way for the Truth to be preserved for the churches, (apart from those epistles already written) was for it *to be orally passed on by faithful men.*

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” II Thess. 2:15 NASB

At the time Paul wrote II Timothy – the gospel of John, more than likely the gospel of Mark, Hebrews, and possibly I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation all were not yet written. The Canon of Scripture would not close for almost another thirty years. And all those books, Paul’s epistles included, which were already written *would not be copied and available for all the churches until decades later.* Every Christian did not have a Bible under his arm as we do today. Many

pseudo-epistles in the first and second centuries were written in the name of an apostle and circulated among the churches pretending to be Scripture (e.g. Acts of Peter, Gospel of Thomas, Acts of Paul and Thecla, etc.).

This was such a danger, that Paul had to sign his epistles with his own hand so that the churches would know whether or not an epistle was really written by him.

“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”
II Thess. 3:17

Consequently, Timothy was told he must preserve the truth of the revelation that was given to Paul from God – the truth that he heard Paul teach many times in the presence of many witnesses. He was told to pass on that revelation and truth to the Church by finding men that were “able” (in the Greek, meaning “competent” or “gifted”) to teach those same truths to others – thus protecting that body of revelation, that would, in the future, be canonized as part of Scripture.

Paul was simply telling Timothy to “set before” faithful men in the assembly, (men who were able, or so gifted to teach) the things that Paul had received from the Lord and taught consistently in public (see Acts 20:20). Timothy was a co-labourer of Paul and knew precisely the truth of the Gospel preached by Paul, and since Paul knew he was soon to die, he wanted Timothy to commit this truth to men who would be faithful in promulgation of that Truth

until the time came when the New Testament would be completed.

Therefore, in this verse, we see Paul was not instituting a discipleship program for the Church, nor was he giving a command that every brother and sister in Christ was expected to repeat, but, instead, he was giving Timothy (a uniquely qualified co-labourer) a specific injunction to discharge.

Technically, Timothy was *not* even told to “teach” faithful men these things; he was told to “set before” faithful men these things. Take for example, the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus. They taught that the resurrection had already taken place. Timothy did not have to “teach” faithful men, that the resurrection of the dead had not taken place (to teach in the sense of discussing, reasoning, entreating, having a Bible study, or comparing Scripture with Scripture). No, all he had to do is simply “set before” them the fact that Paul had always said the resurrection would not take place until the Lord descended from heaven. He simply had to tell them that Paul declared that at the Second Coming this is the fact of the matter – the dead in Christ would be raised incorruptible and those still alive at His coming would be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

It was not a subject that was open for discussion! *They did not need to have a Bible Study to decide the matter!* The question was already settled. Timothy just had to “commit” to their keeping the fact of the matter. He did not need to “teach” them this truth; he just needed to “set before” them that this is what Paul said on the matter.

Remember, the Canon of Scripture was not complete, and so Paul had entrusted to Timothy the responsibility to pass on those doctrines revealed by the Lord to Paul that had not yet been inscripturated, or those doctrines which had been inscripturated, but had not yet been completely disseminated as Scripture to all the churches. This was accomplished by word of mouth (II Thess. 2:15).

Paul did not even command those men, who were entrusted with those things, to repeat the process, and in turn “commit” them to other men. Why? – Because there would be no need. Perhaps, Paul knew that shortly the Canon of Scripture would be completed, and the body of Truth would be preserved. They were *not* told to, in turn, “commit” those things to other faithful men, but were told to simply “teach” those truths in the assembly.²⁴

And because it was to be taught in the church, Timothy was told to set it before faithful men *with the gift of teaching*, not to any and every believer, but only to those men able, or gifted to teach in the assembly (In the assembly, we are not to teach by our natural talent, but by the spiritual gifting of the Lord. To be “able” meant to have the spiritual gift of teaching).

Therefore, we see Paul was not implementing

²⁴ It should be noted that because this point was not understood, this verse was used by many in the Church of the first three centuries, to institute the practice of the “apostolic succession” of bishops. They may have had good intentions, but through misapplication of this verse, they led the Church into much heartache. (cf. also footnote 22).

a discipleship program for *the character development* of the believer. It had nothing to do with such a concept.

He was concerned with preserving the integrity of the “body of revelation” that had been given to him for the Church (Eph. 3:1-9). He wanted those truths to be orally passed on until the time came that the Canon of Scripture would be complete (II Thess. 2:15).

It did not refer to the simple teaching of Scripture, (for instance, the use of the Old Testament that is profitable for correction, doctrine and reproof – II Tim. 3:16), but was referring to the new revelation that was given to Paul by the Holy Spirit for the Church (cf. I Tim. 4:6; II Tim. 1:13; Titus 1:13-14; I Jn 2:24; II Jn. 9).

Today, we no longer depend on such oral teaching. The Canon is complete. We no longer rely on Oral Tradition, such as was given to Timothy, but rely only on the Written Record of Scripture.

And so we see this verse was never referring to discipleship, but is mistakenly used as such today. Biblical discipleship must be for all believers, men and women alike. This verse was only for the gifted teachers in the assembly.

In addition, discipleship entails character development. But, as we saw, Timothy was not trying to improve the character of those faithful men, but was simply setting before them the revealed truth Paul taught.

Consequently, this verse contains no sense of biblical discipleship and cannot be used to support the

modern day version of such a system.²⁵

Q. Are the sisters spoken of as disciples?

A. Yes, in Acts 1:15 the sisters are identified as disciples (see KJV). Also, we all know that women followed the Lord in His ministry (cf. Mark 15:40-41), and, in Acts 9:36, Tabitha is specifically called a disciple.

Q. Who then was their Discipler or Rabbi?

A. The Lord Jesus disciplined them.

Q. Why then do women disciple women today? If the Lord disciplined them, being a man, should not today's discipleship programs have men disciple women?

A. Well – yes – if we assume, for a minute, that a church feels it should institute a discipleship program in their church – despite all that we have shared – and we assume

²⁵ Does that mean that this verse would have no application today? Well, specifically, it would not, since the Canon of Scripture is complete. However, in a general sense, this verse can be used to encourage those gifted like Timothy to make certain the whole council of God is made known to those gifted men in the assembly who have the gift of teaching and to those in the work who desire to teach God's Word. In modern parlance, this verse would better reflect the work of a Bible College, rather than a discipleship program since character development is not an aspect of this admonition. However, even in this, if this verse was fully followed, the work would be done not by a Bible College, but by a gifted worker like Timothy in the assembly.

they believe we are enjoined to follow the pattern given to us in Scripture, then, most assuredly, men should disciple women. It is the example given to us by the Lord, but I think most churches who institute such programs know intuitively that such a thing would not be a good idea, and so they have other women disciple other women.

Q. Where is the Biblical example or authority for this?

A. There is no Biblical authority or example for it! Nowhere in the gospels do we see women discipling women, and that is exactly the point! If we would just follow the Bible, we would never have to institute such a program, because the Lord Jesus would continue to disciple the sisters as He did all those centuries ago. It is because we are not content with His discipling that we need to institute a program never envisioned in Scripture. Never, does Scripture give us an example of a woman discipling another woman.

Q. What about Titus 2:3-5? Does it not say women are to disciple other women?

A. Let's look at the verses.

“...the older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”

Do these verses describe the elements of discipleship? Remember, biblical discipleship is for all believers. It requires a *discipler*, a *disciple*, and it requires

a course of instruction. Let's see if these verses refer to this.

The first thing one sees when looking at these verses, is that it *does not apply* to all believers. It is only for the women, and of the women it is only for younger married women. In fact, it doesn't even involve the younger single sisters, it is for those younger sisters who have husbands and children (although, I'm sure it is fine for the single sisters to hear the wisdom of the older sisters). The point of the matter, however, is this cannot be an example of a women's discipleship program for the whole Church, since it does not apply to all women. So, the only question remaining is, "do these verses speak about the discipleship of younger married women by older women?"

"Do these verses say anything about discipleship?" The fact of the matter is, they don't. Paul does not tell the older women to "disciple" the younger women. If he did, the question would be settled, and we should not oppose it.

He does not say to "disciple", or even to "train", but says to "admonish" or "encourage" the younger women. The word means "to bring one to a sound mind." It does not carry any idea of discipleship, where one is put under the authority of the other. Indeed, one of the good things the older women teach is that the younger women ought to obey and *be under the authority* and guidance of their husbands, not under the older women admonishing them.

And so we see, there is no such disciple/Discipler relationship in these verses. Nowhere do these verses *even hint at any accountability of the younger sisters to the older sisters* as is taught by many modern day discipleship programs.

These verses were simply an admonishment for

older women, who had raised their children and been faithfully married for many years, to help the younger sisters do the same with their families so that God's testimony might be maintained and not dishonored among the unbelievers.

Therefore, the first point to be made is, these verses do not indicate any discipler/disciple relationship. The younger women are not accountable to the older women. If one desires to use these verses for a basis of a discipleship program, one cannot read into the verses what is not there. If women discipleship programs of today urge the accountability of younger sisters to older sisters, based, supposedly, on these verses, such a one is reading into the text what is not there. We must remain honest in our exegesis if we would follow and pattern ourselves after Scripture.

So the question remains, "Why do modern discipleship programs teach that the younger women must be accountable to the older women?" Such teaching cannot be supported by this text. It contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture that the women should, instead, be under the leadership and guidance of their husbands.

One may say then, "Well, yes, we admit, the married women are not accountable to the older women, only the single sisters are." Well, as we said before, these verses do not address single sisters, so, again, where is the biblical support for such accountability? The answer is, there is none! In fact, the Bible teaches *that single sisters are under the authority of their fathers.*

The next thing one sees as one looks at these verses is that the admonishing is to be done *only* by the older or aged sisters. However, according to most modern day discipleship programs, once one finishes a course of instruction, whether it be a two or three year course, the disciple is then suppose to disciple someone else. Such

could not be the case in this verse, for it calls for only the older women to admonish. Any younger sister (after completing a course) would have to wait a whole lifetime, before she would be old enough to admonish other younger women.

So there again we see that women discipleship programs that use these verses as a biblical basis for their program, are not obeying the verses. If they allow or encourage the younger disciple, once instructed, to disciple someone else they are ignoring the text. Nowhere do these verses encourage such a practice – this, in and of itself, shows that Paul was not thinking of discipleship.

The next thing one notices as one looks closely at these verses is there is no *course of instruction!* The aged women are not teaching doctrine, or the great truths of the Bible, they are teaching that which is good – namely, the following things that are enumerated: love, temperance, obedience, etc. ... Doctrine is not listed. Doctrine was taught by *gifted men* in the assembly. The older women were simply teaching *the things needful for a happy home*. There is no thought of instruction or discipleship, but of only of encouragement and friendship.

And so, in conclusion, we see that these verses do not indicate any thought of discipleship. Why? First, there are no *disciplers*. The older women are not told “to disciple” the younger women.

Secondly, there are no *disciples*. The younger women are not told to be accountable to the older women, but are told to be accountable to their husbands. To have discipleship, there must be accountability of the disciple to the discipler. There is no such accountability in these verses.

Thirdly, there is no course of instruction. The older women are not told to teach “doctrine”, but are told to teach the “love and submission” of the younger sisters

to their husbands.

Fourthly, there is no graduation from a course of instruction. The younger sisters could not in turn, repeat the process once they completed some course of instruction, because there was no course of instruction to complete, but only the course of an entire lifetime of experience. They would have to wait their whole lives, until they were old, in order to repeat the process!

And finally, these verses never involved unmarried single sisters. These verses cannot be used to teach the discipleship of unmarried women. It is restricted to those with husbands and families.

And so it is wrong to say these verses support the concept that women should disciple other women. They are simply verses that encourage the older women to help the younger married women in the assembly take care of their families.

The whole idea of women discipling women is foreign to the Scriptures. The Lord was the One discipling the women, and so it should remain the same today.

Unfortunately, however, such is not the case.

Women discipleship programs exist and are practiced by Evangelicals all the while not knowing that, like other aspects of modern discipleship programs, it too has its roots in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church has been practicing women discipleship for centuries. Those enrolled in such programs are called nuns, and together they form a nunnery or convent, wherein all the dangers mentioned in chapter four are practiced and enforced. There is restrictiveness, there is confession, there is hierarchy, there is accountability, and, in some cases, even a spiritual elitism develops.

Therefore, what we can conclude from this question is that, indeed, the sisters are known as disciples,

and in Scripture their only Rabbi, Master and Guide was the Lord Jesus Christ.

May the Church once again recognize this and be content with the biblical pattern given to us in the Word, and be content with the one and only discipleship program ever sanctioned by the Holy Spirit – the discipleship program of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. Does not Paul encourage discipleship in I Cor. 11:1 when he states “Be ye followers of me, even as I am also of Christ?” Does he not repeat this call in such verses as I Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17; I Thess 1:6; II Thess. 3:7, 9?

A. It is admitted that it would be logical to assume that Paul is telling the saints to follow him and be his disciples, in the same way he followed Christ and was His disciple. After all, did not the Lord say, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” and, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

However, these verses are misunderstood and confused with the Lords invitations because, while the KJV translates these verses with the same English word “follow”, the Holy Spirit uses an entirely different word in the Greek. The newer translations, as the NKJV and the NASB bring this out. Their translation of I Cor. 11:1 is as follows, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.”

The word is a totally different word than that which is used by the Lord in His invitation to “follow me.” The two words do not mean the same thing. The word used in the Lord’s invitation *does* carry the connotation of discipleship, *but it is never used by Paul in any of these verses!* Paul always uses a different word which is better

understood as “imitate.” In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses is where we get our English word “mimic” from.

Paul is not saying, “follow me and be my disciple,” (like our Lord did), but, instead, he is saying, “imitate me as I imitate the Lord.” *Mimic me!*

The Lord ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, and I seek to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. *Mimic me!* The Lord blessed when He was reviled. I seek to bless when I am reviled. *Mimic me!* I own no other Master or Discipler, but the Lord Jesus Christ. *Mimic me!* Imitate me!

Paul is not asking for disciples to follow him. Paul refused to be any one’s discipler or Rabbi, he was just simply encouraging the saints to follow his faith and manner of life (cf. II Tim. 3:10-11). He desired that all would imitate his love for the Master. The newer translations clarify this distinction of words.

And so, it is seen that if the word used by Paul had been the same word used by the Lord, the Scriptures, indeed, would have been teaching discipleship by other men. But the fact of the matter is, the opposite is true, and these verses actually forbid the practice of such discipleship.

Paul never practiced the discipleship of other men. He would be no one’s Rabbi, and he was the disciple of no other man, but was the disciple only of the Lord (Gal. 1: 1, 10-12).

If we desire to “*mimic*” him, then we must never be the discipler of someone else, and we must never be the disciple of someone else. We must be true to the Lord, our only Rabbi and Master – our only Discipler – that is true imitation.

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