

Making Disciples of the Body of Christ

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Lesson text: Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

These words, while easily committed to memory, continue to be some of the most under-appreciated and neglected of all the words of our Savior. These three brief verses at the conclusion of Matthew's account of the gospel offer tremendous promise and power to the Lord's Church, but at a demanding and non-negotiable price. Some notable observations in preface include:

a. Christ sets the context of His next words by pronouncing His sovereign power and authority in all of heaven and earth

- There is no power or principality above, equal to or worthy of consideration alongside Christ

b. Christ's instruction and commission to His Church is three-fold

1. Go and teach all nations

- Virtually every other version of the Scriptures render as, "Go and make disciples"
- The purpose of teaching / preaching the gospel is ultimately to make disciples

2. Baptize those who believe and exhibit fruit meet for repentance

- Per Christ's example and command
- Yields admittance / membership into a local, visible, autonomous body of Christ
- The first public act of obedience and initiation of the process of discipleship

3. Teaching the baptized the commands of Christ

- This is not an open-ended, tertiary command of lesser importance any more than the Holy Spirit is a junior person of the Godhead. As God the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and Son, so is this command to make disciples intertwined with the preaching of the Gospel and the baptizing (immersion) of genuine believers.
- With regards to disciples, it "takes one to make one". The moment of salvation is just that, a moment of internal change with eternal ramifications. Baptism is also a moment, a time of public confession following profession of Christ as Savior. Discipleship is not a moment, but a process. This process is undertaken, successfully or otherwise, for the remainder of our natural lives. The effectiveness of every local body of Christ is in direct correlation to the success or failure of its members' individual and corporate discipleship.

B. Prerequisites of Discipleship

Unfortunately, finding the Lord in salvation does not make one a disciple. Being baptized is not necessarily indicative of discipleship. Even faithfully attending church, reading the Scriptures, and dutifully praying is not sufficient for genuine discipleship. The outwards works of religion are never enough to supplant or overcome a lack of faith in following Christ. Christ's original disciples did indeed accomplish many wonderful things in Christ's name and under His authority, but the 11 were qualified by more than salvation and baptism. What was / is the distinguishing factor between those saved by the grace of God and authentic disciples? It is very possible for one to be saved and yet, never become a disciple. Here are the MUSTS associated with discipleship as prerequisites.

1. We MUST forsake all!

Luke 14:33 ³³ *So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."*

The Greek word translated "forsaketh" in this verse is used only here in the New Testament and it means, *separation, departure, cessation*. This is exemplified in the above examples of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew being called by the Lord to discipleship.

Luke 14:26 ²⁶ *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."*

The Greek word for "hate" in this instance means, *"to detest; by extension, to love less"*; the natural duties of family and obligation remain unmoved, but the focus of one's desire and affection must become singularly placed upon Christ. This was evident in the lives of Luke and the other disciples. Among those who fight for the affection of our hearts which may unseat Christ from His throne within us are: fathers, mothers, wives, children, brothers, sisters and even our own selves! This displaced affection may disqualify us from discipleship and reduce us to a life of compromised mediocrity. This, perhaps more than any other, is dangerously tempting as it looks and feels noble to our natural senses. Many a life has been lost to Christ by a refusal to yield familial love for His cause.

Matthew 10:34-36 ³⁴ *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

³⁵ *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

³⁶ *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."*

Luke 9:59-62 ⁵⁹ *And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

⁶⁰ *Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

⁶¹ *And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*

⁶² *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

²⁴ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

There remains a stark contrast between a "cross" created by our own sins and disobedience and the cross of Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 *"²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

3. We MUST continue in His Word

John 8:31 *"³¹ Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."*

In the original texts, "word" is rendered "doctrine" or teaching. Discipleship certainly requires constant study and meditation upon the Scriptures, but the original disciples had only the Old Testament. While this certainly was sufficient Gospel to point individuals towards a coming Messiah and the necessity of preparation, they were afforded none of the latter New Testament epistles which are so instructive towards Christian living and Christ's church. Their success was rooted in their dependence upon the Living Word, His words, His actions, and His instructions. Therefore, in our text, He commissions His church to continue to teach the next generations all the things He had taught them. Now, after 2000 years, things may become diluted if we rely upon an oral history and traditions. Thankfully, we have the complete Written Word which speaks of Christ as its Great Subject, the Holy Spirit who brings us into remembrance of all things Christ taught, and a personal, living, dynamic relationship with the Prince of Peace Himself. In short we must continue in The Word, Christ Jesus!

John 1:1,14 *" In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth".*

Any disciple must emulate his master / teacher in order to be considered successful. Therefore, we as individuals and as the body of Christ must emulate Christ if we are to have any success for His name's sake. **Luke 6:40** *"⁴⁰ The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master."*

Ultimately, the purpose of discipleship is to have a relationship / fellowship with Christ. The Apostle Paul writes in **Philippians 3:7-10**, *"⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*

⁸ 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,

¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

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

²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

The type of fruit Christ desires is of the spiritual variety which is contradictory to our nature. Spiritual fruit is proof of self-denial as well as a desire to worship and serve the Lord. Some of these fruit are listed by the apostle Paul in **Galatians 5:22-24**: "²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

The question is, then, how may we bear fruit and then progress towards bearing much fruit?

The answer lies in the verses prior to **John 15:8**.

John 15:4-8 "⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

Abiding means to live or dwell. Christ's disciples are to live or dwell in Him so that His thoughts, words, actions, feelings, and reactions will be ours. (We sometimes can identify people we have not met previously by how they speak or act or walk. People who live with other people tend to take on each other's characteristics.)

Spiritual fruit vs. natural fruit

As a general rule, spiritual fruit glorifies the Lord and natural fruit glorifies the individual.

Christians need instruction towards desiring, seeking and producing the proper type of fruit.

Matthew 5:16 "¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

5. We MUST love the brethren

John 13:34-35 "³⁴ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.