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Discipleship

Discipleship is the key and heart of body life. The Great Commission bears this stamp:

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.

Matthew 28:18-20

What is a disciple? How long should it take to produce a skilled disciple?

The rulers of Israel took note in Acts 4:13 that the apostles were “*unlearned and ignorant men*.” The world’s way of teaching tends to be academic and produces men and women of “learning and knowledge” such as the rulers of Israel would recognize. The Pharisees and Lawyers were extremely well versed in the scriptures. Book learning! For Jesus’ way, the discipleship was not this way. The results - life, power and men who surprised the “educated” of Israel. Jesus produced very capable men in only 3 1/2 years.

Discipleship has different levels of training, such as we see in Jesus sending out the 70 at one time, only the 12 at another, scenes like Peter, James and John being the only ones behold-

ing the transfiguration on the mount, and the select following closely into the final hours in Gethsemane. Not all training was for all the disciples as a mandatory course. Jesus gave to each what he was meant to have. Such are the marks of training the discipleship way.

The Method of Discipleship

There used to be a common way of training called, “apprenticeship”. That form matches discipleship. The academic method of the “leaders of Israel” in books and texts has primarily replaced that form. With discipleship, book learning or seminars definitely have a place, but it’s only part. Consider that **ALL** converts are to be discipled, but not all possess book learning ability. Are we to assume they can’t become powerful disciples, who in turn disciple others, because they can’t read or have a good memory? The Pharisees would think so, but the fishermen confounded them.

What’s a key difference between discipleship and academic learning? Action for one! We’re not talking theory, we’re talking success or failure in real life with real results.

Take some lessons from the Chinese churches. Before the Communist takeover, many churches held regular gospel meetings Sunday mornings. The Christians would go and bring in one or two unbelievers to hear some random fellow believer preach the gospel. While they were listening, the Christian host of his unbeliever(s) would keep an eye on their pulse. Did they look confused, open, resistant? If they heard the Christian use some difficult word, the Christian host might lean over and quickly explain, or when the call for conversion came, they might encourage them to respond. If they responded, they may counsel them in this. Following a new conversion, the convert was encouraged to join a New-Believer’s Class that was a weekly, year-round, cyclic basic discipleship program, covering Christian life and doctrine. Usually, the person who brought the person originally was encouraged to walk them through this. These classes were taught by different brethren. If your charge missed

a week, you would bring the lesson to them, when convenient, and take the responsibility of teaching it and answering questions.

This is just a “snap shot” of how such a discipleship approach works. All the believers are active in such a system, in some capacity.

Our concept of discipleship has been affected by the modern conception of what constitutes proper education. We generally visualize the institutional system and think that means we’re doing our job in the process of discipleship. This isn’t the case. In fact, to follow this can be disastrous. For example, we tend to think that standard classroom format of assignments and pressured memorization is fulfilling our role of discipling. For some “pupils”, this may actually have the effect of staunching the drive for growth. Proper discipleship won’t have this result. A young Christian may sense a desire to learn more about the Lord and seek direction. The desire is there. When he pursues this desire, he gets buried in academic assignments. The way of true discipleship and life is substituted by the academic model, due to our ignorance of God’s way of discipleship. We give the Pharisee’s method as a substitute, thinking we’re discipling. The young Christian’s life-thirst is quenched and he backs off. He’s fed a substitute for life and senses death instead. He might be led to feel guilty because he isn’t willing, or eager, to put in the required work and study. Even time itself might be too short. He backs off, with an inner sense of guilt, and never really grows thereafter. He won’t seek more discipleship in the future because he has the concept that “discipleship” means going to college in some form.

When this new Christian meets life, he’s empowered by true discipleship, not burdened down with many assignments. Consider this aspect of Jesus’ discipleship program: We find recorded that Jesus offended most of His disciples, they left (John 7:60-66). We never find any left because He gave them more assignments than they had time for! We never find them leaving because it was burdensome work. We find them leav-

ing only because they found His teaching unacceptable. In fact we never find in the New Testament, incidents of assignments such as mandatory reading or memorization being given. The discipleship work in the life of Jesus, and during the Acts, was a matter of life flowing and the recipients growing. The evidence was seen clearly in the disciples eagerly gathering from house to house “*daily*.” We grieve that modern disciples don’t have that desire, but could it be that we’re offering substitute worldly education instead of life? No wonder they won’t gather. Now I’m not saying that God’s way for some isn’t memorization and the like. For some, such as for myself, it is. I know the Lord has had me work on memorizing scripture. It enables me to do the work more efficiently than He has for me. For others, the work may not be the same. He may have them memorize some passages to help strengthen in time of trial, but He may not lay on them the task of memorizing larger portions, for that would be beyond the scope of His ministry for them.

The dictates of following the principal of life means there’s very little set in stone. We see a system work and so want to lock it into use thereafter, but God’s way is liberty of the Spirit, not law of a system. If we use the same “system” we saw work somewhere else, we may find it no longer works. On the opposite side, we may figure we have to keep changing to keep people’s interest. With this concept, we’re always seeking to entertain, and again we walk away from God’s life, failing to bring forth eternal fruit in a healthy Christian life. What does all this spell? Humility and true love of God! If either of these two begin to wane, God’s work will become legalistic and dead. We may look active and growing, but the life will be gone (consider the letter to the Ephesians in Revelation chapter 2).

The Goals of Discipleship

The goals of discipleship should be that of guiding the believers into a productive life. They must be taught to utilize the gifts God has given them (Matthew 25:14-30). Disciples are taught so they’re able to bear the image of the Master. Being various

different organs in the body of Christ, each has his function that has to be put in operation. If those older in the Lord don't encourage the younger to utilize that single talent they may have, the loss will be great. We can make a difference, preventing that one talent brother or sister from being condemned because they never put their gifts to work. Those gifts being the particular work each has received from the Lord to do.

Those who receive five talents tend to rise to the top, but those (the majority) with one-talent, tend to bury their talent. Also consider that six one-talent people can potentially accomplish more for the Lord's work than one five-talent. Working at the same rate of profitability. From such, you can see how much loss the church is suffering due to the majority not using their single talents.

The failure to properly disciple results in loss to the individual, to the local body of Christ and to the Kingdom of God!