



# The Vineyard & The Husbandman

## Part 3

### Discipleship

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# Discipleship

# The Promise of Discipleship

## Knowing God

The promise of Discipleship is nothing less than the promise of the New Covenant: KNOWING GOD. Why do I say that?

Firstly because, that's the recorded prophetic promise of the New Covenant: "They all shall KNOW ME."<sup>1</sup>

Secondly because, that is the promise Jesus made to His disciples: He said: "If you love Me , you will keep My commandments"<sup>2</sup>.... He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him<sup>3</sup>.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:34

<sup>2</sup> John 14:15

<sup>3</sup> John 14:21

<sup>4</sup> John 14:23

In this passage, the Lord speaks of *keeping* His commandments. In the Greek text, this is exactly the same word He later used in the Great Commission: "... teaching them to *observe* all that I commanded you...."<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that **the purpose of Discipleship is Loving Obedience** – *obeying the Lord because we love Him*. But notice that Jesus said the outcome of this loving obedience would be three-fold:

- 1) We will be loved by both Jesus and the Father.
- 2) Jesus will “disclose” – “reveal”<sup>6</sup> - Himself to us.
- 3) Jesus and the Father will dwell within us (Their Spirit in our spirit).

But surely it is true that Jesus and the Father love all those in the world: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son....”<sup>7</sup> We can understand why “Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?’”<sup>8</sup> In response to

<sup>5</sup> Greek: *tereo*, Strong’s # 5083.

<sup>6</sup> Likely a better translation of the Greek word, *emphanzio*, Strong’s # 1718. Not merely disclose through words, but manifest to the sight, reveal in person. (M.R. Vincent)

<sup>7</sup> John 3:16

<sup>8</sup> John 14:22

this, Jesus simply repeated what He had previously said – which is the condition of the promise - namely: “If anyone loves Me he will keep my word.”<sup>9</sup>

This is the understanding: God loves all those in the world, and desires to reveal Himself to them and dwell within them. But only those who obey and love Him are able to recognize Him, receive His love, and experience His indwelling presence. This need not cause us to stumble theologically. Possibly, this may help us understand: A parent loves a child. The child loves the parent. But when there is a matter of disobedience, there is a “barrier” in the relationship. The parent’s love doesn’t cease; but the child’s experience of the love is obstructed, and for the child, the whole of the relationship is mired until the matter is resolved through repentance and forgiveness.

But again, for the loving, obedient disciple of Christ, this is the three-fold promise of Christ:

1) Living in **the on-going experience of the love** of Jesus and the Father.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:23

- 2) Receiving **on-going revelation** of Christ.
- 3) Experiencing **the in-dwelling** of Jesus and the Father (Their Spirit in our spirit).<sup>10</sup>

Considering these various New Testament scriptures, I think it accurate to say that this three-fold statement is summarized by what the Holy Spirit prophesied in the Old Testament scripture: “they all shall KNOW ME”.<sup>11</sup> This is both the promise of the New Covenant – and the promise of Discipleship.

But now, let’s continue on with more about HOW TO DISCIPLE –

*In Light of the New Covenant.*

<sup>10</sup> Being “in Christ” and having “Christ in you”.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 31:34

## Discipling in Light of the New Covenant

### Jeremiah 31:31-34

<sup>31</sup> “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. <sup>33</sup> “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for **they will all know Me**, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

As previously stated, the promise of Discipleship is nothing less than the promise of the New Covenant: KNOWING GOD.

Therefore, in light of the New Covenant, the goal of discipling



should also be TO KNOW GOD - not to make someone into some pre-conceived image of what a “disciple” should look like.

Discipling in light of the New Covenant is not having someone do this or that. Neither is it having someone live this way or that way. This is Old Covenant – “according to the letter”.<sup>12</sup>

Discipling in light of the New Covenant is modeling your knowledge of the Holy One with someone - sharing with someone your relationship with the Lord.

If, through various means and methods, I prescribe for someone to do or that, or live this way or that way, then I have modeled the Moses of the Old Covenant, not the Jesus of the New Covenant. I have “played God” – I have acted as their lord – usurping the Spirit of Christ.

But, through sharing my knowledge and experience of God, if I can help cultivate someone’s personal relationship with God, and help nurture someone’s experiential knowledge of God, then the Spirit of Christ can mold that one into the unique “disciple” which

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:6-11

He would have him to be. And that disciple of Christ will respond to the Spirit of Christ - by living out God's will - unique to his life. God will be glorified, not me - and not my particular discipleship methodology.

## **Servants of a New Covenant**

- “not of the letter, but of the Spirit”

### 2 Corinthians 3:3-6

3 “Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

New Covenant discipleship is a ministry “not of the letter, but of the Spirit”. New Covenant discipling cannot be “of the letter” – i.e.

not through the imposition of various means and methods, because the “letter” – *imposed externally upon the disciple* - brings death. This is NOT to say that the teaching of scripture is not employed in discipling. But this IS to say that it is only the Spirit of Christ – *residing internally in the disciple* - who can bring the word of Christ into the heart and life of a disciple<sup>13</sup>, making it a living and manifest “letter of Christ”. “The Spirit gives life”. Therefore, in discipling, there must always be a sensitivity to, a perceiving of, and a co-laboring with the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciple.

<sup>13</sup> The Word of Christ dwelling internally: Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-11; Romans 10:17; Colossians 3:16.

# The Discipline of Discipleship

## Abiding in the Word of Christ

As much as I am excited by and committed to a New Covenant approach to discipleship, I would be amiss to give the impression that I devalue the necessity of spiritual disciplines. I think the key is approaching the spiritual discipline, not as employing a methodology, but rather as cultivating a relationship with Christ. It is essentially allowing Jesus to be Lord of one's life – in reality. It is giving the Spirit of Christ opportunity – that is, time and energy spent in spirit, soul and body – to nurture and cultivate one's life.

A primary spiritual discipline in discipleship is **study of the Word of Christ**. A “disciple”<sup>14</sup> is literally a “learner”<sup>15</sup>. Greek scholar, W.E. Vine, says that the word denotes “one who follows one's teaching”. “The fellowship of the Spirit” and study of the Word of Christ are the two integral components of discipleship. There is no discipleship without learning through teachings and study. A disciple of Christ is devoted to learning the Word of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Greek: *mathes*, Strong's # 3101

<sup>15</sup> *W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

“If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Greek scholar, James Strong, the Greek word translated “continue”<sup>17</sup> is “a primary verb; to *stay*: **abide**, continue,  **dwell**, endure, **be present**, remain, stand”. Particularly the words “be present”, “abide” and “dwell” connote being **baptized – immersed** – in the teachings of Christ.

Jesus TAUGHT His disciples. And, He instructed His apostles to teach all that He had entrusted to them.<sup>18</sup> The first century disciples were “**continually devoting** themselves to apostles’ teaching”.<sup>19</sup> One literal translation renders that phrase as such: **Act 2:42** And they were<sup>G1510.7.6</sup> <sup>G1161</sup> **attending constantly**<sup>G4342</sup> in the<sup>G3588</sup> teaching<sup>G1322</sup> of the<sup>G3588</sup> apostles.<sup>G652</sup><sup>20</sup>

This rendering possibly refers to attending teachings taking place in the temple and in houses.<sup>21</sup> But what is of more significance was the precedence placed on teaching and study: The phrase

<sup>16</sup> John 8:31b

<sup>17</sup> Greek: *meno*, Strong’s # 3306.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>20</sup> The Apostolic Bible Polyglot translation (a Greek-English Interlinear of the Greek Septuagint and New Testament coded to Strong's numbers)

<sup>21</sup> Acts 2:46; 5:42. Later, the apostle Paul also taught in a “school” (Acts 19:9-10) and in houses (Acts 20:20).

“attending constantly” may also be translated: “earnest towards” or “constantly diligent to”<sup>22</sup> – teaching and study. But what were the apostles teaching? If you had followed Jesus for 3 ½ years and listened to His teachings, what would you teach?<sup>23</sup> Of course! – they taught what Jesus taught them.

In my essay, “Apostolic Teaching”, I discuss at length teaching that is “apostolic” in nature; but I will attempt to summarize here by saying: “Apostolic teaching” is teaching with a particular approach, goal, genre and quality:

The New Testament Scriptures explicitly tell us that the foundation of Christ is laid in the Church by *apostolic teaching*.<sup>24</sup> What does this mean? How does *apostolic teaching* lay the foundation of Christ in the Church?

The goal of *apostolic teaching* is the EXPERIENCE of Christ and the FORMATION of Christ in the disciple. Therefore, the subject matter of *apostolic teaching* is **Christ** – that is, teachings ABOUT

<sup>22</sup> Greek: *proskartereo*, Strong’s # 4342. (*Strong’s Greek Dictionary*)

<sup>23</sup> Or better: “If you are a disciple of Christ, what should you teach?”

<sup>24</sup> As well as *prophetic ministry* – a specific subject beyond the scope of this essay – but it works in conjunction with *apostolic ministry* to lay the foundation of Christ. I Corinthians 3:10-11, Ephesians 2:20, 3:1-7.

CHRIST and the teachings OF CHRIST. Teachings ABOUT Christ are found in typology throughout the Old Testament<sup>25</sup>, which are wonderfully encapsulated in the New Testament *Letter to the Hebrews*.<sup>26</sup> And, of course, the teachings OF Christ are found throughout the gospels, much of which are found in the "Sermon on the Mount" and the "Parables of the Kingdom".<sup>27</sup>

Again, *apostolic teaching* is teaching with a particular approach, goal, genre and quality – its goal is the EXPERIENCE of Christ and the FORMATION of Christ in the disciple. It is obvious that the Church has a plethora of teaching ministries. Personally, I think it is just as obvious that it has a dearth of *apostolic teaching* ministries. The Church has a need to “continue steadfastly” and “be devoted to” *apostolic teaching*.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> E.G. The Old Testament tabernacle, feasts and priesthood.

<sup>26</sup> I suggest my teaching series entitled "Seeing Christ in the Book of Hebrews", "Seeing Him Who Is Unseen", "Tabernacle Truths", as well as, "The Table and the Feast", "And His Name Will Be Called", "Foundation Stones", "The Foundation of the Church", "The Revelation of Jesus Christ".

<sup>27</sup> I suggest my teaching series entitled "The Character of the King & His Kingdom", as well as, "Abide in the Vine", "Who Is this King of Glory", "The Way of the Cross", and "Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross".

<sup>28</sup> Acts 2:42

When the ascended Christ gives equipping ministry gifts such as apostles and prophets<sup>29</sup>, He also gives the necessary grace to fulfill those ministries. The *apostolic teaching* ministry is the special grace to teach the REVELATION of the mystery of Christ in such a way as to bring a people into fullness of RELATIONSHIP with Christ, with a view to REFLECTION of Christ.

### **“The Fellowship of the Spirit”<sup>30</sup>.**

I have written in greater detail on “The Fellowship of the Spirit”<sup>31</sup> in another essay; but here I would like to quote this excerpt:

“True fellowship does not originate in people. It originates in the Holy Spirit. It is something He gives to us. It is a gift of the Spirit. In the phrase “the fellowship of the Spirit”, the preposition “of” designates genitive case, showing possession. There are

<sup>29</sup> Again, the *prophetic ministry* a specific subject beyond the scope of this essay – but it works in conjunction with *apostolic ministry* to lay the foundation of Christ. I Corinthians 3:10-11, Ephesians 2:20, 3:1-7.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1.

<sup>31</sup> A recorded version is posted on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqqgLoR1u94> A complimentary .pdf copy can be obtained by emailing: [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)



many uses of the genitive case in Greek. In commentaries, I find much variance of opinion regarding the particular uses of the genitive case in certain passages. Personally, I'm inclined to see this as a *possessive genitive*, i.e. the fellowship belongs to the Holy Spirit. According to Kenneth Wuest, this is certainly the case in a related verse in 1 Corinthians 1:9 he says: "It is the possessive genitive here, namely, into a communion or joint-participation **belonging to** His Son..."<sup>32</sup> I would tend to give a similar interpretation to Philippians 2:1.

But, it may be *subjective genitive*, i.e. the fellowship is something the Holy Spirit is doing. And, it may also be *plenary genitive*, i.e. the fellowship is something both we and the Holy Spirit are doing. I'm blessed by all three possibilities!

Kenneth Wuest describes the "fellowship of the Spirit" in this way: "A common interest and a mutual and active participation in the things of God in which the believer and the Holy Spirit are joint-participants".<sup>33</sup> And we can summarize W.E. Vines comments on "the fellowship of the Spirit" in this way: A mutual companionship between the Holy Spirit and ourselves, in which we have communion and two-way communication with the Holy Spirit as a means of partaking of the life of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> It is "life in the Spirit", or what the Scripture refers to as "walking in the Spirit" and "praying in the Spirit"<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Wuest Word Studies: *Untranslatable Riches*, p. 98-99

<sup>33</sup> *Word Studies: Philippians*, p.57

<sup>34</sup> *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

<sup>35</sup> I agree with the distinction made between "praying in the Spirit" and "praying with the spirit" by Arthur Wallace in his book, *Pray in the Spirit*. "In the Spirit": Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20. "With the spirit": 1 Corinthians 14:14-15.

Fellowship is *not primarily* something taking place BETWEEN people. It is something which people are participating together IN. Fellowship is *not merely* sharing with one another. Fellowship is **sharing or participating together in something which we have in common**. And that “something” which people are participating together in is the life of the Holy Spirit.

For the Holy Spirit is the only One who gives the life of Christ which sustains His Body.<sup>36</sup> Jesus also told us that the Holy Spirit would “take of what is Mine and declare it to you”.<sup>37</sup> So, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” is people **participating in what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing** – He shares with us the life of Christ, and we share that with one another.

So, **the fellowship of the Spirit** has to do with our personal relationship with the Holy Spirit and our personal devotional life, consisting of the various spiritual disciplines, which John Wesley referred to as ‘holy habits’.<sup>38</sup>

The life OF the Spirit and life IN the Spirit is definitive of the New Covenant. Discipling methodologies can never measure up to New Covenant Discipleship. Yet, there is discipline, in the sense of making oneself available to the Spirit – both the one being disciplined and the one discipling.

<sup>36</sup> John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>37</sup> John 16:13-15

<sup>38</sup> The Fellowship of the Spirit, pp.17-20.

# The Context of Discipleship

## Life

These are the words of the apostle Paul: “The Spirit gives life”.<sup>39</sup> These are also the words of Jesus to His disciples: “The Spirit gives life.”<sup>40</sup> I cannot express how significant it is to understand “life as a principle” in order to understand the New Covenant – and New Covenant Discipleship. “Life as a principle” is the very nature of the New Covenant and what distinguishes it from the Old Covenant.<sup>41</sup> Regarding “life as a principle”, I would like to offer this excerpt from my essay “The Fellowship of the Spirit”:

“The fact that the Spirit gives life is inherent to **the fellowship of the Spirit**. In other words, in order to understand **the fellowship of the Spirit**, we must also understand the life of the Spirit. So, by way of introduction, I’d like to discuss what I am going to refer to as “Life as a Principle”:

<sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6b

<sup>40</sup> John 6:63a

<sup>41</sup> As I endeavored to communicate in the essay, “*The Fellowship of the Spirit*”, as well as the series of essays, “*A New & Living Way*”, the lack of understanding “life as a principle” has the majority of church ministries still operating under the veil of the Old Covenant. In contrast to being according to “the letter”, New Covenant church life “according to the Spirit” is “organic”.

Jesus said: **“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”**<sup>42</sup> God created human beings to live life in “a trinity of dimensions”: physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual.

Those who are not “born of the Spirit”, that is, those who are not regenerated<sup>43</sup>, essentially do not experience life in the spiritual dimension, which is the *source and reality* behind the physical, mental and emotional dimensions. They live life on a superficial level, unaware of the realities of the spiritual realms. The apostle John said: “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”<sup>44</sup>

When Jesus spoke of “having (life) abundantly”, I believe He essentially meant **continuously receiving the spiritual life of God** from the Holy Spirit. I use the word “continuously” because of what is expressed in Jesus’ saying, which He quoted from the Old Testament: **“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”**<sup>45</sup> The tense of the Greek verb translated “proceeds” is the *present continuous sense*<sup>46</sup>, implying that the Creator God is *continually* creating life by His words as He did in the beginning. The “fellowship of the Spirit” is “walking in the Spirit”, participating in the “Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”<sup>47</sup>, and continuously receiving His words that are “spirit and life”<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> John 10:10

<sup>43</sup> John 3:3-8

<sup>44</sup> 1 John 5:12

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3

<sup>46</sup> Greek: *ekporeuomi*, Strong’s # 1607

<sup>47</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>48</sup> John 6:63

The idea that Christianity is first and foremost participation in the life of the Spirit, was germane to apostolic evangelism: An angel instructed the apostles: "**Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.**"<sup>49</sup> .... Let's look further into Jesus' statement:

**"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."**

"It is the Spirit who gives life...." The Greek word that is translated "life" here is *zoe*.<sup>50</sup> Of this word, W.E. Vine says: "Zoe is used in the New Testament of *life as a principle*, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself. (John 5:26)"<sup>51</sup> This is the life which the Spirit gives – the life of God, the life of Christ.<sup>52</sup> The Spirit gives spiritual life. There are other dimensions of life – physical, mental/emotional, which are associated with different Greek words.<sup>53</sup> But when we discuss "the fellowship of the Spirit", we will be discussing spiritual life - life in the Spirit.

<sup>49</sup> Acts 5:20

<sup>50</sup> Strong's # 2222

<sup>51</sup> Most quotes regarding Greek words will be from W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

<sup>52</sup> The triune God is One. The life of the Father God is the life of Christ and the (Holy) Spirit of life. The "God (who) is Spirit" (John 4:24) is the Spirit of Christ, as well as, the Holy Spirit.

<sup>53</sup> *Bios* (# 979) and *psuche* (# 5590) respectively. Most comments regarding Greek words will be based on W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

In John 4, Jesus said: “God is Spirit, and those who worship (or serve) Him, must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>54</sup> And in John 6, Jesus said: “... the flesh profits nothing; **the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.**”<sup>55</sup> Jesus said that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life; but He also indicated that **the words which He speaks also give spiritual life.** This too is key to understanding the essence of **the fellowship of the Spirit.** Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would “take of what is Mine and declare it to you”.<sup>56</sup> So, in “the fellowship of the Spirit”, the Holy Spirit shares the life-giving words of Jesus (with His disciples). “It is the Spirit who gives life”<sup>57</sup> – the Holy Spirit is the only One who gives the life of Christ which sustains (His disciples), “for in Him we live and move and have our being”<sup>58</sup>.

Along with the above excerpt, I would like to add that “life as a principle” was given to God’s people even back in the Old Covenant. This passage from the Old Testament clearly communicates that **the Context of Discipleship is Life** – namely, that **discipling take place in the context of everyday life**, for the desired outcome was that **THE LIFE OF THE DISCIPLE BE**

<sup>54</sup> Verse 24

<sup>55</sup> Verse 63

<sup>56</sup> John 16:13-15

<sup>57</sup> John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>58</sup> Acts 17:28

IMMERSED (BAPTIZED) WITH THE WORD AND THE LIFE OF GOD:

6 “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall *teach them diligently to your sons* and shall talk of them **when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.** 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”<sup>59</sup>

“Life as a principle” – the concept of the Spirit giving life, that is, the life of God<sup>60</sup> - is realized IN THE MIDST OF LIFE, THE SPIRIT INFUSES THE LIFE OF GOD. This is God’s desired outcome in the New Covenant. Currently, it is popular to speak of this as “organic”, meaning an outcome *born out of life*, as opposed to a product of methods and programs.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

<sup>60</sup> Greek: *zoe*, Strong’s # 2222 – “life as a principle” (W.E. Vine).

<sup>61</sup> With regards to corporate or collective church life, the term “organic” refers to an “organism” as distinguished from an organization.

# The Desire for Discipleship

## Seeking God

The Desire for Discipleship is essentially a desire for “the fellowship of the Spirit”, as it has been discussed. This desire is an absolute pre-requisite which arises out of a sense of need for and love for the Lord. I believe Jesus referred to this *sense of need* when He spoke of the character trait – “poor in spirit”<sup>62</sup>.

There are two different Greek words that are both translated “poor”: The first is *penichros*,<sup>63</sup> from *penomai*: to work for one’s daily bread, i.e. to be needy. i.e. One is able to work and earn a living; but just needs a little help today. The other word is *ptochos*,<sup>64</sup> from *ptocheuo*: to be as a beggar. i.e. One has no work and cannot earn a living - he must beg. This is the poverty of spirit that understands “the kindness and tolerance and patience of

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 5:3. See my series “The Beatitudes: Character of the King & His Kingdom”.

<sup>63</sup> Strong’s # 3998

<sup>64</sup> Strong’s # 4434



God” which leads to repentance which is a pre-requisite to saving faith. Truly, this is a character trait of a disciple of Christ.

The connection between **a sense of need for and love for God** is demonstrated in an event involving Jesus, a prostitute and a Pharisee.<sup>65</sup> This was followed by Jesus speaking a parable about a money lender and two debtors.<sup>66</sup> Jesus then compared the Pharisee with the prostitute;<sup>67</sup> and concluded with this statement: “He who has been forgiven little, loves little.”<sup>68</sup> The Pharisee, who was not “poor in spirit” demonstrated no love for God. The prostitute, who was poor in spirit, demonstrated much love for Jesus. In fact, the scripture says that when the woman learned that Jesus was at the Pharisee’s house, she came **SEEKING** Jesus.<sup>69</sup> Her sense of need created a desire in her to **SEEK GOD**. As I said, this is an absolute pre-requisite in discipleship.

<sup>65</sup> Luke 7:36-39

<sup>66</sup> Luke 7:40-42

<sup>67</sup> Luke 7:44-47a

<sup>68</sup> Luke 7:47b

<sup>69</sup> Luke 7:37

# The Responsibility of Discipleship

## Seeking and Learning Christ

About 25 years ago, I took a particular course on Christian Education.<sup>70</sup> One of the things mentioned in this course which made an impression on me and has stayed with me all these years is this statement: **“It is the teacher’s responsibility to teach; and it is the student’s responsibility to learn.”** A necessary component of discipleship is personal responsibility. All that has been said about the WHAT and HOW of discipleship is really of no avail without authentic SEEKING GOD on the part of the disciple. While it does involve those who do the “discipling”, discipleship is ultimately an activity taking place between God and the disciple.

While relationship with Christ is something the Lord is jealous for, at the same time, discipleship to Christ is a commission the Lord

<sup>70</sup> Accelerated Christian Education (Hendersonville, TN.), *“Philosophy of Education”*.

has given to apostolic people<sup>71</sup>. While one is to be a disciple of Christ, there are certain people who are also involved in the “discipling” activity. And while Christ is the Chief Shepherd, there are those whom the Lord has appointed to be shepherds in His household.

Thus, if a disciple is fervently seeking God, he will also recognize, appreciate and seek out an “older one”<sup>72</sup> in the Lord to help nurture and cultivate – mentor – this discipleship he has going on with the Lord.<sup>73</sup> So, in a very real way, seeking the Lord involves **seeking out and “pressing into” a shepherd or mentor –** *appreciating and recognizing that someone can lay a foundation of Christ and build upon that foundation with revelation, relationship and reflection of Christ.* This appreciation and

<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that the commission to make disciples was given to apostles. If it is understood to be a commission given to ALL Christians, then I would argue that ALL Christian need to be “apostolic”, as we have been discussing the term.

<sup>72</sup> “Elder” (*presbuteros*, Strong’s # 4245), “shepherd” (*poimen*, Strong’s # 4166), and “overseer” (*episkopos*, Strong’s # 1985) are all titles, or better, functions which describe one and the same person. Acts 20:17 & 28; Titus 1:5 & 7.

<sup>73</sup> See my essay, “*Discipleship & The Equipping Ministries*”.

recognition on the part of the disciple is absolutely pre-requisite to discipleship. Without it, no discipling can take place. With it, the disciple *draws upon that which is of Christ* from the one doing the discipling. Discipleship cannot be accomplished solely by the activities of the one doing the discipling – it requires the disciple seeking out, pressing into, and drawing upon the one doing the discipling. The one discipling must allow (and require) the disciple to always take his measure of personal responsibility in the discipleship process.

I think a good case in point is this: Discipling requires teaching.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is perfectly natural and good for a disciple to “sit under” the teaching of the one discipling.<sup>75</sup> But as I previously stated - **“It is the teacher’s responsibility to teach; and it is the**

<sup>74</sup> As I have pointed out in my essay, “*Foundation Stones*”, in recent times and in certain quarters, the necessity for “sound doctrine” and teaching in general has lost the esteem it once held in previous times in church history. Never-the-less, Jesus and His apostles taught disciples. So, regardless of varying trends and emphases in conventional churches, discipling always has and always will require teaching. Therefore, he who disciplines must be “able to teach”. 1 Timothy 3:2

<sup>75</sup> But the reality is, the Spirit of Christ will lead the disciple to the teachings of others as well – through books, recordings, videos, and the Internet.

**student's responsibility to learn."** The disciple must have a personal desire for teaching and learning – devoting personal time and energy to transformational learning. Merely “showing up to class” to “sit under” someone and be “spoon-fed” teachings will NOT have authentic discipleship outcomes. In fact, I think it can be wise for the one doing the discipling to make his teachings available in written and recorded formats, but have it be the disciple's personal responsibility to “seek out” the teaching, making it “his own”, doing further study, and receiving personal revelation, all with a view to transformational learning. This approach to discipleship is a long-term process which requires the utmost patience. This may be challenging and frustrating for the one doing the discipling. But, in the discipleship process, he must never seize control away from the Spirit of Christ, usurp possession of the disciple away from the Person of Christ.

# Who to Disciple

## “... disciple all nations”

Let's now consider the question of “Who am I to disciple?” Jesus gave us a “wide-lens” perspective when He said “disciple all nations”. Firstly, what did He mean by “all nations”?

Grammatically speaking, the Greek word translated “nations” is *ethnos*,<sup>76</sup> which means a tribe, a race, a people, specifically non-Jewish. Jesus meant for us to disciple “all peoples” - that is, with the New Covenant in His blood, God's Spirit and life would no longer be limited solely to the people of Israel.<sup>77</sup>

I don't believe that whole nations (collectively) are the object. The New Covenant which Jesus established has all to do with INDIVIDUALS *within* all nations – not a whole nation collectively. Why (or how) can I say that? I believe the Lord said that. Through His prophets, He told us the nature of this New Covenant would be the INDIVIDUAL, not the collective nation, as he did with Israel

<sup>76</sup> Strong's # 1484. “a *race*, that is, a *tribe*; specifically, a *foreign (non-Jewish)* one (usually by implication *pagan*): - Gentile, heathen, nation, people. (Strong's Dictionary).

<sup>77</sup> Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21; Cf. Acts 1:8, 2:5; 9:15; 10:34-35; 11:18; 13:48-49; 15:7-12, 13-18 (Amos 9:11-12).

in the Old Covenant. This is made clear in the primary Old Testament passage regarding the coming of a New Covenant: 29“In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ 30“But **everyone** will die **for his own** iniquity; **each man** who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. 31“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **32not like the covenant which I made with their fathers** in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. 33“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all<sup>78</sup> know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”<sup>79</sup>

The focus on the individual, rather than the collective nation we see here in Jeremiah is also confirmed by Ezekiel.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> i.e. Every individual who is in the New Covenant by virtue of being in Christ.

<sup>79</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-34

<sup>80</sup> Ezekiel 18:1-4, 20.

## Choosing “Those whom the Lord has given”

Discipling is a huge investment of physical, emotional and spiritual energy. A discipling relationship should not be entered into glibly. Also: One cannot effectively handle many discipling relationships at a time. Jesus had twelve. Can I handle even half that number?

Over the years, the Holy Spirit impressed upon me two things regarding the discipling ministry which, at first, may sound contradictory:

Firstly, I became convinced that one should choose those whom you would disciple. Jesus is our Pattern; and He chose His disciples. Mark tells us: “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve ....”<sup>81</sup> Luke gives us another piece of information which proves to be significant: “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and *He spent the whole night in prayer to God*. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and

<sup>81</sup> Mark 3:13-14



chose twelve of them....”<sup>82</sup> Jesus sought the Father in prayer; and the Father told Jesus whom to disciple.

In the words of Isaiah (which have become very personal and meaningful to me), Jesus chose **“those whom the Lord has given”**.<sup>83</sup> This was the second thing the Holy Spirit impressed upon me: WHO we disciple should be **“those whom the Lord has given”**. But, how do we recognize **“those whom the Lord has given”**? Admittedly, by virtue of His oneness with the Father, the process was more inherent for Jesus, but I have learned the following:

- 1) As with all guidance from the Lord, “because of practice, (you) have your senses trained”<sup>84</sup> – that is, you have “disciplined (yourself) for the purpose of godliness”,<sup>85</sup> and have learned to be “led by the Spirit”,<sup>86</sup> recognizing what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing.
- 2) Let the person share his heart and mind. See what it is that he is actually desiring. Is it truly discipleship he is seeking?

<sup>82</sup> Luke 6:12-13

<sup>83</sup> Isaiah 8:18

<sup>84</sup> Hebrews 5:14

<sup>85</sup> 1 Timothy 4:7

<sup>86</sup> Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18

Is it Revelation, Relationship and Reflection of Christ? Or is it merely some form of self- aggrandizement through the pursuit of spiritual people, places and things?

- 3) Knowing the nature of discipleship, as we have been discussing it, helps in recognizing those who are truly seeking discipleship.

So, which is it with discipling relationships? CHOSEN or GIVEN? Both. Through spiritual discernment, I endeavor to recognize **“those whom the Lord has given”**, and base my “choices” upon that recognition in the Spirit.

Another word about **“those whom the Lord has given”**:

Who has the Lord already “given” to you? Your own children! And these may be your biological children, stepchildren, legally adopted children, informally “adopted” children. The Kingdom of God - God’s Household – is populated by the Family of God. The “family” is an institution created by God. It is God’s desire that your biological (or nuclear) family also be a spiritual family. Likewise, spiritual parents – those who disciple others – have spiritual families which are based on relationship rather than

organization. Thus, your spiritual family is ALL “those whom the Lord has given” – both biological and spiritual children - whom you are discipling. Like biological families, spiritual families can also be “flawed”; but are characterized by the grace and redemption of God.

### **“Those whom the Lord has given” Online: The New “Local”**

I am remembering a conversation that took place about 20 years ago: I had a part-time job in a Christian bookstore; and while talking with a co-worker, who was considerably younger than myself, she mentioned “an online friend”. I interrupted her saying, “What do you mean, ‘an online *friend*’.” I told her I could not imagine using the term “friend” for someone I knew only on the Internet. I realized then that the definition of “friend”, or at least the dynamics of “friendship”, had changed for those in the younger generations, who spent much more time communicating on the Internet than I had at that point in my life. Well, needless to say, 20 years later, I also have come to spend much more time communicating on the Internet; and in very recent years, Internet communication has become my primary vehicle in the work of

ministry. I now also have many “online friendships” with Christians literally all over the world.<sup>87</sup> And, I now have no problem referring to a good many of these people as “friends”. In my estimation, the quality and quantity of our communication with one another exceeds that which I share with many “offline friends”. I realize that not everyone is highly active communicating on the Internet; but this can only be said of older generations. It does not apply to younger generations – all over the world, almost all younger people are highly active communicating on the Internet. Conventional methodologies assign discipleship to the arena of “the local church”. I would like to suggest that the conventional perception of “local church” needs to be reconsidered in light of the Kingdom of God and the New Covenant.<sup>88</sup> If the concept of “local church” is going to be associated with discipling at all, then I suggest that, in discerning **“those whom the Lord has given”**, we consider what relationships we see already established in our lives which are NOT LIMITED TO those relationships we have in what is conventionally considered the “local church”.

<sup>87</sup> Some, I have known “in person” for years when we lived in another country or another state, but now relate to them primarily on the Internet. Others, I have never met “in person”, yet have been communicating with them for years on the Internet.

<sup>88</sup> Suggested reading: *Custom & Command* by Stan Firth, my series of essays entitled, *A New & Living Way*, as well as, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum.

Discipling takes place in the arena of the Kingdom of God - the Household of God – the Family of God - even with people who are not yet regenerated Christians. Those people are *potentially* regenerated Christians<sup>89</sup> – that is, those whom we are evangelizing – giving witness to and teaching Christ to. Discipleship can begin even before regeneration. I must admit that this perspective is relatively new to me – I had always considered discipleship only for “real” and “serious” Christians. But, while discipleship IS “real” Christianity and IS “serious” Christianity, I cannot give a scriptural basis in support of discipleship being only for regenerated Christians. In fact, when Jesus clearly set out the terms of discipleship – namely, “Take up your cross daily, deny yourself, lose your life for My sake” - He said that to His disciples BEFORE THEY WERE REGENERATED.<sup>90</sup> But, He set out the same terms of discipleship to crowds of PEOPLE WHO HAD NOT YET MADE A COMMITMENT TO HIS LORDSHIP AS WELL.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> I have quite intentionally used the term, “potentially”, in light of scripture passages such as, John 3:3-8 and Romans 8:9-17, which clearly define a “Christian” – “in the Kingdom of God” and “in the Family of God” - as one who has received the Spirit of Christ and been regenerated.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 10:38-39, 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24.

<sup>91</sup> Mark 8:34-35 (Cf. v. 34); Luke 14:27 (Cf. v.25)

It may be that most discipling relationships are "local", in the conventional sense of the word. But, who are those in "our locality"? People we relate to only at school or work? People we relate to only once or twice per week at church meetings? I would like to suggest that "local" should be redefined to mean **those with whom we spend the most time relating to**. I doubt there should be any debating the fact that we "relate" much more with some people via various Internet formats<sup>92</sup> than with some other people who are "local" in the conventional sense. I believe it would be difficult to make a convincing argument that physical locality truly affords much more "authenticity" and "accountability". I certainly do not believe that to be true – even after more than 40 years of experience in "local churches". How often do we see those in our "local church"? How much heart to heart interaction and mind to mind communication actually takes place in a Sunday morning "worship service" or Tuesday night prayer meeting or Wednesday night Bible study, or Friday night cell group meeting?

<sup>92</sup> Not merely Facebook and Twitter, but also blog sites, websites, as well as, audio and video recordings, "podcasts", and video conferencing, et. al., but particularly, emailing personal letters, articles, notes, etc.

Either by direct personal experience in the practice of letter writing, or by reading the published letters of various personalities, one can see that written communication affords the possibility of the depth and width of human communication in both quality and quantity. Granted, too often the communication taking place on the various Internet formats is in “sound bites” and images, but this “dumbed-down” form of communication is not universally the case, and it is certainly not a necessity. The various Internet formats actually present multiple vehicles for effective and enhanced communication. The Internet is simply what you make it.

Personally, I highly esteem my “online friendships” – some of which have been maintained for 20 years – as the content of our communications far exceeds most of what I have experienced in “local church” times of sharing. If one is so motivated, communication via the various Internet formats can be – and is – much more engaging and of higher quality than the standard fare that takes place at “church meetings”.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Again, I am well-aware, and occasionally guilty, of the nonsense posted on various social media sites. But, again, that does not have to be the case, and is decidedly not always the case. I am firmly convinced that the Internet, for better or worse, is simply what you make it.

I know this is controversial and vulnerable to criticism, but I am suggesting that our perception, understanding, practice, and working definition of the "local expression of the universal Body of Christ" be reconsidered to be not as limiting as the conventional church claims it to be.<sup>94</sup>

The Scriptures do tell us what we should be doing together. BUT – that is definitely contingent upon what people make themselves available to do together, and what the context of the gathering allows us to do together. Instead of what we conventionally do in "worship services" when we "go to church", we should be obeying the Lord's commission - **disciple all peoples**, *"not forsaking our own assembling together"*<sup>95</sup> **with "those whom the Lord has given"**.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Again, in relation to this concept of "local", I would highly recommend an article by Chip Brogden entitled "*Family, Fellowship, and Leadership*": <https://www.chipbrogden.com/family-fellowship-and-leadership/>

<sup>95</sup> Hebrews 10:25. I suggest the commentary by Peter Ditzel, "*Hebrews 10:25: What are We Not to Forsake?*": [https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/hebrews\\_1025/](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/hebrews_1025/) What we are not to forsake is our hope - our hope of gathering together with Christ at His Return. Greek: *episunagoge*, Strong's # 1997. Cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27. Every mention of this word is in reference to gathering with Christ. There is no scripture in the New Testament – including Hebrews 10:25 – which tells us to "not forsake going to church".

<sup>96</sup> Isaiah 8:18



# The Fruit of Discipleship

Each relationship – including those with one’s biological children – is significantly unique and different.

The spiritual quality and fruit in a ministry relationship will vary according to the quality of ...

- humility
- teachability
- earnest desire

... on the part of the one being disciplined.

Also, the spiritual quality and fruit in a ministry relationship will vary according to the quality of ...

- love (self-denial)
- patience
- sensitivity
- experience
- wisdom

... of the one doing the discipling.

The one who would disciple cannot give what he does not have. The one who would be disciplined will only receive what he desires to receive. This is true in all relationships; and it is true in all forms of ministry.

It seems that, in our present generation, relatively few young people are SEEKING mentorship from older Christians.<sup>97</sup> Of course, it may also be said that relatively few older Christians are making themselves AVAILABLE for mentorship of young people. In any case, more and more, we have people mentoring themselves primarily via the Internet. The Internet can be a great source of information; but to that information needs to be added insight, understanding, discernment, and discretion in order to arrive at wisdom. Wisdom is knowing God and walking in His

<sup>97</sup> Various forms of the word “fool” appear in the Book of Proverbs 189 times. The word simply means someone who is not teachable - i.e. not teachable by some authority figure. That person insists on learning solely through personal experience, rather than ALSO through the personal experience of some authority figure. Fools are those who may or may not learn from their own mistakes. Of course, one must interact and relate to the “right” authority figure. As far as beginning to identify “the right authority figure” goes - one needs to bear in mind that “the fool says in his heart there is no God”. (Psalms 14:1 & 53:1) “The beginning of wisdom is reverential respect of God.” (Proverbs 9:10, Psalm 111:10). This “godliness” (Greek: *theosebeia*, Strong’s # 2317, reverential respect for God) must be characteristic of both the one being disciplined and the one discipling.

ways.<sup>98</sup> A significant aspect of the pursuit of wisdom is intentional SEEKING OUT a mentoring discipleship relationship with older Christians, and DRAWING OUT from them that which is of Christ. In my experience, young people who understand and appreciate this spiritual reality, and are motivated to SEEK OUT and DRAW OUT Christ in a mentoring relationship with older Christians, are fairly rare. As with godly biological children, godly spiritual children are also wonderful blessings to those who disciple.<sup>99</sup> This is the greatest blessing: Through discipling “those whom the Lord has given”, my wife and I have been afforded the opportunity to learn much of the Father’s heart and the mind of Christ.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Proverbs 9:10 (Cf. 30:3); Psalms 95:10 (Cf. Hebrews 3:10). I deal more fully with the components, as well as, nature and definition of wisdom in my teaching, “*Wisdom*”. For a complimentary copy of this teaching in .pdf format, email: AtChrist’sTable@gmail.com

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Psalms 127 & 128.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. “The Father’s Heart” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2psxCnyY6Pw>  
For a complimentary copy of “The Father’s Heart” in .pdf format, email: AtChrist’sTable@gmail.com

Bill & Frances Furioso  
~ At Christ's Table ~



Just a little bit about ourselves ...

We have been married for 37 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Being an avid student by nature, I have done formal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology.

We served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years helping to establish churches and train church leaders. Our Bible teaching ministry has also taken us to other countries like Zimbabwe, Brazil, and England, as well as, throughout the United States.

We have pastored several churches, and as an itinerant Bible teacher, I have ministered in hundreds of churches on four continents. As a writer, I've authored many publications which are distributed to church leaders worldwide.

We minister together speaking in churches, leading spiritual formation seminars, personal mentoring, and administrating an international partnership of church leaders, which includes occasional overseas missions.

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