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In Search of a Useful Concept of Discipleship in the Gospels

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IN SEARCH OF A USEFUL CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP
IN THE GOSPELS

by
Lawson E. Brown

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Approved by:

Major Professor Wayne McCoun

Cooperative Reader _____

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The author will begin his task by stating the problem, giving reasons justifying the study. He will then briefly discuss his method of procedure, his assumptions, and his definition of given terms.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The author will put forth his thesis in the form of a question, as follows: Is there a useful concept of discipleship to be found in the New Testament gospels? Is it possible to extrapolate principles useful for contemporary discipleship models?

Justification for the Study

The greatest imperative left by Christ to His Church is clearly delineated in His last words, as recorded by Matthew:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."¹

Jesus has clearly declared, then, that every person whom He has called to Himself must accept the mandate to disciple others. Certainly, then, every called minister is a discipler.² The firm

¹New American Standard Bible (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1960), Matthew 28:18b-20.

²The word "minister" here refers to that one whom Christ

belief of the author is that not every minister knows what it means to disciple. In his book, Your Church Can Grow, C. P. Wagner has clearly indicated his conviction that the Great Commission is not simply an appeal to procure "decisions." Rather, the Great Commission is a plea to the membership of the Church to "make disciples." Disciples are committed, continuing Christians, given to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, actively involved in the edification of His Church.³

If then, the command is to disciple, the church ought to have in its possession a biblical concept of discipleship. The apprehension and application of a biblical concept of discipleship, then, is the burden of the author of this thesis.

METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Background Study

Before actually approaching the New Testament gospels to develop a biblical concept of discipleship, the author will trace the history of the use of the word disciple (mathētēs). The two major sources consulted are Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, and The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Colin Brown. The major effort of this research is to compare the religious educational techniques of later Judaism with the learning dynamics of the master-disciple relationship, as initiated by Jesus.

appoints in His body to equip the saints (cf. Ephesians 4:11 ff.).

³C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Glendale, California: Regal Books of Gospel Light Publications, 1976), p. 31.

Developing the Concept

The author will then proceed to approach the New Testament gospels, implementing the inductive approach to Bible study. His research will depend largely upon the use of A Harmony of the Gospels, by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry. The translation consulted is New American Standard Bible. Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible, Gingrich's Shorter Lexicon of the New Testament, The Greek New Testament, and several commentaries have also been used as tools. The author has familiarized himself with several books addressed to the topic of discipleship as well. However, he wishes to emphasize the fact that the bulk of his time has been given to personal study of the gospels, using the tools mentioned heretofore. Some word studies have been included, but this is not an area of emphasis. Through the method indicated, the author will defend the formulation of a New Testament concept of discipleship which envelops the treatment of the following areas of emphasis: participants involved, relationships initiated, methods implemented, and content imparted.

Extrapolating Implications

Finally, the author will conclude his thesis, arguing the relevance of the concept he has formulated. Explicit principles will be drawn from the concept, relevant to contemporary discipleship models.

ASSUMPTIONS

Historicity of the Gospels

The author is not at all in sympathy with those theologians who refute the historicity of the gospels.⁴ He is convinced that not only do the gospels give witness to eternal truths, but just as important, they have been written with meticulous concern for historical accuracy, and further, that they have been preserved with this same degree of accuracy.

Validity of Harmonization

Without the most valuable contribution of Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry in A Harmony of the Gospels, the progress of the writer would have been greatly hindered. For the task at hand, the appreciation of time and sequence in the gospel narratives is of great assistance. Thomas and Gundry have afforded this for the writer, and have convinced him of the legitimacy of harmonization.⁵

Authority of the Scriptures

The author believes that the Scriptures "constitute the revealed Word of God, as the only supreme, sufficient, and

⁴For example, the author does not accept the opinion of Jesuit Joseph Fitzmeyer, Scripture scholar at the Catholic University of America, who writes the following: "The truth of the Gospels is not simply historical and anyone who tries to identify their truth with historicity is misunderstanding them completely." From "Searching for the Real Jesus," Newsweek, December, 1979, p. 49.

⁵Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, "Is a Harmony of the Gospels Legitimate," A Harmony of the Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), pp. 265-268.

authoritative rule of faith and practice"6 As such, the Bible is authoritative for matters related to the propagation of the Good News. Entailed in this, is the imperative of the way of discipleship. The gospels, then, have much to say directly and by way of implication concerning the dynamics of discipleship in the life of the believer.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Word "Useful"

A New Testament concept of discipleship is useful if it provides a resource for the formulation of principles which prove to be relevant for the establishment of a foundation for contemporary discipleship models.

The Word "Concept"

A concept is a construct. A concept is the amalgamation of facts which, when synthesized, result in the formulation of an idea or theory. Biblical concepts, if they are indeed biblical, are authoritative for the faith and practice of the believer and Christ's Church.

The Word "Disciple"

The Greek word, mathētēs, means learner, pupil, or disciple. In the New Testament sense, a disciple is one who follows after Christ, entering into a personal relationship with Him, committing himself in obedience, and placing personal belief in His very person.

⁶Taken from the "Statement of Faith," Western Evangelical Seminary Catalog, 1979-80, p. 16.

The Word "Discipleship"

Discipleship refers to all that is involved in the dynamics of the master-disciple relationship. The specifics of this relationship will soon be explicated.

The Word "Principle"

A principle is a "truth that is foundation for other truths; a fundamental belief."⁷

The Word "Model"

A model is a copy of an original. In this case, modern discipleship models are not necessarily precise imitations of Christ's discipleship model. Rather, contemporary models should provide structures which are built upon principles derived from the example of Christ's discipleship model.

⁷Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., The World Book Dictionary, Vol. II (Chicago, London, Rome, Stockholm, Sydney, Toronto: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1969), p. 1694.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DISCIPLESHIP

The burden of the author of this thesis is to arrive at a thoroughly biblical understanding of the concept of discipleship. The purpose of this endeavor is to make useful application for contemporary discipleship models. Fundamental to any good biblical research is careful examination of context. The author, then, has chosen to discuss briefly historical considerations which may have been significant to Christ's unique use of the discipleship concept.

GREEK ORIGINS

The Greek word rendering the English word "disciple" is mathētēs (μαθητής). In close connection with this word is the word rendered "teacher," or didaskalos (διδάσκαλος). Dr. K. H. Rengstorff, author of the essay on mathētēs in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, traces the word to its earliest literary use. Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 448-425 B.C.), the first real Greek historian, was the first to use the word. Its use here "takes on the sense of pupil" ¹ This general use of the word carries with it an emphasis upon "the fact that the one thus designated is engaged in learning, that his education consists in the appropriation or adoption

¹Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 416.

of specific knowledge or conduct, and that it proceeds deliberately and according to a set plan."² The general Greek use implies "a direct dependence of the one under instruction upon an authority superior in knowledge, and which emphasizes the fact that this relation cannot be dissolved" ³ The skill or learning imparted may be an art, such as weaving, medicine, or music, or perhaps a philosophical orientation, as in the case of the school of the Sophists. One is seen as a mathētēs only when he is bound to a didaskalos, "a master or teacher to whom the mathētēs . . . generally had to pay a fee."⁴ In a broader sense, and obviously an exception, the mathētēs is linked intellectually to a thinker removed in time. Rengstorf illustrates this connection by mentioning the accepted view that Socrates is the true mathētēs of Homer in that he is an imitator of Homer.⁵

Socrates rejected the teacher-pupil model, however. He never saw himself as a didaskalos, nor did he ever want to have any mathētēs. He had in mind a communal relationship, where both the teacher and the one taught committed themselves to the pursuit of a common goal, "such as the knowledge of morality" ⁶ This led far beyond the formal relationship between mathētēs and didaskalos to the mutual fellowship between two, and this to such an extent that the latter became fundamental to the whole relationship.⁷

²Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 416. ³Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 416.

⁴Colin Brown, ed., The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 484.

⁵Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 417. ⁶Brown, Vol. I, p. 484.

⁷Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 417.

So Socrates desired to dispense with the Sophistic didaskalos-mathētēs relationship and in its place institute a far superior means of learning, the master-disciple relationship. The term mathētēs, then, gradually fell out of use, alternative words taking its place, "such as hetairos, friend; gnōrimos, expert; akolouthos, follower."⁸

The master-disciple relation appeared in religious realms of learning, as well as in the philosophical schools. The mystery religions employed such a relationship. Rengstorf records these as being quite impersonal with a high degree of anonymity prevailing.⁹ However, there were other master-disciple relations with religious aspects. "There is a definite religious side to the relation in men like Pythagoras, Epicurus, and Appolonius of Tyana."¹⁰ He sees the relationships developed here as all possessing one common element, "namely, the religious veneration of the master by his disciples."¹¹

After the death of the great philosophical teachers of antiquity, closely knit groups or fellowships of disciples were assembled. Their purpose was to preserve the insights and sayings peculiar to their masters. Out of this commitment to the master came "the principle of tradition."¹² Entailed in this is a life-style involving constant outward expression of an inward commitment to the master. "At issue here is that the intentions of the master should be cultivated, and his sayings carefully preserved and transmitted."¹³ The principle is found even beyond the time of the New Testament.¹⁴

⁸Brown, Vol. I, p. 484. ⁹Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 421.

¹⁰Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 421. ¹¹Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 421.

¹²Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 424. ¹³Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 424.

¹⁴Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 424.

One readily sees, then, that integral to the master-disciple relationship of the Hellenistic world is the inner commitment to propagate the teachings and insights of the master.

ABSENCE IN OLD TESTAMENT

The word mathētēs does not occur in the Septuagint.¹⁵ The Hebrew word talmid (תַּלְמִיד), a pupil, which becomes very important for later Rabbinic usage, is found but once in I Chronicles 25:8.¹⁶ "Apart from the formal relationship of teacher and pupil, the Old Testament, unlike the classical Greek world and Hellenism, has no master-disciple relation."¹⁷ For example, Joshua was not Moses' disciple. He was sent as Moses' servant and eventually his successor, and this by the express command of God. The Old Testament prophets did not train and work with disciples. Elisha served Elijah, Gehazi rendered service to Elisha, and Baruch assisted Jeremiah; there were no master-disciple relationships here.¹⁸

In sharp contrast to the Greek world, also, is the complete absence of the principle of tradition. The Old Testament is consciously Mosaic, but it is not Moses who is venerated; his place in history and contribution to the religious life of the community is what is important.¹⁹ The differences delineated heretofore are striking. One cannot help but query the absence of the master-disciple relationship and its corresponding principle of tradition.

¹⁵Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 426. ¹⁶Brown, Vol. I, p. 485.

¹⁷Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 427. ¹⁸Kittel, Vol. IV, pp. 428-429.

¹⁹Kittel, Vol. IV, pp. 429-430.

The answer is obvious when one considers the character and purpose of the Hebrew people:

The lack of any Old Testament vocabulary for a learner, such as the teacher-pupil relationship describes, is bound up with Israel's consciousness of being an elect people. What the individual Israelite has to learn in respect of God's will does not make him a "pupil" in relation to his "master," God. For even as a learner the individual always remains a part of the whole chosen people, all of whom encounter in the divine Word the authority of the Electing One. This excludes any possibility of a disciple-master relationship between men because even the priest and the prophet do not teach on their own authority.²⁰

The Hebrew people, then, is a unique people. Its understanding and means of learning is distinctively different from that of the Greeks. For a more complete picture of the master-disciple relationship before the time of Christ, one needs yet to examine learning models contributed by the Judaic school.

JUDAIC ASSIMILATION

As stated previously, the talmid is a "pupil." Specifically, the talmid is "one who gives himself (as a learner) to Scripture and to the religious tradition of Judaism."²¹ There are two classes of talmidim, a beginner class and a more advanced class. The talmid is the initial step toward the rabbi. Only men are permitted entrance into the talmidim. Talmid is a title of honor. The talmid enjoys high esteem by Jews in the time of later Rabbinism. One who studies the Torah is indeed privileged and is to be respected and deeply honored. His position in society is of extreme importance:

Only the rabbi, on the basis of his familiarity with the materials of religious law, can say for certain what is right in individual cases. Hence the pious ideal is that all Jews should

²⁰Brown, Vol. 1, p. 485. ²¹Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 432.

be occupied in the Torah and its exposition and application, so that they can and will do what is right in a given situation. The fulfillment of this ideal is expected in the Messianic age. This will be a time when all Israelites will zealously study the Torah, and the Messiah will be the great example Until then, the rabbi is indispensable, and talmidim are needed who are preparing for office.²²

No talmid is without a teacher. "Only entry into the fellowship gathered around a teacher, and subjection to the authority of the teacher, constitutes the talmid."²³ The talmid renders services to his rabbi as a sign of his reverence and respect for the Torah, which the rabbi represents. He frequently follows him and asks him questions. Perhaps one of the most important functions of the talmid is that of listening. Listening, for the talmid, involves both hearing and appropriation.²⁴

The goal of the talmid is ordination:

When after several years of association with his master, he had become familiar with the oral tradition, he would be called talmid haham and allowed to teach himself and be addressed as Rabbi Since the scribes were generally called Rabbi and referred to as such in the presence of others, Rabbi gradually became the exclusive term for those who had completed their studies and been ordained as teachers of the Law.²⁵

As a result of their prominence in the task of teaching, great rabbis formed schools. The fellowship of talmidim under the rabbi became an avenue of influence. The individual talmid became the representative of the tradition established by the rabbi and a member of succeeding generations of the school. Although individual teachers were influenced in determining the content of instruction, Rabbinic Judaism is thoroughly Mosaic. Moses was and is "the starting-point

²²Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 432. ²³Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 434.

²⁴Kittel, Vol. IV, pp. 434-435. ²⁵Kittel, Vol. IV, pp. 962-963.

and absolute teacher."²⁶

The Old Testament was not instrumental in shaping the Rabbinic approach to learning. The development of the Judaic model of learning has been attributed to Hellenistic influences.²⁷ "For here were schools in the sense of fellowships of disciples, and here, too, the principle of tradition was accepted."²⁸ Rengstorf convincingly defends this premise, concluding that "the talmid as such came into Judaism from the educative process of the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical schools."²⁹

UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST'S MODEL

Before drawing attention to the distinctives of Christ's discipleship model, it is important to emphasize a point of significance, not always apparent. Christ was not the first to implement the master-disciple relationship. As indicated, Socrates and others of the Greek ancients employed this same model. Later, the Jewish community was profoundly influenced through Judaic assimilation of this same relationship. So when Christ began His public ministry, He entered the religious system and used it for His own purposes:

Clearly, Jesus came forward like a Rabbi or Scribe. He taught and discussed like one (Mark 12:18 ff.), and was asked to make legal decisions (Luke 12:13 ff.). Even if he was not recognized by

²⁶Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 437.

²⁷The master-disciple relationship is specifically referred to here.

²⁸Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 438.

²⁹For a complete argument, consult Rengstorf's five observations with respect to Hellenistic and Rabbinic learning models, Vol. IV, pp. 438-439.

many, because he had not passed through a Rabbinic school (Mark 6:2, John 7:15), it was certainly with justice that he was addressed as "Rabbi" by his disciples (Mark 9:5; 11:21; John 1:38, 4:31) and outsiders (cf. John 3:2).³⁰

To add even more evidence to this argument, one needs only to recall the references of the writers of the gospels to the disciples of John the Baptist. They are mentioned in connection with John's imprisonment (Matthew 11:2 ff.). After his death, they buried his body (Mark 6:29 ff.). As his disciples, they possessed their own form of prayer (Luke 11:10), they fasted (Mark 2:18 ff.), and at some points are seen in controversy with the Jews (John 3:25).³¹ These men "were adherents of a movement from which it is possible that Jesus Himself came. At any rate, John 1:25 ff. reports that Jesus' first two disciples originated from the Baptist's circle of disciples."³² Viewing the ministry of Christ from this vantage point, He is seen as one who enters the mainstream of religious life, moving from the familiar to the new. But there are notable differences in Christ's method of building disciples that make His approach unique.

Entry Into Discipleship

In later Judaism, if a man desired to enter the talmidim, he would go to the master of his choice and petition to become a talmid.³³ Entry, then, would depend primarily upon a voluntary decision. With Jesus, however, it was His call that was decisive.

And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."³⁴

³⁰Brown, Vol. I, p. 488. ³¹Brown, Vol. I, p. 487.

³²Brown, Vol. I, p. 487. ³³Brown, Vol. I, p. 488.

³⁴New American Standard Bible (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman

And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alpheus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose and followed Him (Mark 2:14).

The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip, and Jesus said to him, "Follow Me" (John 1:43).

And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59).

Jesus took the initiative in calling men to discipleship. Some followed, others would not.

At this point, it should be noted that Christ did not call everyone personally. Numerous references indicate a larger group of disciples (Matthew 12:15; Luke 6:17; 19:37; John 6:60, 66). Perhaps it is necessary to speak in terms of two groups of disciples, "a wider circle of those who believe in Him and a narrow circle which always accompanies Him."³⁵ John records later how this larger group is reduced (John 6:66). In a very real sense, however, the true disciple is one who is first called. For it is the Father who knows the genuine disciple. "And he was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father'" (John 6:65).

One might well be curious to ask who it is that is called. At this juncture Christ's method differs again from the procedure of the religious community. One could safely assume that the prospective talmid is one inclined to studying and academic pursuits. This is not a rule for the disciples of Christ. "The circle of disciples is in fact a microcosm of the Judaism of the time."³⁶ The group of twelve represented a divergence of backgrounds and thought. There was Simon

Company, 1960), Mark 1:17. All Scripture references hereafter are taken from this translation, unless otherwise stated.

³⁵Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 445. ³⁶Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 452.

the Zealot, who came from an ambitious and war-like people. There was Matthew the publican, one from a wealthy and disdained class. There were Peter and Andrew, James and John, simple fishermen. Christ had a mission to achieve. He chose men so that a variety of classes and personality types were included. But most important, Christ chose those who were able to respond to His claims.³⁷ His Word to men was universal. Many chose to reject the call. Some received and followed after Him.

Nature of Discipleship

A key difference between Christ's discipleship model and that of the rabbi's is in the personal relationships Jesus developed, as opposed to the formal relationship established between the rabbi and talmid. Of no small significance is the fact that Jesus spent most of His time with His disciples. At the beginning of His ministry, He spent more time with the multitudes preaching, teaching, and healing. Contrary to what many assume, Christ did not appoint His disciples near the beginning of His ministry. According to Thomas and Gundry, editors of A Harmony of the Gospels, He did not appoint the Twelve until the elapse of at least eighteen months from the time of the beginning of His ministry.³⁸ Now of course, there are several men who are recorded by the gospel writers as being in association with Him from the beginning. John records Jesus' association with Andrew and Peter, and some believe John and James are implied associates as well

³⁷Full discussion will be given concerning eligibility for discipleship in a later section.

³⁸Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 348.

at this point.³⁹ One day later, Jesus bade Philip and Nathaniel to follow Him. However, these six did not become His permanent followers at this point, for it was approximately one year later when Jesus called the four from their fishing nets.⁴⁰ Apparently, they had returned to their occupations as fishermen somewhere during the interim. In an attempt to harmonize the gospels, Thomas and Gundry refer to a second call, as recorded by Luke.⁴¹ This means, of course, that the four returned once more to their occupation after a tour of Galilee, until Jesus called them a second time. "After responding to this second call, they seem to have remained with Jesus permanently."⁴²

The point of all this is simple, yet notable. Jesus did not appoint the Twelve as His official disciples until ample time had elapsed for them to have come to observe His ministry, to make value judgments, and quite possibly, to have come to know Him in a personal way. There is enough evidence indicating that this is true for at least half of the disciples.⁴³ Christ's practice of befriending

³⁹John 1:40 clearly mentions Andrew and Peter. However, 1:37 indicates two first walked with Jesus. Peter was not one of the two. John avoids mentioning himself in his gospel. This fact, together with verse 41 suggest four initial associates: Andrew and John, and later, Peter and James.

⁴⁰Thomas and Gundry, p. 348. This first call is recorded in Matthew 4:18-22, and Mark 1:16-20.

⁴¹The argument here is that Luke's account in 5:1-11 contains considerable differences from Matthew and Mark's description of the apparent first call (footnote 40). For more discussion, consult Thomas and Gundry, p. 52.

⁴²Thomas and Gundry, p. 52.

⁴³John and Andrew, James and Peter, Philip and Nathaniel from the very beginning. Matthew some time later. So the first six knew Him for a year and one-half before the official appointment. Matthew followed Him perhaps nine months before the official appointment

sinners comes to light at this point. Before He called men to discipleship, He came to know them first. Simply stated, discipleship begins with friendship.

Clearly, Jesus had a wider circle of disciples from which He appointed the Twelve (Luke 6:13). Luke states that He chose the Twelve "whom He also named as apostles" (Luke 6:13b). Perhaps Mark gives more insight concerning the appointment of the Twelve: "And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and He gave them authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15). Older manuscripts coincide with Luke's account by adding the words, "whom He named apostles."⁴⁴ From these two passages, the reader may observe that Jesus chose the Twelve from a larger circle of disciples, as an official appointment of a smaller group who were chosen for the purpose of companionship and particularly for the purpose of ministry as apostles. The reader is aware that this was an important event in the ministry of Christ for He prayed all night before making the official designation (Luke 6:12).

Approximately six months after His calling the Twelve, Jesus travelled a long circuitous route from the Mediterranean coast to the eastern shore of Galilee. He was now in the same area where He had delivered the two Gerasene demoniacs.⁴⁵ On this occasion, He healed

(Thomas and Gundry, p. 348).

⁴⁴Kurt Aland and other eds., The Greek New Testament (New York: American Bible Society, 1966), p. 130.

⁴⁵Matthew mentions two demoniacs. Mark and Luke speak of one. "Apparently there were two demon-possessed men, but Mark and Luke single out the one who was leader" (Thomas and Gundry, p. 88).

the deaf mute. Of interest is the fact that Christ asked the deaf mute not to tell anyone of his healing, but earlier he instructed the demoniacs to spread the news widely (Mark 7:36, Luke 8:39). From the beginning, Jesus concentrated more upon the multitudes. Now, however, increased publicity would have denied Him of much needed time for the special task of training the Twelve. The reader may observe that Jesus seemed to deliberately avoid the attention of the multitude as He took the deaf mute "aside from the multitude by himself" (Mark 7:33a).⁴⁶ This seemed to become more and more a pattern in His ministry from this time forth.

In summary, then, the reader may observe the following. Jesus did not choose the Twelve until midway through His ministry. This allowed ample time for Him to develop informal relationships and to select carefully appropriate candidates. His purpose seemed to be two-fold. First, the Twelve were chosen for companionship. Second, and most important, the Twelve were chosen to assist Him in expanding His ministry through their designation as apostles. A pattern became apparent in the last year of His ministry. Jesus gradually withdrew from an emphasis upon ministry to the multitudes in an attempt to provide more time for the Twelve. His purpose was to train and equip them to propagate the message of the kingdom.

To be a mathētēs, then, meant to be personally attached to Jesus as one's Master.⁴⁷

Mathētēs always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as mathētēs,

⁴⁶Thomas and Gundry, pp. 112, 348.

⁴⁷Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 441.

and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power.⁴⁸

Rengstorf is convinced that no other master-disciple relationship has existed which possessed the degree of personal attachment existent in the case of Christ and the Twelve.⁴⁹ And there is an explicit explanation. Any person who would follow after Christ gave himself to the very person of Christ in a faith commitment. For the disciple following after Socrates, the commitment was to an ideal or system of thought. For the talmid following after the rabbi, the commitment was to the Talmud. For the Christian mathētēs, however, his commitment was not to a philosophy or sacred book, but to his very Lord.⁵⁰

Purpose of Discipleship

The Greek master and disciple shared the mutual endeavor of seeking knowledge. The rabbi and talmid sought not only to know the Scriptures, but to enjoy the esteem ascribed to them in the apprehension of knowledge. The ultimate purpose of the mathētēs related to Christ, however, is to give witness to his Lord, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God.⁵¹ The motivation of the mathētēs, therefore, is radically different from the motivation of the talmid. As will be discussed later, the cost of discipleship is great. This is keenly realized when one contemplates Christ's instructions concerning the inevitability of suffering (Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:38). The way of discipleship means self-denial, endurance, and hardship. To be a

⁴⁸Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 441. ⁴⁹Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 442.

⁵⁰This theme will be developed in the section, "Requirements for the Aspiring Disciple."

⁵¹Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 455.

disciple is not merely an exercise of intellectual appropriation. Rather, it is a daily walk of obedience. To be a talmid means honor and reward. To be a mathētēs means loving Christ. And in this, there is sacrifice. The reward, however, is the promise of knowing Him now, and in eternity. Simply stated, the heart motivation of the talmid is ambition; the heart motivation of the mathētēs is to know Christ and lead others to this knowledge. And he seeks after Him because it is right to do so, for Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life.

A disciple's task, then, does not consist in propagating a particular teaching about Jesus. Christ was not interested in any "principle of tradition." There is no doubt that Christ was opposed to traditionalism (Mark 3:1 ff.; Luke 13:10 ff.).⁵² "The essence of discipleship lies in the disciple's fulfillment of his duty to be a witness to his Lord in his entire life."⁵³

⁵²Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 454. ⁵³Brown, Vol. I, p. 490.

Chapter 3

NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP

Having gained an appreciation of the historical development of the master-disciple relationship, and having come to understand something of the religious learning milieu existent during the period of Christ's earthly ministry, one can then proceed to search out the New Testament concept of discipleship. The author has chosen to limit his study to the gospels. In his study of the same, four distinctive areas of importance emerged which together formulate a concept of discipleship. The first relates to the individual participants involved in the master-disciple relationship. The second has to do with relationships initiated and developed by the participants, the third speaks of methods implemented by the Master. And finally, a fourth gleans briefly some of the content, imparted by the Master, having to do with being a disciple.

PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED

As indicated, the participants involved in the master-disciple relationship will be attended to individually. The author will begin, giving his attention to the character and person of Jesus Christ.

The Person of the Master Discipler

Perhaps the greatest insight the author has apprehended in this entire pursuit is the profound realization that the success of

Christ's ministry depended primarily upon His own person. This is not intended to emphasize that "part" of His person which is divine. Rather, it is the complete and wholly integrated nature of His human personality which is referred to here.¹ Further, it is the author's conviction that Christ's wholly integrated personality was developed as a direct result of His self-knowledge, and companion to this, His singleness of purpose. Finally, the author wishes to demonstrate the fact that the manifestation of this complete personality is apparent in Christ's ability to love perfectly.

For every man's life, there is a motive, a driving force which serves as an impetus for him to live out his existence. When one studies the life of Christ, he cannot help but query the source or essence of His motivation. Christ's ability to give was phenomenal. The gospel writers, in their sincere efforts to record an accurate narrative of the life of Christ, have etched into the mind of the author an impression of the person of Christ which he will never forget. Christ was a person totally God-minded, totally self-less. This realization became increasingly salient as the author sought the concept of discipleship in the gospels. In a day when secular humanism pervades so much of American education, one might be inclined to see Christ as a man wholly given to the passion of self-actualization. But this was not the motivation of Christ. Let the reader mark the words of Christ: "'My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work'" (John 4:34). And He proved the veracity of

¹Analysis of Christ's person is not intended here. The author confesses his lack of understanding with respect to the God-man nature of Christ. For the purposes of this part of the thesis, he has chosen to speak of His person in terms of "human personality."

His words, when He prayed at the hour of perhaps His greatest need, "'Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt'" (Mark 14:36).

Christ's single purpose was to do the will of His Father.

One might well ask, then, from where Christ learned to attain to this degree of commitment. It seems that the answer must, in part, be due to the fact that Christ knew who He was. John records these words: "'For I have come down from Heaven, not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent Me'" (John 6:38). In the same conversation, He states:

"I am the bread of life I am the living bread that came down out of Heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:48, 51a).

Knowing who He was, Christ's will was fixed. He had come to do His Father's will. Christ, then, possessing full self-awareness, in an act of volition, set His will to do the will of the Father.

Perhaps of significance at this point, is the fact that Christ's will was tested before He entered His public ministry: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan. He resisted the temptation to satisfy the greatest fleshly desire (Matthew 4:4). He resisted the human desire for fame and power (Luke 4:8). He resisted Satan's suggestion to assert His own authority by presuming upon His Father's will. Christ's loyalty was well defined. He defeated Satan, pinning him with the Word of God.

The gospel writers, then, present Jesus as a fully grown, mature man at the point of His entrance into His ministry. Concerning His youthful years, Luke writes, "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and

stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). He was baptized by John the Baptist, and the same day the Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21-22). He entered His ministry at age thirty, a full grown, mature man (Luke 3:23). Not long after, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tested. Christ was fully prepared to minister before He entered His ministry.

Not only was Christ prepared and fully given to doing His Father's will, He was also aware of the specific tasks promulgated by the will of His Father:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are downtrodden,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Inherent in all of this was the message of the Kingdom of God. Christ came to proclaim the dominion of God in heaven, in the hearts of men, and eventually on earth.² This was the burning passion of His heart. This consuming passion was so innate to His person, that one could quite possibly interpret and gain insight into every behavior and choice of method which Christ exercised. This insight will take on greater meaning at later points in this thesis.

In summary, then, let it be said that Christ was a person possessing a fully integrated personality. The author has posited that this was so because of Christ's complete self-awareness and singleness of purpose. Jesus Christ knew that He was God's Son, and He had set His will to do the will of His Father. Further, the will of the

²The author chooses to avoid discussion of the meaning of the Kingdom of God in detail at this point. This question affords room for yet another thesis.

Father was administrated in Christ's manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Finally, the author wishes to briefly illustrate particular aspects of Christ's personality, relating them to the dominant behavior of Christ, that being, His constant love.

Dependence upon God—self-discipline. Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as a person of ability. He seemed to be able to enter any situation and say or do the right thing. But one would be mistaken if he would assume that Jesus achieved remarkable successes through human resources. The gospel writers record several instances where Christ spent time in prayer. Before appointing the Twelve, He spent the entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12, 13). Other times, He rose up early to pray:

And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; and they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for you." And He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for" (Mark 1:35-39).

One can observe, in both these examples, the fact that Christ initiated some new action after prayer. Christ was in prayer so that He might gain wisdom for particular situations from His Father.

He also spent time in prayer to gain strength and power:

And his disciples [John the Baptist's] came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. Now when Jesus heard it, He withdrew from there to a boat, to a lonely place by Himself; and when the multitudes heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick (Matthew 14:12-14).

Here one observes Christ retreating to be alone, after hearing the news of His cousin's death. No doubt this was a time of earnest prayer and

drawing upon the strength of God. Apparently, however, it was not long after that Christ was able to resume His ministry of giving. Christ knew that His Father was a Provider of wisdom and strength. And He disciplined Himself to be in a place to draw upon this strength. This was a conscious effort on His part, and He gave up sleep and food to exploit the resources of His Father.

Ability to give. Just as self-discipline in prayer was an act of love, so too was Christ's life of giving. As indicated, Christ was able to give supernaturally because He drew upon the resources of His Father. There is no need to discuss at length the fact that Christ was a giver. His selfless behavior and tender-hearted care for the sick and spiritually depraved pervades each of the gospel accounts. As the author studies the gospels, he was challenged by Christ's constant willingness to give. Surely Jesus was exhausted many times, yet He was moved by the needs of the people and their confidence in His ability to provide. The reader who is familiar with the gospel accounts will conjure up scenes of the giving Christ when he recalls even a few familiar accounts. For example, let him recall the lame man restored to health on the Sabbath, the healing of Centurion's servant, the widow's son raised at Nain, the deliverance of the Gerasene demoniacs, the feeding of the five thousand, the blind man healed at Bethsaida, Lazarus raised from the dead, the ten cleansed lepers, His loving forgiveness for the immoral woman who anointed His feet with precious perfume. Indeed, Christ's commitment to give is the most obvious aspect of His loving. After giving details of His greatest act of giving, His passion, John closes his account with the

following:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written (John 21:25).

Friend of sinners. Related to His ability to give, is Christ's desire to befriend those who were lost and separated from God. As in so many areas, He was an artist in the area of social skills. Jesus met people well. Peter received a new name the first time he met Christ. Jesus seemed to perceive Peter's real potential when He gave him a name which promised a change from weakness to stability and strength (John 1:42).³ When He met Nathaniel, He paid him a compliment (John 1:47). In calling Matthew, "Jesus went against the theocratic notions of the scribes and Pharisees by calling a person with this background. Matthew responded and left his occupation, never to return to it."⁴ His frequent association with tax collectors and sinners was always sure to be a point of contention for the religious people of His day. But it was the sick that needed the physician, not the healthy, He replied (Matthew 9:12). Whether it was the adulterous Samaritan woman at the well, a dishonest and conniving Zaccheus, or the burly and gruffy fisherman Simon, Jesus always paid attention to the graces of friendship and courtesy.

Unlimited patience. The greatest demonstration of Christ's patience was in His willingness to persist in leading and tending His

³Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 1075.

⁴Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., A Harmony of the Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 55.

disciples in spite of their inability to perceive His real mission and person. Several examples could be cited here. Suffice it to say that the understanding of the disciples was sadly lacking, even at the time of His crucifixion. There was still the hope that Christ's purpose was to organize a physical kingdom. The crushing disappointment at the moment of His crucifixion and their ensuing shock and unbelief concerning His resurrection give evidence to this proposition as well. Perhaps one of the best examples of the patience, sensitivity, and selfless concern of Christ is in His words to Peter just before His prophecy concerning Peter's eventual denial of Christ:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

Faithful confrontation. Dr. Arthur Climenhaga, in a seminary lecture address, said of Jesus: "The flame of His passion was to raise issues Christ compelled men to live on one side or the other."⁵ Jesus was not unfaithful to His Father's call to the ministry of confrontation. One would do well to consider the shocking effect of the following statement: "'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness'" (Luke 11:39). Jesus well understood the insincerity and deceptiveness of their hearts, the anemic condition of their worship, and the societal injustices existent in that day. He spoke out boldly against these sins at every opportunity. His grief

⁵Lecture delivered by Arthur Climenhaga ("Jesus Christ and the Holy Life") at Western Evangelical Seminary, January 23, 1980.

and contempt over their rebellion and depravity became animated when He drove them out of the temple, whip in hand (John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-13). This aspect of His ministry is one of the strongest testimonies of His commitment to love His people. Christ cared enough even to inflict pain in an effort to restore.

Authoritative ministry. One cannot help but marvel when he studies the life of Christ and observes His ability to enter situations, assert leadership, solve problems, address issues, and heal. In the gospels, the word exousia (ἐξουσία) rendered "authority," is the word which is often used in connection with this ability to minister in a powerful way. Repeatedly, one observes statements like these: "And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes . . . so they debated among themselves, saying 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him'" (Mark 1:22, 27). The ministry of Christ was always placed in antithesis to the activities and reputation of the religious leaders of His day. This contrast was obvious to the people who observed Christ in action. They witnessed the works and teaching of One who had harnessed within Him "the divinely given power and authority to act."⁶

The New Testament word exousia, then, is a word connoting both the idea of authorization and the notion of power.⁷ The gospel writers present Jesus as being fully able to confront Satan's territory.

⁶Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 568.

⁷Kittel, Vol. II, p. 569.

Indeed, "a special feature in this exousia is that it is inseparable from the proclamation that the Kingdom of God is near."⁸ To the seventy, He gave the following instructions:

"And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest of you; yet be sure of this, that the Kingdom of God has come near'" (Luke 10:8-11).

At another point, Matthew quotes Jesus, saying: "'But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you'" (Matthew 12:28). Clearly, Christ was invested with an authority which was manifested by His ability to heal, to forgive sins, to invade the domain of Satan, and which gave evidence of the presence of the Kingdom of God. Simply stated, the Bearer of God's authority was sent to assault and conquer Satan's territory and in so doing, manifest the Kingdom of God.

Summary statement. Christ's success as the master-discipler did not wholly rest in His choice of a method or the implementation of a precise plan of action. These were essentials, as will be demonstrated. The conviction of the author, however, is that Christ persuaded His disciples of His deity through His ability to love perfectly. John emphasizes the theme of love in the life and person of Christ. Significant supporting insights are implied in the new commandment given by Christ: "'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another'" (John 14:34). And later Jesus says, "'Just as the Father has loved

⁸Kittel, Vol. II, p. 569.

Me, I have also loved you; abide in my love'" (John 15:9). Just as Christ was loved by His father, so He loved His disciples. And just as He loved His disciples, so He expected them to love each other. The result is in these words, also given by Christ: "'By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another'" (John 13:35). Just as the world recognized genuine Christianity through the witness of brotherly love, so too the disciples were convinced of the divinity of Christ, for He loved them dearly. One cannot help but be moved when he reads these words from Christ's farewell prayer, as recorded by John: "'While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled'" (John 17:12). Christ's selfless love for His disciples compelled them to come to Himself. And it was this same love that convinced them that He was from God.

This love was not just a feeling, an emotional expression. The author has shown how Christ's dependence upon God, self-discipline, giving nature, ability to befriend, unlimited patience, faithfulness to confront, and His God-given authority have all been motivated out of a heart that loved. This love was not only extended to His disciples, but to all with whom He came in contact. But this is not a comprehensive answer. Christ's passion for people can only be understood when one grasps the total God-minded, self-less nature of Christ only made real in One who knew who He was, and for what purpose He came. Christ came down from Heaven to do the will of His Father. His obedience won the hearts of many who responded through His witness of love.

Requirements for the Aspiring Disciple

Knowing the example Christ established for the "would-be" discipler, one naturally inquires as to the necessary qualifications of the "would-be disciple." Perhaps the most obvious approach would be to study the group that Christ actually appointed to be His disciples.

Rev. H. S. Vigevano, in his book, Thirteen Men Who Changed the World, has attempted to portray each of the twelve disciples in the form of character sketches.⁹ His sketches are interesting and appear to be quite accurate, based upon fragments of information recorded by the gospel writers. His main thesis seems to concern itself with drawing out and placing emphasis upon the humanity of the twelve disciples. The book of Acts depicts the apostles as men of God, highly successful and influential individuals. But they did not begin this way. These men are portrayed by the gospel writers as being quite immature and slow to learn.

Christ was quite cognizant, of course, that His choice of disciples was extremely important if He was to propagate His message successfully. Yet, His choice of disciples seems quite curious. Some might expect Him to choose the influential, the educated, the religious. However, the group was composed of rather simple, uneducated men, for the most part. All, save Judas Iscariot, were Galileans. Those first mentioned in John's gospel were Andrew, Peter, John, and

⁹H. S. Vigevano, Thirteen Men Who Changed the World (Glendale, California: Regal Books Division, Gospel Light Publications, 1966).

James.¹⁰ These were simple fishermen. Some of these, at least Peter, James and John, are seen as rather uncultured, loud and unsophisticated.¹¹ There was Philip, practical and skeptical, Andrew the friend, Nathaniel the mystic, James the ambitious one, and Thomas the pessimist.¹² Even more unusual, there was Matthew, a former tax collector, and Simon of "the fanatically patriotic party of Zealots, who were in favor of immediate revolt against Roman overlordship!"¹³ One might wonder how this group was ever able to stay together; the parade of various personalities and career types was uncommon, perhaps unique.

So this was an unusual group. But are there any clues concerning characteristics which the individuals of the group might have had in common? Perhaps Matthew gives some clues. He records how the disciples, after Christ's delivery of the parable of the sower, asked Jesus why He spoke in parables. Christ responded saying:

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
And with their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand in their heart and turn again, and I should heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:13-16).

¹⁰Some scholars believe that John, the writer, implies himself and his brother James in 1:40, 41.

¹¹James and John, "sons of thunder," are revealed in this light in Luke 9:54.

¹²Character descriptions all taken from H. S. Vigevano.

¹³Pfeiffer and Harrison, p. 994.

Adam Clarke says of the people who are the subject of this prophecy:

"The fault is totally in the people, and not at all in that God whose name is Mercy and whose nature is love."¹⁴ His thesis is that if this people were spiritual, they would seek out the meaning of the parables as did the disciples. This is a logical explanation and is in keeping with Christ's attitude of disappointment, grief and anger toward these people for their gross inability to see and understand. The disciples, however, were not satisfied with the ambiguity which they met in interpreting the parable. They inquired of Jesus to learn the meaning of it. He was obliged to tell them for theirs was more than just idle curiosity.

Not much else is known about these individuals. On the basis of John's presentation of the fishermen's eagerness and interest to follow and learn, and in light of the line of thought pursued by the author formerly, at least one common quality may be observed about the individuals of this group. These men were teachable. Understanding, knowledge, and awareness of the person of Christ and His mission were pitifully lacking, but a spirit of willingness to follow and learn of the Teacher is portrayed in the gospel narratives. In summary, then, two observations may be made of this group: it was diverse in the characters and lifestyles represented, and it possessed a spirit of adventurous teachability.

This was the lot Christ brought to Himself. One can now proceed to examine given requirements of discipleship Jesus Himself

¹⁴Ralph Earle, abridgment, Adam Clark's Commentary on the Entire Bible (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1967), p. 796.

explicated in the course of His ministry.

Contemplation before commitment. Before one committed himself to the Master, there were important considerations that he had to reflect upon. He had to realize first that status was not important to Christ. This was exemplified in the discussion on the composition of the Twelve. God was not impressed by human wealth or influence. His concerns had to do with character. One might also observe that the novice disciple was not required to understand everything about discipleship and its implications. The Twelve certainly did not foresee the full implications of their initial commitment! The Lord Jesus was a kind and sensitive teacher. He understood man's deepest needs and inadequacies and He was sensitive to the learner's pace of progress. As a shepherd, His inclination was to lead, not to force growth prematurely.

Notwithstanding the foregoing comments, the "would-be" disciple had to understand clearly several truths of grave importance before committing himself. Let the reader observe the words of Christ:

"Which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand. Or else while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace" (Luke 14:28-32).

Commitment to the Master. The word akoloutheō, (ἀκολουθεῖν), occurring seventy times in the gospels, is an important word denoting

the nature of discipleship.¹⁵ The root means, literally, "to follow," "to go behind," "to accompany."¹⁶ "Akolouthēō denotes the action of a man answering the call of Jesus whose whole life is redirected in obedience. A mathētēs is one who has heard the call of Jesus and joins Him."¹⁷ The word akolouthēō is not to be interpreted as having purely metaphorical meaning in the New Testament. "The semi-literal sense of 'going behind' remains"¹⁸ Of the first four disciples, Luke records: "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him" (Luke 5:11). Further, as will soon be illustrated, "akolouthēō is always the call to decisive and intimate fellowship of the earthly Jesus. It always points to the beginning of discipleship."¹⁹

Along with the physical act of following, there were numerous inner aspects of following required by the Master. Part of Christ's sensitivity was evidenced by His keen awareness of the inner motives of men. The following statement by John verifies this truth: "But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for

¹⁵Colin Brown, ed., The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 481.

¹⁶F. Wilbur Gingrich, Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 7.

¹⁷Brown, Vol. I, p. 481.

¹⁸Brown, Vol. I, p. 482. Note: Brown gives two exceptions to this "semi-literal" sense. Examine the use of the word in John 21:19 and Revelation 14:4.

¹⁹Brown, Vol. I, p. 482.

He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25). Christ knew who it was that was sincere just as He knew and brought to light impure motives. This was indicated in the attitudes of the following "would-be" disciples:

And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."

And another said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57-62).

Much commentary and discussion has been stimulated by these words of Christ, as quoted by Luke. Thomas and Gundry suggest that the call to the Kingdom and discipleship is to be accepted when issued. To delay means to lose the call.²⁰ This seems to be a reasonable explanation. The author would like to suggest that in addition to the urgency of the call, Christ knew and perceived the real motives of these men. In the case of the first prospective disciple, perhaps Christ perceived this man's inability or unwillingness to forsake the physical comforts of life and follow Him. For the latter two, perhaps Christ saw in the hearts of these an unwillingness to forsake human relationships in preference to a relationship with Himself. In any case, it seems apparent that the call to discipleship was an urgent call. If the prospective disciple desired to satisfy first earthly desires and then to give himself in commitment, he would have missed the meaning and purpose of following Jesus, and would have done best

²⁰Thomas and Gundry, p. 107.

not to commit himself. To be a disciple meant to give one's will to the Lordship of Christ. Earthly inclinations would only distract and hinder the way of the disciple. Any aspiring disciple had to examine and know for certain his inner motives before committing himself. The prospective disciple could test his motives by being clear on one crucial issue: To be a disciple meant to forsake all of one's dependence upon prestige, wealth, friends and family, and to wholly depend upon Christ for one's well being. To be distracted by earthly desires would surely result in incomplete commitment. If one was clear on this issue of heart motive, the crucial step of commitment could have followed naturally.

Entailed in the step of commitment was the opening of oneself to a new lifestyle. This was not simply a lifestyle of a learning student, one who apprehends intellectual knowledge, as in the case of the talmid. The way of discipleship embraced a life of love and obedience. The disciple was committed to a person, not an ideology, a system of philosophy, or a body of doctrines. Christ's love for His disciples was deep and far reaching, as indicated prior. This same quality of love was expected reciprocally: "'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple'" (Luke 14:26). Christ's use of hyperbole at this point was intended to drive home a cardinal rule of discipleship. Christ is first. Commitment to Him was to supersede any other loyalty. Companion to the love of the disciple for his master, indeed, the proof of love, was obedience. John gives considerable attention to the primordial significance of love and obedience. In the space of two

chapters (John 14-15), he implicates or states clearly the Lord's definition of love no less than ten times! The following statement illustrates this fact succinctly: "'He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me'" (John 14:21a). In the master-disciple relationship, to commit was to love, to love was to obey.

The invitation to fellowship with Christ in the master-disciple relationship was a call which included promise. The promise of fellowship was indeed part of the joy which Christ had in store for those who loved Him (John 15:11). The ultimate joy was the promise of eternal fellowship (John 17:3). But the aspiring disciple needed also to prepare himself for the eventuality of suffering. To be identified with Christ meant to be in conflict with the realm of Satan and his influence in the lives of men. Christ's words were sincere: "'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24). Regardless of how one interprets this saying, he must agree that "the cross symbolizes punishment, torture, contempt, shame, persecution, suffering, rejection, hatred, and death."²¹ In the present day, this is an aspect of following Christ which is not always stressed, sometimes not even acknowledged. Jesus was not deceptive, however, in His explication concerning the cost of discipleship. However, He did not dwell upon this negative aspect. These are His next words: "'For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it'" (Matthew 16:25). The call of Christ to

²¹Dawson McAllister, Discussion Manual for Student Relationships, Vol. II (Englewood, Colorado: Shepherd Productions, Inc., 1976), p. 11.

discipleship, therefore, had in it the call to commitment and suffering, but just as important, the promise of life.

Assumed in all of this, although not initially true in the case of the Twelve, was the disciple's personal conviction and belief in the Lordship of Christ. Before one could commit himself to the person of Christ, he had to believe that Jesus was from God and that Jesus was man's only redemption and hope for life. This belief was personal. Each disciple places belief and faith in the person of Christ for his own personal salvation. This was not true in the case of the Twelve at the outset of their following Him. As will be pointed out in another place, Christ's primary goal was to convince His own disciples of the divinity of His person. This was not a reality for them, until perhaps shortly before His crucifixion (John 16:29-31). Their understanding was still incomplete, however, and was not made complete until after His resurrection, when as Luke writes, "then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). The Twelve were committed to Christ as far as their understanding of His person permitted them. After His resurrection, their understanding was completed and their commitment took on new meaning. All disciples from this time forth would come to Christ with the witness of the Twelve concerning the divine person of Jesus Christ. The pattern set by the Twelve, then, was unique. In their conversion and full appreciation of the person of Christ, a vast heritage of knowledge was passed on to all who would believe in Christ, after their time. For the aspiring disciple after the time of the Twelve, then, personal belief in Christ was prerequisite for the way of discipleship.

Summary statement. The foregoing has dealt with the entrance requirements for the aspiring disciple seeking to enter the school of discipleship. In a discussion examining the composition of the group of Twelve, it was observed that this was a group of diverse background, and that its members, although lacking in understanding, were teachable and did indeed exhibit a willingness to follow and learn. From this first life example of discipleship, one might well conclude that Christ required only a willingness to follow and a spirit of teachability. This was a group that had little initial awareness, however, of the person and purpose of Jesus Christ. As His identity became more and more apparent to them, Christ's requirements for the aspiring disciple became more explicit. In studying specific statements of the Lord one will soon come to understand that Christ required the prospective disciple to contemplate first the implications of discipleship. This involved a good deal of introspection, a determining of real motives for seeking after discipleship. Commitment to Christ meant forsaking dependence upon all else and casting one's hope for well-being totally upon Christ. Indeed, for those first disciples, commitment to Christ meant, quite literally, to follow after Him, to accompany Him. Further, commitment to Christ meant that the disciple was compelled to adopt a lifestyle of love and obedience. One could obey without loving, but one could not love without obeying. The promise of discipleship was personal knowledge of Christ. Surely every disciple, both then and now, was and is a privileged human being! However, an adequate understanding of discipleship could not be gained unless one more truth was realized. The disciple could expect to encounter suffering and he had to be willing to embrace this part of

his new lifestyle. Basic to all of this was the role of personal faith in the living Son of God as one's only hope for salvation. If the aspiring disciple had pondered these truths, accepted their implications and had come to believe in the person of Jesus Christ, then he was fit to enter the school of discipleship.

RELATIONSHIPS INITIATED

In a day when method and efficiency are so important for achievement, one might be inclined to examine Christ's ministry in an attempt to formulate a methodological approach which would explain comprehensively the concept of discipleship. If only one could discover the method in Christ's system, then all he would have to do is reconstruct, wind up the machinery, and set it off. But Christ never looked only to methods, system, and organization to disciple men. He never wrote a book; He wasn't the founder of any school. The dynamics of discipleship in the master-disciple relationship initiated by Jesus were in constant operation always within an environment of personal relationships. Christ lived with people. He travelled with people, He ate with people, He talked with people, He rested with people, He rejoiced with people. One must marvel at how enveloped He was in the lives of people. As was expounded prior, it was His mature, wholly integrated person which was the primary contribution to His success. And this is so because He imparted His very person to those within His sphere of outreach, in the context of relationship.

The gospels present Jesus as being involved in several categories of relationship. First, and perhaps most important, Christ was intimately related to His Father. Although His feet trod the dusty

roads of Palestine, His perspective surpassed far beyond earthly concerns. However, He did not live the life of an isolated mystic. He touched the lives of sinners and outcasts. He was well acquainted with the world, its sin and pain. Most important for the purpose at hand, He was related to groups of people. Day after day, He ministered to the multitudes, both in the synagogues and in the countryside. Much of His time was given to the Twelve; He shared even more time with three. The author wishes to give himself to careful scrutiny of each of these categories of relationship, seeking to define the nature of each and in so doing, continue to develop the concept of discipleship.

Jesus and His Father

The gospel writers give clues concerning Christ's relationship to His Father primarily through record of Christ's prayer life. Private prayer was habitual for Christ. "He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16). At special times of need, He sometimes prayed for great periods of time. No doubt He prayed for long periods of time during His forty day fast in the wilderness. Of importance, perhaps, is the fact that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). Perhaps during this period of testing, Christ was strengthened and given a more comprehensive picture of His impending ministry. On another occasion, before appointing the Twelve, Luke records that "He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). During the Lord's greatest moment of need, Luke describes His praying as follows: "And being in agony He was

praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44).

As discussed at an earlier point, the gospel writers depict Christ as being wholly dependent upon His Father. And this is apparently the reason for His frequent times alone with God in prayer. For this is the one and only relationship in which Christ received in significant measure. His ministry was one of giving and the source of His creative energy had to be maintained.

John's record of Christ's farewell prayer reflected a beautiful relationship of intimacy between Jesus and the Father. This is a relationship of perfect mutual knowledge and perfect mutual love (John 17:21, 26). In fact, Jesus describes His relationship with the Father in terms of oneness: "'That they [His disciples] may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee'" (John 17:21). Christ enjoyed an intimacy with and knowledge of His Father which His disciples could not appreciate initially. But to be sure, they observed His behavior when He would retreat into solitude to be with His Father. The Master-discipler had set for them an example of what it meant to be self-disciplined and dependent upon God. For if the very Son of God had need of the Father, how much more do feeble humans have need of Him! Therefore, their observation of His relationship with His Father became very important for a time in the future when He would no longer be with them. As disciples, they observed and developed first hand an appreciation of what it meant to be dependent upon God. Later, as disciplers, they appreciated even more the relationship they shared with the Father. For they were now leaders themselves and did not have the earthly Jesus to lean upon in times of need.

Jesus and Sinners

"There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink'" (John 4:7). With this gesture, Jesus extended a hand of friendship. The reader can be sure of this for the woman replied immediately: "'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?'" (John 4:9b). John adds parenthetically, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9b). Jesus did the unexpected. He spoke to a Samaritan woman, paying her a compliment by asking a favor. Jesus knew whom He was addressing. He reminded her later that indeed she had no husband, that she had had five, and that the one she was living with at that time was not her husband. This was a promiscuous Samaritan adulteress, and He, the Son of God, was talking with her and in fact, revealed His very person to her. What were the results of this encounter?

Because of His willingness to befriend an outcast, Christ won the hearing of this sinful woman. There is a spirit of candidness and honesty in her conversation with Jesus that leads the reader to believe that she trusted Him and was sincere in her desire to learn more of this stranger. The first result of this newly initiated relationship, then, was the conversion of the woman herself. Further, through her testimony concerning His Messiahship, many other Samaritans believed in Him (John 4:39). In fact, Jesus stayed yet two more days and ministered in this community. "And many more believed because of His word" (John 4:41).

Another result of this encounter, not so obvious, is its effect upon the observing disciples. Christ wove together an excellent opportunity for teaching. Observe His words:

"Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:36-38).

At this time He effectively taught them the concept of sowing and reaping. In this case, Christ sowed and the woman reaped.²² They were admonished to do the same and perhaps they did reap during the two days ensuing. No doubt they caught the full impact of this scene. They were presently experiencing the pangs of physical hunger while Jesus was saying to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). In this case, the will of the Father was to befriend a Samaritan adulteress. The result of Christ's obedience was the woman's salvation and the salvation of many who believed because of her word.

Jesus continued His ministry of loving sinners. He ate and spent time with tax-gatherers. Matthew and Zaccheus were two men of this profession who found life because of His interest in them. He forgave the woman caught in adultery and cleansed the heart of a sinful woman as she anointed His feet with perfume and tears. The blind beggars came to Him and found deliverance. The Gaderene demoniac and the ten lepers were healed as the Kingdom of God passed by them. To the religious leaders of His day, all of these were outcasts. His response to their disdainful comments came as a statement which encapsulated the meaning of His entire ministry: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for

²²Pfeiffer and Harrison, p. 1081.

I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12, 13).

For those who were sincerely desirous of knowing the joy and freedom of forgiveness and healing, Christ stood selflessly with open hands. For those who were motivated by selfish ambition and pride, the grace of God was not extended. The gospel writers remembered Jesus and gave testimony of Him as a friend to sinners. Many of those who were touched by His loving friendship became disciples themselves. Christ was moved to initiate relationships with sinners and in so doing, lived as a model discipler before His own disciples.

Jesus and the Multitudes

Another important relationship of Christ's ministry of discipleship was His relationship to the multitudes. Particularly in the earlier part of His ministry, Jesus spent much time with the multitudes. He often spoke in the synagogue and temple giving witness to the message of the Kingdom. In fact, when His accusers came to arrest Him, He said, "'Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me'" (Matthew 26:55). His Galilean ministry is described by Matthew as follows: "And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Matthew goes on to record the result of this ministry:

And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:23-25).

Christ's ministry is also frequently characterized with comments such

as this: "And immediately on the Sabbath He entered into the synagogue and began to teach. And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:21b-22). Earlier, it was pointed out that Jesus taught after the manner of a scribe.²³ He addressed questions and delivered commentaries upon Scripture passages while seated in the temple. But there was a distinctive difference between the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the scribes. As indicated, the difference was in His authoritative manner, as opposed to their insipid presentation. At an earlier point, it was noted that authority includes ability or power to act. As Christ healed the sick and cast out the demons, this authority was manifested. The scribes were not in touch with this authority. As a result, Jesus ministered to an ever-growing audience. The nature of His relationship to the multitudes, then, was atypical in that He related to them personally, yet with authority. The scribes lorded their position over the people, but lacked the authority of Jesus.

As Jesus stooped to touch those broken in body and lifted the broken in spirit, the hearts of His disciples must have throbbed with marvel and joy. His relationship with the multitudes provided for His disciples a springboard from which discussion and questions were stimulated. In private, Christ must have often expounded to them the happenings of the day, bringing them ever closer to the knowledge of Himself. For any who had eyes to see, He modeled daily the way of the discipler as He initiated relationships with the multitudes.

²³See page 14.

Jesus and His Disciples

The reader will recall an earlier discussion which illustrated the fact that Christ's relationship to His disciples was intensely personal. Indeed, the call to discipleship was issued only after the establishment of friendships. The purpose in the call to discipleship was for companionship and the sharing of the burden of ministry. As Christ's ministry drew closer to its end, He spent more and more time with His disciples. In so doing, He was enabled to impart Himself to them in greater measure. Knowing these generalities concerning the beginnings of Christ's relationships with the Twelve, one may proceed to examine more specific characteristics of the group of Twelve and their relationship with Christ, and with each other.

Some insight may be gained with respect to Christ's relationship to the Twelve if one gives attention to the way in which His disciples addressed Him. At the outset of this discussion, some reference should be made to the languages in use during the time of Christ. This is important for the question at hand. Thomas and Gundry in an essay, "The Languages Jesus Spoke," discuss this problem at length, arriving at the following conclusion:

Apparently, then, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic were all commonly spoken and/or understood among the Palestinian Jews of Jesus' day. To determine precise proportions of use is not possible, and perhaps one language tended to predominate in one area more than the others. But it was a mixed language milieu. Almost certainly Jesus spoke in all these languages and evidences for this exist in the gospels themselves.²⁴

The point of drawing attention to this problem at this point is to demonstrate the fact that it is probably not valid to attach too much

²⁴Thomas and Gundry, p. 312.

significance to particular names addressed to Christ by His disciples. For it is not always known if the Greek name recorded is a translation from an Aramaic or Hebrew word, or if the word used was indeed spoken in Greek. Werner Foerster, in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, seems to assume that the writers always translated names addressed to Jesus from Aramaic or Hebrew, recording them in Greek. The problem may be illustrated by drawing attention to the incident when Christ calmed the storm while He and the disciples were at sea. The disciples came to Him and awoke Him. Matthew records the name addressed to Him as being kyrie (κύριε) meaning Lord; Mark records didaskalos (διδάσκαλος) or teacher; Luke records epistata (ἐπιστάτα) meaning master (Matthew 8:25; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24). Foerster generally assumes that the word used in the Hebrew Aramaic is rabbē (ῥαββί), meaning rabbi. Each writer, he argues, uses the Greek term of his choice for purposes related to the reading constituency in question, the spiritual condition of the person using the word, or emphasis which the writer desires to convey in given incidents.²⁵ There are, however, specific instances where Jesus was addressed as "Rabbi."²⁶ "Yet too much significance should not be attached to this, since rabbē might be applied to any exalted personage."²⁷ Nicodemus, the disciples of John, the enthusiastic crowd, and

²⁵Thorough discussion of this problem is given in Kittel, Vol. III, pp. 1086-1094.

²⁶Kittel, Vol. III, p. 153, refers to Mark 9:15; 11:21; John 4:31; 9:2; 11:8.

²⁷Kittel, Vol. III, p. 153.

Judas at the time of Christ's arrest used the same word.²⁸ On the basis of the use of the word rabbē, then, one might conclude that the disciples were related to Christ in much the same way as the talmid to the rabbi. As argued prior, Jesus conducted Himself like the Jewish scribes. There is, then, an aspect of Christ's relationship with His disciples which is more formal in nature.

Closely related to the use of the word rabbi, is the word didaskalos, or teacher. There is a sense in which "teacher" is equivalent to "rabbi." Jesus Himself indicates this when He said, "'But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers'" (Matthew 23:8). However, in this case, the use of the word "teacher" for Jesus carries with it much more impact than its use anywhere else.²⁹ For Jesus is seen as the absolute didaskalos. The reason for this is that His very person evoked an authority which could not be denied and which demanded obedience. The word kyrios, meaning Lord, carries this same meaning with even more impact. Jesus uses both, exemplifying their similarity. "'You call Me teacher and Lord; and you are right; for so I am'" (John 13:13). However, the term kyrios was not used so frequently on the lips of the disciples.³⁰

The name "Lord" ascribed to Jesus does not take on its fullest meaning for the disciples until after the resurrection, when their eyes were opened and they knew and understood Him to be the Messiah. This does not mean, however, that the disciples misused the word kyrios. For they had some notion of its implications. The following quote

²⁸Kittel, Vol. III, p. 153. ²⁹Kittel, Vol. III, p. 156.

³⁰Kittel, Vol. III, p. 1094.

brings to light the authority of Christ and how it related to His Lordship:

On the other hand, there was a basic difference between the relation of Jesus to His disciples and that of the scribes to their pupils, for Jesus had called them to discipleship and was their Lord. His teaching did not contain the explication and development of traditional material which had to be proved by scriptural exegesis. Jesus preached with authority and opposed His authoritative "but I say to you" (Matthew 5:21-48 ff.) to the Law and to tradition.³¹

There is meaning in all of this. To some extent, it is true that the disciples were related to Jesus in a formal way, as the talmid was related to the rabbi. But there is significant departure, however, when one considers the degree of commitment which the disciples rendered Christ. They came to know Him as their very Lord. This knowledge is directly related to His revelation of His person to them. The initial attractiveness which drew them to Him grew stronger and took on meaning as they gave themselves to Him in obedience. This process unfolded in an environment which was intensely personal. The disciples were committed to the person of Jesus Christ. Their understanding of His Lordship was incomplete, but their commitment was sure. This degree of intimacy is not characteristic of the rabbi-talmid relationship.

On the basis of examining names used in address to Christ, then, one can learn something of the relationship which Christ initiated with His disciples. However, there are other clues in the gospels which serve to enlighten the reader concerning the nature of this group and its relationship to Jesus. Perhaps an obvious curiosity at this point would be to query the practical function and existence

³¹Kittel, Vol. VI, p. 964.

of this group. How did they support themselves, for example? Also, how is it that the group made decisions? As to the first question, it seems as though this group had limited funds at its disposal. Judas Iscariot apparently was their treasurer, as he had the "money box" (John 12:6). At one point, the reader is given a clue as to how much the treasure held. At the feeding of the five thousand, Christ asked His disciples to feed the people, for they were hungry. Mark and John record their response: "'Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?'" (Mark 9:37; John 6:7). The denarius, in those days, was equivalent to a day's wage.³² This was not a large sum of money, but some feel that they did not have even this much in their treasury.³³ Financially, then, their resources were not abundant. Judging by Christ's admonition to the disciple not to be anxious for the provisions of life, it would seem likely that these lived on a day to day basis (Matthew 6:25-34).

For the most part, it seems that the Twelve in association with Jesus enjoyed a rather informal relationship. Being a group given to transitory visits, no doubt they walked hundreds of miles together. This gave them time to be alone with Jesus, to rest, to jest, to ask questions of Jesus. This was not a group of ascetics. They did not fast, they attended feasts and weddings when invited (Matthew 9:14; Matthew 9:10-13; John 2:1-11). Jesus was intensely practical. Something of this trait may be observed in the record of His leading the

³²Thomas and Gundry, p. 175.

³³Francis Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan, eds., The New Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 819. Also: Thomas and Gundry, p. 103.

disciples through a grain field to eat on the Sabbath. Of course, this was not kosher for a Jew, but Jesus' practical decree simply stated that "'the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27).

This gives light concerning how decisions were made in the group. Of course, Jesus was their leader, but He led with sensitivity. If they were hungry, they stopped to eat. If they were tired, they would retreat to a lonely place for relaxation. Perhaps the best example of His sensitivity is observed when one realizes how patient He was in their slowness in apprehending the meaning and import of His person. The reader may be amazed when he observes the questions asked of Jesus by the disciples at the time of their last Passover celebration in the Upper Room (John 14, 15, 16). For they did not yet understand who the Father was or where Jesus was going. They seemed not to have even the slightest understanding of what Christ was about to experience (John 14:8; 13:36; 16:17). Christ was so patient, in fact, that He did not even ask His disciples who they thought He was until He had walked with them for perhaps nine or ten months!³⁴ Of interest at this point is the fact that Jesus asked the question of them. He did not try to force this revelation upon them. Apparently, they were not to the place in their understanding to have received this truth and to comprehend it. The point of all this is to demonstrate the fact that although Jesus was their Lord and leader, He was sensitive to their needs and abilities; He led them with care and sensitivity. The picture here is one of a kind, considerate, and

³⁴Thomas and Gundry, p. 348.

loving shepherd who graciously leads His sheep. This gives the reader further insight into the nature of the relationship existent between Jesus and the Twelve.

Notwithstanding the comments prior concerning the slowness of the disciples to learn, one would judge amiss if he would assume that Jesus did not treat the Twelve as a select group, revealing no more to them than He revealed to the multitudes. For there are several scriptural references which indicate that Jesus did indeed reveal truths to them not revealed to others. In part, this is the meaning of His parabolic ministry. He expressed a truth in a concealed form, requiring effort and willingness to learn on the part of the hearer. The disciples expressed this desire to learn, as indicated in the account of Jesus' teaching on the sower and the four soils, and also at His speaking the parable of the tares of the field (Matthew 13:10-23, 36-43). Concerning the signs of His second coming, Christ revealed this information to His disciples in private (Matthew 24:3 ff.). At another time the disciples were observing Him in prayer. "After He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples'" (Luke 11:1). After hearing the prayer, they sat at His feet and learned profound insights concerning the value of persisting in prayer before a loving Father (Luke 11:2-13). Perhaps the most detailed account of the private moments of Jesus and His disciples is given by John in his recalling the conversations during the course of the Last Passover. The reader cannot help but be moved when he reads these words as penned by John: "When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will

betray me'" (John 13:21). Jesus was deeply grieved that this thing would come to pass. This hurt must have been a great burden for Him to bear. Rejection from the blind, He expected. But Judas was one chosen as His very own. Yet He continues to care for their needs as He explicated the things to come and gave time to respond to each of their questions. He comforted them, assuring them of a home in Heaven; He urged them to continue to abide in Him after His leaving; He promised them His abiding presence in the coming of the Comforter (John 14:1; 15:1; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15). Can anyone catch the depth of His love for them, His concern for their provision in this moment of intense meaning? Jesus loved His disciples; His relationship to them was deeply personal.

One final point should be pursued in the discussion of relationships. To this point, emphasis has been placed upon the relationship between Christ and the Twelve. There is, however, sufficient evidence which indicates the existence of yet an even more personal relationship. On several occasions, mention is made concerning Peter, James and John and their special involvement in the ministry of Christ. For example, when He raised the synagogue official's daughter from the dead, He allowed only her parents and the trio to accompany Him in the girl's room (Mark 5:37). At the time of His transfiguration, perhaps the climactic moment of His ministry, He allowed Peter, James and John to give witness to and experience a foretaste of His future glory in the Kingdom (Matthew 17:1 ff.; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28 ff.). And then on a third occasion, one of the most desperate and desolate moments of His earthly life, He allowed them once again to witness a moment that they could never forget. "And He said to them, 'My soul

is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch'" (Mark 14:34). After crying out in prayer before His Father, "He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?'" (Mark 14:37). One cannot help but notice that Jesus speaks specifically to Peter at this moment. His concern for Peter's spiritual safety was genuine. Christ had invested much into Peter's life. For to him was given the keys of the Kingdom and important responsibilities concerning the founding of His church (Matthew 16:17-19). One of the most touching scenes depicts Peter's personal commission from the Son of God in those memorable words, "'Tend My sheep'" (John 21:19). And to John, Jesus was especially close. John, making mention of himself with consistent modesty, describes his relationship with Jesus by referring to himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23).

The reader sees clearly, then, that even within the group of Twelve, there were those who enjoyed a special intimacy with Jesus. For these were those whom Jesus knew the longest; perhaps, they were spiritually able to receive the special truths and to witness some of the most meaningful moments of His ministry. Perhaps they were to a place in their spiritual development where they were able to contribute to the faith and hope needed in the moment, rather than distract or take away.

In summary, then, Christ valued the importance of relationships. Indeed, the dynamics of discipleship could not function without the supporting matrix of several relationships. The disciples observed Christ's dependence upon His Father, and witnessed the results of this relationship. They saw how He reached out to sinners, changing lives

and adding to the growing number of believers. Indeed, the disciples themselves came to be disciples because of His personal way with people and ability to befriend. After the appointment of the Twelve, He strove to spend more time with them, moving ever closer to His goal of training and equipping them so that they too could disciple others. Their relationship with Him was both formal and personal. He taught them as a scribe but spoke with an authority backed with deeds of personal kindness. The structure of their group was one which provided for their self-support. They were sincere concerning the task before them but were not ascetics. Their Lord was their leader, but He guided with patience and sensitivity. To Him, they were a select group; their eyes and ears were blessed as they witnessed the Master minister and expound the truths of life hidden from those who would not see and hear. This was particularly true for Peter, James and John. For Jesus saw something in them which warranted their being included in the most momentous occasions. Simply stated, Jesus deeply loved His disciples and expressed this love through His words, emotions and deeds.

METHODS IMPLEMENTED

The development of the New Testament concept of discipleship would not be complete if some attention were not given to the question of methods implemented in the discipleship process. To this point, the issues addressed have related largely to the character of participants involved and the relationships initiated in the dynamics of discipleship. Giving attention to methods implemented will strengthen the concept by giving it structure, a framework to which all other

related ideas may be attached. The author will briefly consider various means which Jesus used to teach the disciples. Although not entirely accurate, one may choose to think of these as being stages of a learning process. The author, then, will illustrate how the disciples learned through observation, didactic instruction, participation, retreat and evaluation, testing and failure, and finally, through leadership in ministry.

Learning Through Observation

At an earlier point, the author discussed the fact that Jesus was motivated by His passion to do the will of His Father, and that the will of His Father was to preach and propagate the Kingdom of God. This was His general objective. In order for Him to achieve this goal, however, Christ knew that He had to impart this same message into the hearts and minds of men who would be so dedicated to His cause that they would die for Him. The author is convinced, given this knowledge, that one of Christ's foremost specific objectives was to convince His own disciples that He was the very Son of God, and that His purpose was to establish the Kingdom of God. The author has pursued the concept of the Kingdom of God at some length, apart from this thesis, and has come to appreciate Bob Mumford's definition of the Kingdom in his book, The King and You. Simply stated, "the Kingdom of God is a condition—the rule of the King in the lives of His willing subjects."³⁵ Others expand on this, including the Church, as a part of God's Kingdom. However one chooses to define the Kingdom, one

³⁵Bob Mumford, The King and You (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 18.

thing seems clear. The disciples, initially, missed the meaning of the Kingdom of God. For they were looking for a physical kingdom which would provide their deliverance from the oppression of the Romans.

If Christ could convince His disciples of His person and purpose, then He would have achieved much of His mission. Just as important, however, was His public declaration of the Kingdom. To effect this level of awareness, He had to publish His message visibly. So when one seeks to interpret the ministry of Christ, he must remember that Jesus ministered both to convince His disciples of His person and purpose, as well as to publish the news of the Kingdom. Quite possibly, the former is the more important, for failure at this point would greatly hinder His chances of propagating God's message to man.

Jesus initiated His task largely by doing. Knowing that He had to equip His disciples before they could minister, He took them with Him, and they observed Him in action. They witnessed a ministry which was transitory in nature. Knowing that He had to proclaim His message widely, He did not allow Himself to be distracted by the needs of people when He felt it was time to move on. The disciples learned first hand what it meant to conduct one's life according to priorities (Mark 1:38). They witnessed not only a ministry which was wide in scope, but also a ministry which was highly visible. Matthew writes: "And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matthew 9:36). He placed Himself in public places, preaching and teaching with an authority which was able to conquer sin, disease, even death!

In every situation, the disciples learned through observation.

For Jesus knew how to use problems and needs and convert them into learning experiences. For example, Jesus used the Samaritan woman's need of water as an opportunity to teach her about living water. Later He used the hunger of the disciples to teach them what real and satisfying food was (John 4:13, 14, 32, 34). By creating wine instantaneously, He manifested His glory to His disciples (John 2:11). By restoring life and vitality to a man's withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath, He taught all those observing concerning the real meaning of God's commandment concerning the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9 ff.). No one knows how many demons Christ drove out of the lives of men and women. By ministering to the need of the moment in these situations, Jesus manifested the power of God's Kingdom over the power of Satan's domain. Even in the face of death, sorrow and despair, the Light of Life showed Himself victorious in the raising of Lazarus. In that day, the disciples learned the power of belief and the resulting manifestation of the glory of God (John 11:40). Jesus captured the need of the moment, asserted His authority, and in so doing, created an atmosphere which stimulated "the learning moment." Could anyone disciple another more convincingly?

Learning Through Didactic Instruction

Perhaps there has been no greater teacher than Jesus Christ. For He held the attention of thousands, sometimes for several days at a time (Matthew 15:32). His ability to break the credibility gap most always won Him the hearing of groups both large and small. As mentioned in the section prior, He earned credibility by meeting the need of the moment in a demonstration of God's power. Repeatedly, the

gospel writers state that He healed all of their diseases. No wonder His audience was open to hear the content of His message, after experiencing and/or witnessing healings! Jesus, being the Truth, spoke in a manner that indicated that He was the author of that which He spoke. The proof was in His power to heal and forgive sins.

Part of His ability to communicate stemmed from His practice of moving from the familiar to the new. The Sermon on the Mount demonstrates this fact:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17)."

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery': But I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:26).

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God . . ." (Matthew 5:33, 34).

This technique of moving from the familiar to the new assisted His disciples and others listening to learn the distinctives of the new faith they were about to embrace.

On other occasions, His teaching appeared to be obscure. This is perhaps characteristic of His parabolic ministry. For some, the analogies and stories helped them to understand and remember. For others, the meaning was ambiguous. Thomas and Gundry offer the following explanation:

Matthew, Mark, and Luke devote much space to the period spent in Galilee. Early stages of the period were marked by increasing popularity which reached its peak probably at about the time of the Sermon on the Mount. Arising opposition, beginning with a series of Sabbath controversies with Jewish leaders, is also perceived. This culminated in the first public rejection of Jesus by these leaders. At that point, toward the end of the period, Jesus inaugurated His parabolic teaching ministry so that He might reveal truth to those with receptive hearts while hiding

it from the unreceptive.³⁶

The disciples proved to be in the company of the receptive. Mark supports this in his recollection: "And He was not speaking to them without parables; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples" (Mark 4:34). The reader observes, then, that Jesus used a more formal approach to teaching on some occasions; at other times He met privately with His disciples and conversed with them on an informal basis.

Another method of teaching employed by Christ may be noted when one observes those occasions when He rebuked. The reaction of the religious leaders was often cast in foil to the character of Christ. Jesus always retorted with the right word for the moment. His plea was always for justice in the context of love (Matthew 12:7, 8, 9-14). The Pharisees called for perfection and legalistic observation of sundry laws pertaining to their religion. Again, this is exemplary of His usual meeting the need of the moment. The result of these encounters was sometimes divisive, rather than healing.

Jesus, then, was portrayed as a figure of contrast in the gospels. He entered a religious milieu which was often portrayed as being legalistic and superficial. From His person exuded an air of authority and power. He moved His audience from the familiar to the new. And in the new, there was life. His teaching was credible, stimulating, and challenging. Men were always forced to choose one side or another in response to His teaching.

³⁶Thomas and Gundry, p. 47.

Learning Through Participation in Ministry

Approximately four or five months after Jesus appointed the Twelve, He sent them out to be involved actively in ministry.³⁷ The response of the multitudes was growing, for just before recording the sending of the Twelve, Matthew writes these words:

And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:36-38).

Christ's heart was burdened, for the task and needs before Him were too much for Him to meet alone. For this cause, He sent out the Twelve.

Related to the needs of people, and "fundamental to Jesus' conception of His person and work is His sense of being 'sent' by the Father. In turn, He 'sent out' His disciples with His own authority so that they could continue and extend His mission."³⁸ Part of discipleship, indeed, the goal of it, was participation in ministry. Christ must have estimated, at this point, that His disciples were ready to participate in ministry. This seems somewhat incredulous, for it is clear that the disciples did not yet fully understand who Jesus really was. Mark records the sending of the Twelve in the sixth chapter. Later, in the same chapter, the feeding of the five thousand is recorded. The last part of this same chapter records Jesus' walking on the stormy waters toward their wind-tossed boat. They were severely frightened, even after He identified Himself. "And He got

³⁷Thomas and Gundry, p. 348.

³⁸George A. Buttrick, ed., The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I (Abingdon Press), p. 171.

into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened" (Mark 6:51, 52). Two chapters later, Mark records the feeding of the four thousand. Christ tested His disciples again, asking them to provide. They had not yet learned to rely upon Him; again they reasoned according to human limitations! In spite of their unenlightened minds, Christ sent them forth to minister. The author proposes that this action by Christ marked the beginning of yet another stage in a process intended to convince the disciples of the meaning of His person.

Yet He did not send them ill-equipped and totally without knowledge. Two things He did for them. First, "He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matthew 10:1). Second, He gave them detailed instructions as to how they should conduct themselves. They were instructed to preach the immediacy of the Kingdom of God; He prepared them for rejection and told them how to deal with persecution; He assured them of His abiding presence and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for specific situations (Matthew 10:1 ff.). For these Twelve, it seems that all He required of them was their willingness to go. He provided for them the message and authority which would authenticate the message.

Some six or seven months later, Christ sent out even a larger group of disciples.³⁹ Perhaps some of these seventy became disciples as a direct result of the ministry of the Twelve. They were given

³⁹Thomas and Gundry, p. 348.

similar instructions, and were provided with the same message and authority. The urgency of Christ's ministry was bearing upon Him more and more. The burden of His heart was to send out yet more laborers (Luke 10:2). In less than six months, He would be crucified. His mission would be accomplished and these, His own disciples, would have to be ready and able to propagate the message of the Kingdom.

Learning Through Retreat and Evaluation

One result of the ministry of the disciples was an increased awareness of Christ and His works. Even Herod heard about Christ and His deeds as a result of their ministry; he began to fear that John had come back from the dead (Mark 6:13, 14). No doubt many were talking about Jesus and His miraculous ministry.

Not much mention, however, is made concerning what happened when the disciples reassembled after their ministerial tour. Mark briefly indicates the following: "And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught" (Mark 6:30). One can observe, however, that they did gather together, presumably alone. A significant period of time must have been set aside for this exercise for Mark records that they told Him "all that they had done and taught."

More information is given in connection with the return of the seventy:

And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I

praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight" (Luke 10:17-21).

Although not specifically indicated, it is implied that this scene was set in a private environment as well. They returned elated at the success of their travels. Christ was overjoyed too. One may notice, however, that His reason for rejoicing was not the same as their cause for gladness. Christ saw more in this victory than momentary triumph over Satan. More important, He realized that the power of God had kept His disciples from the evil one. The disciples were thrilled by the power that had emanated from them. Christ warned them to rejoice not in temporary victories, but in the eternal victory which they had because of their names being recorded in heaven.

Their tour was successful. These men had a greater awareness of what it meant to belong to Christ. They had experienced the joy of relying upon His provision for them. God had kept them from the evil one; they were fast becoming lethal instruments in God's Kingdom. Jesus rejoiced greatly for this success had proven that His meticulous efforts to train them were now reaping dividends for Him. The seed which He had planted in their hearts had surely taken root.

Learning Through Testing and Failure

To speak of failure in this day and culture, in most environments, is to admit weakness. To be weak is to be disgraced. Jesus was patient with the failures of His disciples. Indeed, He actually created environments in which failure would be a distinct possibility. Sending them out on their own, for example, left the door to failure wide open. And there were occasions where they did fail. The day He

ministered to the five thousand, He asked Philip, "'Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?' And this He said to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do" (John 6:5, 6). Philip's answer expressed his inclination to look at problems humanistically. He failed. His answer was not Christ's answer. Not long after, the same test was repeated. Again, the disciples did not rely upon the resources of God. They failed again. While at sea in the midst of a fierce storm, they shook Jesus to wake Him, saying, "'Master, Master, we are perishing'" (Luke 8:24). They panicked and failed. But Jesus used their failure to win their trust in Him. In another storm, they saw Him walking by them on the water. Peter, recognizing the Lord, jumped out of the boat at Jesus' bidding. His faith took him some distance, then he began to sink. Peter too failed to trust Jesus completely (Matthew 14:24-33). After the transfiguration experience, Jesus and the three came down the mountain and found the disciples and scribes arguing. The disciples were not able to cast out a troublesome demon (Mark 9:14-29). This was peculiar for this happened not long after they had arrived back from their tour; they should have had some experience with this problem. They failed again, for they could not cast out the demon. From this, they learned the value of persistent prayer in the face of demonic oppression. Perhaps the greatest failures came when they abandoned Christ at moments when He needed them the most. They fell asleep rather than upholding Him in prayer as He cried out in prayer in the garden (Matthew 26:36-46). Later, every one of them fled when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus (Mark 14:43-52). That same night Peter denied Christ three times (Matthew 26:69-75). These were their worst failures. Finally, after hearing

the news of His resurrection from the elated women, they responded in this way, as recorded by Luke: "And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them" (Luke 24:11). There are other recorded examples of their failure. No one knows how many are not recorded.

Each of these situations represented a test. Each day the disciples observed how Christ used problems to demonstrate God's power. Yet they were not able to fully trust Him for the problems they encountered. And Christ persisted in His loving patience toward them. For Jesus held to a vision that never died. In His vision, He saw these men as men of mature character, men of faith, men who lived for Him with a bold authority.

Learning Through Leadership in Ministry

To do justice to this theme, one must study the book of Acts. In this account, he will discover the kind of men Jesus envisioned while He faithfully disciplined them during His earthly ministry. One might inquire as to how these men finally reached this level of maturity. Luke gives great insight at this juncture. He records these words of Christ at His last appearance to them:

"These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."
Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

The author is convinced that the last sentence quoted floods much light upon the question at hand. Jesus led His disciples out of failure, confusion, and mere intellectual understanding into a complete heart persuasion, a revelation of the full meaning of His person. The author is inclined to believe that this was the soonest possible

moment that they were open to this revelation. From the very beginning, they had an intellectual understanding of who He was, for some of them had heard the very witness of John the Baptist as he revealed the presence of the Christ in the words: "'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). Philip recognized Him as "'the Son of God . . . King of Israel'" (John 1:49). Peter's prophetic utterance in the words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," would lead one to believe that surely they understood. As to the full meaning of His person, however, they were not able to receive this until after His resurrection. And Jesus availed Himself of this most opportune learning moment. From this moment on, these men were changed. Luke ends his gospel with these words: "And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God" (Luke 24:52, 53).

Jesus had brought them to the last step in the discipleship process. The last step is the primary goal and purpose of discipleship itself. The call to discipleship is a call to constant growth and increasing productivity. Jesus knew that with the help of the promised Holy Spirit, they were ready to effect His commission to leadership in ministry. For now they were ready to receive His Great Commission:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

In summary, then, one can distinguish several methods which Christ effected to achieve the task of discipleship. From the beginning, the disciples learned primarily through observation. Jesus

maintained a high degree of visibility, teaching and preaching in the synagogues, healing and delivering the afflicted. This afforded Him the realization of at least two specific objectives; the public proclamation of the Kingdom, and the persuasion of His disciples concerning His Messiahship. Christ was a man of action; He proved the veracity of His message and created the environment for the all important "learning moment" by meeting the need of the moment. The disciples learned through didactic instruction as well. Jesus was a great teacher, perhaps history's best. He captivated their interest by moving from the familiar to the new; He sharpened their desire to learn through the use of parables. Through the use of rebuke, all of those who observed learned the meaning of true religion. His teaching pitched Him as a figure of contrast within the religious community of His day. The learning of the disciples was greatly accelerated through their own participation in ministry. They came back to Jesus overjoyed at the victories which were wrought through the authority which Christ has bestowed upon them. During moments of retreat and evaluation, they reported to Jesus all they had done, encouraging each other and their Lord. Perhaps one of the greatest means of learning was through testing and failure. Jesus exposed them to life as it really was; occasionally, they failed. Through failure, greater trust in Christ's ability to provide was expedited. In all of this, Jesus held to an undying vision of their eventual maturity. After His resurrection, they were finally able to apprehend the meaning of His ministry and sufferings. From this point on, these men were completely changed. They were now ready to receive His commission to leadership. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, these men were enabled to proclaim His message with

boldness. They had finally fulfilled the meaning of being a disciple; they were now ready to disciple others. And this is the mandate which Christ imparted to them, that day.

CONTENT IMPARTED

Both then and now, Jesus calls His disciples to a new and totally different life style. The disciple of Christ yields himself to radical changes, both in heart and behavior. This is the distinctive message of Jesus. He envisions men who are renewed in the very heart of their being. This is quite unlike the shallowness of mere outward conformity as practiced by the religious community of Jesus' day. As indicated earlier, this change is only possible through the apprehension of a personal revelation of the person of Christ in the heart of man. From this point, the way of discipleship begins.

The task of the new disciple who has been given this personal knowledge of Christ, is the apprehension of a totally new perspective. This new perspective will provide a framework which the Holy Spirit can use to enable the new disciple to live a life pleasing to God. The disciple, then, needs to gain a new perspective of God, the world around him, and the community into which he has been baptized.

A New Perspective of God

At an earlier point, emphasis was placed upon the entrance requirements of the aspiring disciple into the school of discipleship. In the case of the Twelve, it was argued that it was their spirit of teachability and willingness to follow that merited their being chosen as disciples. As the disciples grew in their knowledge of Him, they

came to realize more of what Christ required for the privilege of being His disciple. The discussion at hand will focus upon the aspect of continuing in the way of discipleship.

The disciple is called to a life of Kingdom living. This requires a change in one's thought patterns. The mind without Christ is selfish. To follow after Christ means to think after the thoughts of Christ. To follow after Christ means to apprehend God's perspective concerning His purposes for the world. This can only be possible when the disciple has grappled with the powerful nature of his own self will. Just as the Father sent Christ to do His will, so has Christ sent the disciple to follow after His will (John 20:21). Perhaps the best expression of this concept is to be found in these familiar words: "'But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you'" (Matthew 6:33). In keeping with the definition of the Kingdom rendered prior, one must see Christ's appeal here as speaking of the Lordship of Christ in the heart of the disciple. By actively submitting one's will to the will of Christ, he is actually seeking after the Kingdom. This is a deliberate, daily commitment. For Jesus Himself said, "'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). For this degree of commitment to be effective, it must begin with an act of the will, a decision clearly made in a point of time. The task is not accomplished once for all, however. To follow after Christ means to deny oneself daily.

Having the personal will given over to the Father's will, how does the disciple actually apprehend the Father's will in particular situations? Christ's words remain. To restate them all is not in

keeping with the purpose of the overall task at hand. With respect to the disciple's perspective of God, however, there are general guidelines applicable to this question.

Probably one of the most difficult obstacles which the new disciple must overcome, is the inclination to think humanistically. Especially is this true today. Jesus demonstrated a life in which He thought and conducted His behavior according to the perspectives of His Father. Jesus said, "'The things impossible with men are possible with God'" (Luke 18:27). If one could truly come to terms with the weightiness of that sometimes trite statement, how his life would be changed! The Lord Jesus capitalized upon the problems and needs of men. Jesus knew that God was Lord of all creation. In Him was invested the Kingdom of God and when the Kingdom of God passed by, Satan's power and the wisdom of humanity were called into submission. Jesus patiently taught His disciples how to think after God.

For some time, it was difficult for those first disciples to see how earthly minded the religious leaders of their day really were. At one point, they came to Jesus, saying, "'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?'" (Matthew 15:12). Jesus responded to them, saying, "'Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit'" (Matthew 15:14). The disciples had to learn how to discriminate between the thoughts of men, and the thoughts of God. Time and time again the gospels foil the humanistic responses of the disciples against the God-mindedness of Christ.

There is a key relationship between apprehending the mind of God in a given situation and putting into use the power of faith. The

kind of faith in question here is not simply the kind of faith necessary for one's personal salvation.⁴⁰ Jesus seems to emphasize another kind of faith, a faith which effects the miraculous. Does it not seem logical that if one could come to know the mind of God for specific situations, that he could exercise faith in the simple knowledge that he indeed has the mind of God? Repeatedly, Jesus challenges His disciples with statements of this nature: "'And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it'" (John 14:13, 14). Clearly, Jesus desires earnestly that the disciple learns to think after God, and in so doing, to step out aggressively in faith and witness the miraculous. Sadly enough, much confusion and error has infiltrated the lives of many well meaning disciples at this point. There is not room for further discussion, but one thing should remain prominent in the mind of the disciple: Christ, in His earthly life, urged His disciples to exert faith and see His Father's name glorified. His message is still the same! Let the reader observe this statement by Christ: "'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father'" (John 14:12). There is a great need for following after the admonition of Jesus with respect to the primordial role of sign producing faith, always in the interest of glorifying the Father.

The way in which the disciple strives to do the will of the

⁴⁰The Scriptures distinguish between saving faith and that faith which is a gift from God which effects miracles (I Corinthians 12:9; 13:2; Hebrews 11:6).

Father, then, is by consciously thinking after the mind of God. But what are the dynamics of this process? John has recorded some very important words of Christ relating to this very question:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me . . . ; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:1, 4, 5, 8-10).

Clearly, the disciple is identified with Christ. Indeed, if he is not a part of Christ, he is not His disciple. Jesus has clearly explicated the importance of continual dependence upon Himself. In keeping with the imagery portrayed, this dependence consists in the drawing upon Christ for one's spiritual vitality. Included in this is the idea of nurture, growth, and reproduction. Indeed, the proof of discipleship is in fruit bearing. Connected with the notion of fruit bearing is the concept of abiding in His love. To abide in His love is to obey Him. One obeys by being absorbed in the word of Christ. At another time, Christ said, "'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31, 32). From these passages, one can detect something of a sequence in Christ's logic: To obey is to abide; abiding brings one to the knowledge of the truth; knowledge of the truth facilitates freedom. In keeping with another statement of Christ, it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who will bear witness of Christ. He will help the disciple to abide in Jesus' word, for it is He who bears witness of Him (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit,

then, effects a freedom which liberates the disciple from the power of sin, enabling him to continue in obedience. Quite simply, to continue in the way of discipleship is to obey. Having these general concepts concerning the disciple's perspective of God, one can proceed to learn more specifically how it is that the disciple can know the Father's will in particular situations.

A New Perspective of the World

There are specific responsibilities which Jesus has placed upon the shoulders of the disciple, having to do with his relationship to the world. The disciple, being one who pursues the thoughts and perspective of God will keenly realize that he is not in agreement with the world's perspective; but to be sure, he is in the world. This means simply that he cannot be an invisible disciple. To be a disciple means to be scrutinized, persecuted, and rejected. He is a peculiar breed in an unfriendly world. Indeed, the responsibility of visibility comes as an imperative from the lips of Christ: "'You are the salt of the earth . . . ; you are the light of the world'" (Matthew 13a, 14a). And the disciple's very salvation depends upon the fulfillment of this obligation: "'Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 10:32, 33).

The disciple cannot nurture a defeatist attitude, however, in light of these truths. He must see himself as "the light of the world." For apart from Christ in him, there is no other living witness to the truth! This is the challenge and excitement of being His

disciple. There is no better example of God's love to a lost world than what the world witnessed in Jesus Christ. Surely the reader has caught the author's emphasis of Christ, the friend of sinners. The disciple has sadly missed the purpose of his calling if he chooses to hide himself amidst a secret collection of like-minded saints, all in an effort to keep himself pure and unspotted before God! Christ has commanded that the community of believers infiltrate the world, befriend the lost, and persuade them of their need of the Savior.

A New Perspective of the Community

The role of the individual disciple in relationship to the community of believers is so important that Christ went so far as to say this of it: "'By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another'" (John 13:35). In the context in question, the "one another" referred to here are fellow believers. He did not say that the world would know the disciple belongs to Christ because of powerful preaching or miraculous signs. These, indeed, do testify, but the real proof of loyalty to Christ is in the unequivocal love of fellow disciples. One cannot overemphasize, therefore, the importance of the proper functioning of the community of Christ.

The disciples have demonstrated the difficulty in this. For they were interested in rank and importance. In response, Christ clearly taught them concerning the primordial importance of unity:

"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:7-12).

The disciples were well acquainted with the rabbi-talmid relationship of their day. The goal of every talmid was to reach the position of rabbi, to be highly honored and respected. The rabbi was a man of power and authority. Jesus warned them not to fall into the trap of revering one man above another, for they were brothers of the same rank. Jesus alone was the Master Teacher. The commitment of every disciple was to Christ, not to any man. He warned His disciples not to seek to be leaders, asserting power and influence over others. Had they adopted this sort of mentality, they would have conformed to the religious politics existent in their day. Christ instructed them of these things for He knew that soon He would no longer be with them. His statement was universal; it applies to all disciples of all time, "One is your Teacher . . ." and He is Christ.

Jesus carried the theme of brotherhood even further. He explicated clear guidelines of what it meant to be brothers. True greatness in the Kingdom of God is to be found in him who serves his brothers. The ticklish question of personal rights is brought into play here. To serve means to minister to the needs of others, even to the point of forfeiting one's own rights. This seems almost fanatical; the result is expressed in a paradoxical statement: "Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Discipleship can only function in the context of community. A community in which brotherly love is exemplified is the very proof of discipleship. Discipleship does not involve only an individual and Christ. As illustrated earlier, the interplay of relationships are central to the dynamics of discipleship. When Christ instituted the Lord's supper, He intended to begin a tradition which would forever

symbolize the community of Christians whose identity was in the suffering and resurrection of Christ. This is not only a personal relationship between the believer and Christ. For his identity is intact only in the context of a distinctive community, the very Body of Christ.

In summary, then, Christ imparted specific content to His disciples designed to help them continue in discipleship. Included in this is the urgency of gaining a new perspective of God. The problem of self will is basic here. To gain a new perspective of God means thinking after God. This requires a loyalty to Christ which becomes a decision at one point in time and which must be followed daily. To think after God means to apprehend His will and believe Him for the supernatural. Apprehending the will of God is in part achieved through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of the truth, however, cannot continue apart from the life of obedience. The result is freedom from sin and freedom to do right. Continuing in discipleship requires the apprehension of a new perspective of the world as well. Certainly the disciple must expect rejection and persecution, but his real burden should be to befriend the lost and lead them to the Savior. Indeed, this is the secondary emphasis of the Greatest Commandment. Finally, the disciple who desires to continue must see himself as a part of a larger community of disciples who share the common status of brothers. The dynamics of discipleship cannot function outside the context of a loving, unified community. Paramount in importance is the fact that there is only one Teacher, and that is Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The writer has attempted to develop a thoroughly biblical concept of discipleship on the basis of his study of the gospels. The challenge, at this point, is to apply the concept for contemporary usage. By now, the reader is aware that the writer is convinced of the usefulness of the concept. The writer will first discuss the problem of transition, and finally, prerequisites for effective discipleship. In so doing, he will illustrate the usefulness of the concept.

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSITION

Before discussing specific applicable principles, a few problems must first be addressed. The first problem is in the use of the word mathētēs after the time of the twelve disciples. Within the primitive community of believers, the word came into use in several different ways. Its most common use was the most exclusive use. A disciple according to the New Testament first generation was one who literally followed after Christ, an eye-witness.¹ Others understood the mathētēs to be an imitator of Christ. This became so extreme that in Ignatius, only the martyr was worthy of being called a true

¹Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 454.

disciple of Christ.² In Greek Christian communities, the term was associated with the Greek understanding of mathētēs. As a result, Christianity was for some simply a philosophical movement.³ For these reasons, the use of the word mathētēs gradually fell out of use. Paul does not use the word in his epistles.

Does this mean, then, that the Twelve were the only disciples? That the Twelve were a special group of apostles, there is no doubt. But the word "apostle" is not necessarily synonymous with the word "disciple." Luke uses the word "disciple" frequently in Acts, for example. Clearly, he does not mean to equate the terms.⁴ The term "disciple" in Acts is used in reference to Christians, as such. The exclusive uses mentioned heretofore do not apply. Perhaps the best evidence supporting the use of the word "disciple" for "Christian" is in the words of Christ Himself in the Great Commission. His command was to "go and make disciples." This command has universal application. Clearly, those who would follow Christ even after His departure are genuine disciples. Indeed, the semi-literal sense of "following Christ" still remains. For the Christian has the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit of truth who bears witness of Christ. In a very real sense, then, the Christian, even today, can, in obedience to the Spirit, follow after Christ, and so prove to be His disciple. The disappearance of the word "disciple," then, is due to misuse and the resulting confusion. Scripturally, the word has an important place in the dogmas of Christian literature.

²Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 459. ³Kittel, Vol. IV, p. 459.

⁴See Acts 9:25, 13:52, 19:1 ff.; 21:4.

Another problem of transition lies in the actual discipleship model Christ initiated. Does Jesus really expect men to give up all that they possess, forsake their occupation, join a commune of believers and follow some great discipler, as did the Twelve? One can come to the logical answer by recalling the religious environment which Jesus entered. The concept of discipleship was not new or unusual in later Judaism, as illustrated in Chapter Two. Jesus entered the religious system of His day, changing it from the inside. The model He initiated was not seen as being fanatical! Externally, His model of discipleship carried with it much resemblance to the rabbitalmid model. Jesus began with the familiar, and led His followers into the new. Christ, therefore, was not intending to establish a model of discipleship in which every discipler after His time should follow rigidly. If Christ were to enter the American model of religious education today, He would quite possibly conduct Himself as He did during the days of later Judaism. Being a Master Teacher, He would probably begin with that which is familiar and progress to the new.⁵ The contemporary discipler has before him the same task. He will wisely draw from the gospels the principles of discipleship which Jesus established. From this point, he will construct a model of discipleship applicable to his particular situation.

⁵The author is not attempting to anticipate exactly what Jesus would do if He were to enter today's religious milieu. The author intends only to argue that Jesus would not likely disciple men exactly the way He did when He lived as a man in the days of later Judaism.

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Carl Wilson, in his book, With Christ in the School of Disciple Building, has carefully traced the history of the church with respect to her task of making disciples. He has arrived at some rather sobering conclusions. At the outset of his book, he writes:

It is the thesis of this book that the main cause of the church's failure is that she (unknowingly and unwittingly) has been trapped by certain historical developments and is no longer effectively building disciples as Jesus intended, and therefore many in the church are ignorant of, and disobedient to, His will.⁶

Indeed, this is a serious claim! Several symptoms of this ailment are evident, says Wilson: The infiltration of secular humanism, the general laxity of the laity due to the increase in clericalism, intellectualized Christianity backlashed with an experience-centered charismatic movement, loss of authority and abuse of authority, the shift of educational responsibilities from the local church to organizational boards, the seminary emphasis upon lecturing, administration, and counseling.⁷ The author is in sympathy with many of Wilson's claims. Neither Wilson nor the author of this thesis have opted to adopt a critical or pessimistic attitude, however. Rather, their focus is upon the solution. The author, then, will enumerate seven conclusions and principles which he has drawn from the New Testament concept of discipleship, as elucidated by this thesis. Application of these principles will bring Christ's church ever closer to His expectations for her.

⁶Carl Wilson, With Christ in the School of Disciple Building (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 17.

⁷Wilson, ch. 1.

1. The command to disciple is Christ's imperative to His Church. This is the essence of evangelism. For this to be facilitated, a biblical understanding of discipleship must be effected. Jesus implemented the discipleship model, because its implementation produced results! His approach was thoroughly pragmatic. He entered the religious system of His day, changing it from the inside. So must the called minister approach today's church structure. Jesus does not expect the twentieth century discipler to imitate the model of discipleship which He followed in a culture and time far removed from the present. He does expect the discipler, however, to draw from Christ's model those principles which will serve to give shape and structure to a contemporary model, so that the task of discipling might be expedited in this day and culture.

2. Implicated in the Great Commission is the total involvement of every disciple in the work of discipleship. The imperative to disciple is not solely relegated to the "professional" ministry of the church. Sharp division of the official ministry and the laity is unscriptural.⁸ Christ has clearly stated that the disciple is "the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world." In no way can the disciple, whether he be a called minister, or one of the "lay" ministry, escape Christ's commandment to be involved in the work of discipleship. The call to discipleship includes the imperative of discipling others.

⁸Paul speaks of the minister as the "equipper of the saints." The saints, in turn, do the "work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4). Every Christian is gifted. The disciple must discern his gift and involve himself somewhere in the total scheme of discipleship (I Corinthians 12, 13, 14).

3. The effective discipler will have reached an appreciable level of personal maturity. Christ has set the ideal. Jesus Christ knew who He was, and what His mission was. He was completely given to one single purpose—to do the will of His Father. The discipler will be continually hindered and distracted if he is not motivated by this same single purpose. The mature discipler will have been tested and will know his points of weakness. His life and ministry must reflect a dependence upon God, an active prayer life, an ability to give, a desire to befriend sinners, patience, faithfulness in confrontation, and authority. His authority is in his calling and the Word of God. His knowledge of the Word of God is prerequisite. All of these characteristics of maturity are expressions of selfless love. Jesus' ministry was successful because of His ability to love perfectly. Indeed, it is Christ within the disciple who loves. The disciple's complete submission to the will of the Father in his life will largely determine his level of effectiveness and productivity in the work of discipleship.

4. The aspiring disciple is required to meet several prerequisites before being accepted as a disciple. The tendency today is to emphasize the fulfillment of self in the call to discipleship. Fellowship with Christ is the promise and indeed, a worthy motivation in itself. But Christ is not slack in His requirements for discipleship. Before taking the path of discipleship, one would be wise to count the cost. To become a disciple, he must first come to a personal heart knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ. He places his faith in Him not only as Savior, but as his Lord. Discipleship means following, and this by the Holy Spirit. To be a disciple means to obey; this

requires a spirit of teachability. Daily taking up of one's cross indicates a life of self denial and suffering. If the prospective disciple cannot conform to these expectations and standards, he is not worthy of Christ.

5. The dynamics of discipleship cannot function outside the context of several relationships. The called discipler will find himself intimately related to the Father, a friend of sinners, active in larger groups, a discipler of one or several. Discipling one or several requires a commitment of time. He will lead with a sensitive spirit, aware of the needs, abilities, and progress of each disciple. His relationship to his disciple is marked by a sincere love for him. He must give of his very best to his disciple. The relationships heretofore described were intensely personal in the life of Christ. Today, there is a tendency to depend upon the Christian Education program of the church to do the work of discipleship. This is often unsatisfactory, however, because of its tendency to be impersonal. Christ has set the example of a model of discipleship which is intensely personal.

6. For every discipleship model, there are biblical methods to be followed. Christ's disciples learned through observing the life and ministry of Christ. The discipler must learn to see problems as God's opportunities to manifest His glory. A competent discipler will be a good teacher. He will familiarize himself with the dynamics of communication. No disciple can grow unless he participates in ministry. This will facilitate times of retreat and evaluation. To some degree the disciple is accountable to his discipler. Participation in ministry will also mean occasional failure. Jesus patiently encouraged and

instructed His disciples in their repeated failures. The discipler must be patient with the one whom he disciplines, tenderly and lovingly leading him ever closer to the Master.

7. Every discipleship model must include content which focuses upon new perspectives of God, the world, and the Christian community.

Christ has commanded that the disciple be taught "to observe all things" that He has commanded. This will mean, of course, some degree of formal learning. But more important, this entails the obedient response to Christ's commands. The goal, therefore, is changed behavior. This can only occur as the growing disciple acquires new perspectives of God, the world, and the Christian community. The issue of self will be in focus once again. The disciple must learn to discriminate between God's thoughts and man's thoughts. Thinking after God can very often mean believing God for the supernatural. Most important, the infilling of the Holy Spirit will lead the disciple into all truth and the freedom to obey. In gaining a new perspective of the world, the disciple will come to see himself as being intimately identified with Christ. He must prepare himself to be persecuted. More important, the disciple will come to understand that within him dwells the Light of the world. Believing this, he can step out and manifest to his world the love of Christ. Finally, the disciple must see himself a part of a community of believers. His love for his brother is the very proof of discipleship in the eyes of the world. Loving one's brother means serving him. Loving one's brother leaves no room for selfish ambition. Christ has admonished His church that He alone is the Master Teacher. This truth is most important for disciple and discipler alike. Each is part of a community. This is a glorious community, a community

who has only one Lord.

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