

## **AM I ONE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES?**

(All True Believers in Jesus Should Be His Disciples)

### ***PREPARE TO APPRECIATE OUR TEACHERS AT OUR GET TOGETHER***

Matthew 28: 16-20, 10:37-38, Luke 14: 27, and Acts 14: 19-28

Pastor Richard P. Carlson

A big game hunter was preparing for a wilderness hunt, but he couldn't find his compass. His son, hearing him looking for a compass, offered him his math compass. He said, "Dad, I've got a math compass; the kind you make circles with, but it doesn't show you true north." I read that story and smiled. It reminds me of millions of believers who have a compass that only takes them in circles, like the Israelites, going round and around Mt. Sinai, turning an eleven-day journey into forty years. Does the Bible have a pattern or compass for follow-up, so Christ's disciples don't go around in circles, never becoming Jesus' disciples? Is God interested in teachers, preachers, elders, pastors, deacons, and deaconesses who know how to help new believers grow into Christ's disciples? Yes! Is God interested in biblical follow-up? A pastor told me one of his deacons knew what God's compass was for follow-up. He said, "If you've got the Word without the Spirit, you'll dry up. If you've got the Spirit without the Word, you'll blow up; If you've got the Spirit and the Word, you'll grow up."

This week God directed my attention to Acts 14: 19-28, which tells about Paul's church planting in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in Galatia. The direction of Paul's journey of planting four churches was in an arc or half circle eastward from Antioch in Pisidia on east over to Iconium and on southeast over to Lystra and southerly to Derbe. Planting four churches on that first missionary tour was colossal, and Paul could have completed a circle and gone back to Antioch of Pisidia. On this journey, outside Lystra, Paul was stoned to death outside Lystra, it appeared, but he revived, or was raised back to life and he went back into Lystra with the Gospel. Paul didn't follow the circular compass. Now with courage from Jesus, Paul turned around and retraced his steps to follow up the believers in his newly planted churches where he almost was killed. Why did Paul go back? The answer revolves around a word in our text that appears four times. It starts with a d. What is it? It is disciples—v. 20, 21, 22, and 28. The beginning of the first missionary journey was mostly evangelism, testifying and seeing many come to the Savior. Retracing that half-arc, Paul's purpose changed. Now his purpose in returning to the four church plants was not evangelism, but follow-up.

Why follow-up? The reason is, that professing believers are not always immediate disciples. When professing believers have no desire to grow in Christ or to obey Him, they are anything but disciples. Following up converts who have no intention of following Jesus is impossible. When a believer claims to be saved, but is unteachable, and has no desire to grow, worship, read the Word, or pray, they are not disciples. They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of the Gospel, because they apparently gave their heads alone to Jesus, and not their hearts. Without giving God our heart, we cannot abide in Jesus, nor can we grow as true Jesus' disciples. Can we define a disciple? Is this a person who has graduated from Bible College, or Seminary, or someone with lots of Bible training? It could be, but thousands of Bible

College and Seminary graduates have gotten good training, but yet they are not bonafide, biblical true Jesus disciples. Let's examine for a few moments a seven-fold definition of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

A true Jesus disciple (1) is repentant and converted. He has heard the Gospel of Christ, and responded to Christ's call to Himself, His call to repentance, believing and receiving Jesus. Jesus began His ministry, Mark 1: 14, proclaiming "the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel." John wrote in John 1: 11-12, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His Name. A true Jesus disciple (2) is a baptized believer. He or she has obediently followed the Lord in open confession of faith in Christ in believer's baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This vital ordinance separates a professing believer from a true Jesus follower. This open confession of Christ before others Jesus spoke of in Matthew 10: 32-33, "So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." Jesus said in Mark 16: 16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." For Jesus, repenting, believing, and receiving Him is to be followed by open believer's baptism—giving the answer of a good, clear conscience before God and others. (I Peter 3: 21) To come to know Jesus and to be unwilling to be baptized shows a spirit within that makes growth and discipleship impossible.

A true Jesus disciple (3) gathers for worship. He or she meets in a gathered assembly, for fellowship, growth, and edification. Wherever you find true disciples, you will find that they are part of a local church. In the church at Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11: 26) If a person refuses accountability in a local church, that action is not part of being Jesus' disciple. God calls us to each other, to a local family of believers, to loving loyalty to one another. A true Jesus disciple (4) is teachable to Christ's commands. They are learning to observe all things Christ has commanded. In Jesus' great Commission in Matthew 28: 19-20, we read, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." A true disciple knows he must renounce self as first, and then take up his cross to follow Jesus. A Jesus disciple has nothing, including money, that is more important than Jesus. A true Jesus disciple (5) practices Christ's presence. He or she is dependent upon Christ's presence and power for life and ministry. Paul wrote in Philippians 2: 13, "It is God who works within us, both to will and to do, of His own good pleasure."

A true Jesus disciple (6) is devoted to the Word, fellowship, the Lord's Table, and prayer. Read Acts 2: 42. "And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching—that's the Word, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread—Communion, and to prayer." A true Jesus disciple (7) witnesses the Gospel. Mark 16: 15 declares, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation." He or she has a heart for winning the lost to Jesus. Acts 2: 47 tells the story of true Jesus disciple's lives, "And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved." Many

additional commands about disciples are in the Word, but these seven are vital. We can't detract from one of them and talk honestly about being a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. When a church has true disciples of Jesus, biblical follow-up requires that pastors, teachers, and elders seek to meet seven needs that all true disciples have. In Acts 14: 19-28, we find the seven needs all true disciples have.

### **TRUE JESUS DISCIPLES NEED THEIR SOULS STRENGTHENED. (I.)**

Notice Acts 14: 22. Paul and Barnabas returned to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, doing what. We read, "strengthening the souls of the disciples." The Greek word for strengthening is **episteridzo**, which in the KJV is confirming, in Goodspeed, reassuring, in the Amplified Bible, establishing, in Phillips, putting fresh heart into the disciples there, Living Bible, helping them grow in love for God and each other. R.C. H. Lenski in his commentary says, "making the souls of the disciples, firm. Adam Clarke says, disciplining their hearts. Strong's Concordance says the meaning is "to support further." The word for souls is **psuche**, which means breath or spirit, and literally, it refers to our vitality, in our hearts, mind, life, and soul. Every true disciple of Jesus at times gets disheartened. We feel alone in our walk with Jesus. We long for a fresh recharging of our spiritual batteries. We need fresh troops, to come join us at the front of the battle. We need new energy, with our souls strengthened. This is why we have Sunday morning and evening services, Wednesday night Bible studies, Sunday School, Ladies Prayer time on Tuesday mornings, and Revival Prayer Fellowship Friday mornings, and Small Group Meetings. These all are a strengthening of our souls—a pause in our week, to let our souls catch up with our bodies. Our first task as disciplers is to lift up the souls of Jesus true disciples.

### **TRUE JESUS DISCIPLES NEED ENCOURAGEMENT TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH. (II.)**

Notice v, 22, as we read, "and encouraging them to continue in the faith," Note this discipleship is not teaching easy living, no hassles. Christ came and died not to make our lives easy, but to make us His very own. Discipleship means we are training Jesus' disciples to be prepared for **thlipsis**, which means tribulations. **Thlipsis** means the pressure that squeezes painfully, or that which crowds us. Paul didn't teach his disciples to put up with these trials. No, never! Paul told his disciples in verse 22, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." In John 16: 33, Jesus said, "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Paul tells us in Romans 5: 3, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that **thlipsis**-tribulations or suffering produces patience and endurance." God doesn't promise to remove life's pressures, but to comfort us in our pressures. We read in II Corinthians 1:3-4 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." The very presence of pressures that squeeze us is proof of God teaching us, even as Paul said in Romans 12: 12, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Anyone can take the advice of Job's wife to curse God and die, but it takes a true disciple of Jesus to go on in the face of pressures at work, at home, financial woes, and health problems. Jesus said in Luke 10: 3, "Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Job even knew

the awful truth that those who claim to be our friends, and even family can torment God's people. In Job 23: 10, he said, "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Peter adds in I Peter 1: 7 "So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Discipleship includes encouraging each other in the face of **thlipsis**.

**TRUE JESUS DISCIPLES NEED PRAYERFUL HELP TO SELECT GODLY LEADERS TO GUIDE THEM.** (III.) Notice what Paul and Barnabas did. Verse 23 states "they appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." Paul and Barnabas doubtless spoke to the disciples about the qualifications of elders and taught these disciples that choosing elders and other church leaders is not about counting who gets the most votes, in any primary way. No, discipleship includes making such choices about who should teach, guide, or mentor us should involve prayer and fasting. The Greek word for appointed is **cheirotoneo** which means to stretch out the hand to select or appoint, or to raise the hand to choose which ones to appoint. Prayerful selection of godly leaders and all church leadership is essential to follow-up and discipleship. Discipleship can trip us up here if we fail to make the selection of godly leadership a matter of fervent prayer and even fasting.

**TRUE JESUS DISCIPLES NEED TO BE COMMENDED TO THE LORD FOR THE SERVICE THEY ARE TO PERFORM.** (IV.) Notice that Paul and Barnabas—v. 26, "returned to Antioch, north of Jerusalem, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled." Look at verse 26. We read of Paul and Barnabas, "And from there they sailed to Antioch (in Syria) where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled." Now Paul and Barnabas are giving these new converts who had become disciples, the same legacy of commendation they received when they went out on their first missionary journey. This commendation is the Greek word **paratithemi** which means to place alongside, and to deposit as a trust for protection and safety. This entrusting our disciples to God, every disciple needs. Today, at our dinner upstairs, we need to thank our teachers, and pray over them all, entrusting them to God to continue God's work through them that they have been called to do. What a commendation if each of us would select a teacher or two today, and go to them and say, "I am going to begin to pray for you daily in your work as a teacher." You might see tears come to some eyes—disciples need prayer, promises of prayer, entrusting them to God for the task they perform.

**TRUE JESUS DISCIPLES NEED ACCOUNTABILITY TO EACH OTHER.** (V.) Personal accountability was paramount in the gathered body, as true disciples report on their service to God to each other. Look at verse 27. We read, "And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Personal accountability outside the church is not enough. The church must be gathered together to hear the reports of God's grace before accountability is complete. Doubtless, disciples share victories in their homes, and in small venues. Yet, the pattern God

wants is the gathered body to hear the official report. I could preach a whole message this, but I appeal to us all. Never willingly stay home when we quarterly share our reports. Pastors owe this to you as a flock. Sunday School Superintendents, Deacons, Elders, Deaconesses, Treasurers, Financial Secretaries, and Christian Education Chairpersons and Mission Board Chairpersons owe this to you all, and you all as God's flock need to prioritize four times a year to never on purpose miss when we have our quarterly meetings for accountability. If we want nothing to do with hearing about how many have been saved, baptized, and who has joined the church, about what has happened and what plans are ahead, we are not acting as disciples, nor are we giving Jesus disciples accountability they need.

**TRUE DISCIPLES NEED A LONG TIME SPENT WITH THEM TO HELP THEM GROW—QUANTITY TIME.** (VI.) Look at verse 28. And they, that's Paul and Barnabas remained no little time with the disciples." No little time here was a minimum of 6 months from the fall of AD 51 to the spring of AD 52. Paul and Barnabas needed time to rest, time to heal—Paul had been stoned and bore marks of his faithfulness. This time was telling stories to the families, to the moms and dads and the children. Missionary stories, real life makes children dream, and hope, and plan, and prepare to be missionaries themselves at home or overseas. Discipleship means hospitality, having your leaders over to your home—your elders, deacons, teachers, pastors and telling stories in front of the children of what the snow retreat was like, what the IWD conference was like, what the short term mission trip was like, and summer time is a great quality time to meet in the mountains not just for fishing, but for a baptism like we had at the Lower Green River Lake when Chuck Johnson, Marcy Rumler-Sparks and J. W. Flake were all baptized. It takes time to bring disciples from strength to strength as disciples. We need small groups like our final meetings this past Monday and Thursday. We need other small groups studying in time—an hour or so regularly. As your pastor, I along with Pastor Larry and Pastor Will minister with an open-door policy, and one of the biggest ingredients we can give you all in many ways is our time.

**TRUE DISCIPLES NEED HUMBLE MODELS AND EXAMPLES TO WORK WITH THEM, WORKERS LIKE PAUL AND BARNABAS.** (VII.) Today I call you as teachers and elders and deacons and board members to be models like Paul and Barnabas. Growing disciples need examples who have their eye not on advancement, popularity, but on living a crucified life before God and you all. That's our job as pastors. What if Paul had overlooked Timothy in Lystra because he was shooting for the top. What an impoverished ministry Paul would have had without Timothy. It would have been like thunder without lightning. You can't think of Paul without his disciplined son in the faith. This week on the 56th anniversary of my Dad's Homegoing, I pay tribute to Dad and to Mom for being my mentors and disciplers long before Bible College and Seminary. They had dozens of missionaries in our home growing up. I stayed up late listening to their stories and I dreamed of being a missionary or a pastor long before I was old enough to go for training. Dads and Moms in your home, you are the models like Paul and Barnabas for your children. Are you a disciple? Are you making disciples of your children, Jesus disciples? This is your only chance. We only get one chance to bring up our children as models, as disciples ourselves to help see them become Jesus disciples. Do it now. Amen!!!