

Presenting Every Man Perfect, Part 3

Teaching Every Man

Colossians 1:28–29

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Introduction

Well, it's wonderful to be back in GraceLife. I thank you all for your prayers as I was away these last two weeks on a ministry trip to New Zealand. It was a wonderful time of ministry, as we had 800 people at the Impact Bible Conference at Riverbend Bible Church in Hastings, gathered to consider what Scripture says about discipleship in and through the local church. And even before I left for that trip, as I was preparing for that conference I recognized a great compulsion to preach this material to GraceLife as well. I was able to preach the first two messages to you before I left, and so we pick up this morning with Part 3 in a series from Colossians 1:28–29, which I've entitled: Presenting Every Man Perfect. Colossians 1:28–29 is a brief text that, in an economy of words, succinctly captures the philosophy of ministry of the Apostle Paul, and which also centers his philosophy of ministry on discipleship.

And so I'll begin this morning by reading that passage once again. If you haven't yet, turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1, and we'll read verses 28 and 29. Paul writes, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

And I've submitted to you that in those two brief verses, we find **five elements of Christian discipleship** that will equip us to faithfully engage in the work of the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations. And those **five elements** I've called (1) the **scheme** of discipleship, (2) the **substance** of discipleship, (3) the **scope** of discipleship, (4) the **strain** of discipleship, and (5) the **strength** of discipleship. And in our first two sermons in this series, we gave our attention to the **scheme** and **substance** of discipleship. And I'll briefly review those once again.

Review I: The Scheme of Discipleship (v. 28c–29a)

First, we considered **the scheme** of discipleship—or the goal, the purpose, or the aim of discipleship. Paul says, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that* we may present every man complete in Christ. *For this purpose* also I labor"

The great passion of Paul's life was to labor alongside each and every believer in Jesus so that every Christian would progress in sanctification and finally be brought to perfection in glorification. This is what ministry is about for Paul. This is what drove him and fueled him to lay down his life in sacrificial service to the church. He was not content to get people to pray a prayer or make a profession of faith. He was not satisfied for Christ's people to remain at the bare minimum of spiritual and theological maturity. Paul knew that the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of a pure Bride, a sanctified Bride—a Bride with no spot, wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and blameless. And so he devoted his entire life to seeing that the Lord Jesus got what He was worthy of in His Church.

And so we learned that the **scheme**, or goal, or purpose, or aim of our ministry in the local church ought also to be the sanctification and maturity of the people of God. We ought to feel the weight of responsibility that a minister of the Gospel feels for those whom he's been called to serve. We ought to be so invested in the spiritual health of our brothers and sisters in the church that we feel the anguish of childbirth until Christ is fully formed in them, that we feel their spiritual weakness as our spiritual weakness, that we struggle in prayer and in service to them until they attain to all the *wealth* of the treasures and of wisdom and knowledge that are bound up in knowing and following Christ. And so we must devote ourselves to discipleship—to helping each other come after and follow Jesus better, to more faithfully obey all that He has commanded us.

Review II: The Substance of Discipleship (v. 28a)

And then we asked: how do we do that? How do we go about presenting every Christian complete in Christ? What did Paul do to ensure that every Christian would be constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, becoming increasingly conformed to Christlikeness? Well, in addition to the scheme of discipleship, we also considered the **substance** of discipleship. And we saw that right at the beginning of verse 28: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

The essence of ministry is "We proclaim Him." The very sum and **substance** of Christian discipleship is the proclamation of Christ to one another, because it's as Christ is proclaimed that the beauty of His glory is displayed. And it's as Christ's people behold with the eyes of faith the glory of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18, that they will be increasingly transformed into the image of that glory that they behold. The loveliness Christ satisfies the heart, and so we don't seek satisfaction in sin. We seek satisfaction only in obedience to all that Christ has commanded, because we know that it is on the path of obedience that we get to see and enjoy more of His glory.

And so all the aspects of church life that aim at discipleship—whether the preaching of the Word, whether one-on-one biblical counseling, whether the fellowship and community of small group Bible studies, or even just in our everyday conversations with one another as we hang out and spend time together—the heart and soul of all discipleship is the *proclamation of Christ* to one another. It is as we proclaim Him to each other—as we hold up the beauty and glory of His person and work to the eyes of our hearts—that the body of Christ is built up and edified and transformed into Christ’s image.

Review: Admonition

But the sentence doesn’t end with “We proclaim Him.” Paul expounds further on what it means to proclaim Christ—what proclaiming Christ to every man entails. And we saw that in verse 28 the proclamation of Christ is broken down into **two main functions**. Look again at the text: “We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and *teaching* every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” The **substance** of discipleship—the proclamation of Christ—is carried out through the ministry of admonition and the ministry of teaching.

Last time we focused on the ministry of admonition. We focused on how Scripture commands us (1) to faithfully and lovingly give admonition to those entangled with sin, how it commands us (2) to humbly and wisely receive admonition when brothers and sisters bring things to our attention, how it commands us (3) to go out of our way to pursue and invite admonition, and how Scripture graciously reveals to us the purpose of admonition, namely, that we would come to share in the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

And we concluded that we need to recalibrate our thinking concerning the giving and receiving of correction from faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather than bristling at it, being offended by it, and dismissing it as the overbearing judgmentalism of busybodies, we ought to humbly receive and even invite correction from our brethren. And rather than fearing the offense that’ll be taken by the correction we might give, we ought not to shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable to our fellow believers. A key feature of genuine Christian discipleship is the ministry of admonition.

Introduction to Teaching

Well this morning we come to that **second** function by which we carry out the proclamation of Christ to one another. And that is: the ministry of teaching. Once again: “We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and *teaching every man with all wisdom*, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” Just as much as admonition, so also is teaching is absolutely indispensable to discipleship.

In fact, the word used throughout the New Testament that we translate “disciple” is the Greek word *mathētēs*. And the fundamental meaning of the word *mathētēs* is “learner,” or “student,” or “pupil.” The standard Greek dictionary defines it as “one who engages in learning through instruction from another” (BDAG). So at its very core, there are distinct academic and pedagogical overtones to what it means to be a disciple. There is no such thing as a disciple without a teacher. And so Jesus links those two concepts in Matthew 10:24 when He says, “A *disciple* is not above his *teacher*.” In Luke 6:40, He says, “A *disciple* is not above his *teacher*; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his *teacher*.” These are inseparable concepts.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the call to discipleship was a call to follow Him. When He called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples in Matthew 4:19, the call was, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” When He called Levi from the tax collector’s booth in Matthew 9:9, the call was “Follow Me!” He also expressed this in the call to “come to” Him or to “come after” Him. In Luke 14:27, Jesus says, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” There is a coming after—a following—of Jesus that is definitional of being His disciple.

Well, Jesus issues that same call to discipleship in Matthew 11:28–30, where He says, “*Come to Me*, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” The call to come to Him is a call to be His disciple. And the next sentence is: “Take My yoke upon you and *learn from Me*.” The call to discipleship is call to learn. It is a call to be taught. And of course, in Matthew 28:18–20, in the Lord’s Great Commission to the Church, He commissions us: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” How, Lord? What do we do to make disciples? “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*.” We are after sanctification, maturity, Christlikeness, obedience. But we must *teach* to obey.

And so to put it in the language of Colossians 1:28: if we’re serious about presenting every man complete in Christ, and if we’re serious about proclaiming Christ, we must be faithful not only to admonish every man, but also to teach every man with all wisdom. And as we consider this ministry of teaching that is the bone marrow of discipleship, we’ll outline our thoughts along **three responsibilities** that are comprehended in the discipler’s duty to teach every man with all wisdom. We must teach one another to **know the truth**, to **love the truth**, and to **practice the truth**.

A. Know the Truth

First, the central role of teaching in discipleship means that every believer in Christ has a **responsibility to know the truth**. Discipleship is a fundamentally intellectual endeavor, where

the followers of Jesus are taught the truth of God revealed in the Word of God—the content of the Scriptures, the great doctrines of the faith, the history of theology, and the practical keys to mortifying indwelling sin, battling temptation, and pressing on in personal holiness.

Now, as soon as I say that, there are people who balk at the notion that maturity and growth in the Christian life have anything to do with head knowledge. There is a rampant anti-intellectualism that absolutely plagues the professing Church—an intellectual laziness, an aversion to deep and focused thinking. In keeping with our culture of instant gratification, many professing Christians are marked by an attitude that desires every spiritual lesson you try to teach them to be microwaveable. Teaching from the Word of God has to be served up, ready-made, in easily digestible portions. The moment you require them to quiet themselves, to gird up the loins of their minds, and to examine and evaluate and reflect upon what a given text might be saying—to closely follow a precise line of argumentation, or to think through how one portion of Scriptural teaching harmonizes with another portion—they check out.

I can't tell you how many times I've had people, in their desire to steer clear of the deep end of the theological pool, say to me, "Mike, I'm just a simple guy. I'm not all that smart, definitely not an academic type, and I'm not even all that big a fan of reading." And I'd say, "But these are the truths of God, the means by which you get to know more of Him—things into which even the angels long to look!" And they'd say something like, "Look, Jesus' disciples didn't have PhDs! They were fishermen! Just regular blue-collar guys." And so they confuse biblical simplicity with being simplistic. They imagine that if every thought in the Christian life is not immediately accessible to someone of below-average intelligence with very little mental strain on their part, then that thought must be convoluted by human reason and inherently unbiblical.

But this is simply out of accord with the entirety of biblical teaching. Scripture actually commands us to think deeply! In contrast to those who think that every legitimate spiritual truth should be immediately obvious and accessible with little concentrated thought, Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:7, "*Consider* what I say," or the ESV: "*Think over* what I say," or the NIV: "*Reflect on* what I say," "for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." By what means will the Lord give you understanding in everything? When you consider, think over, and reflect on the Scripture that Paul has written.

Or in Philippians 4:8, Paul calls the church's attention to whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, et cetera, and then commands them, "*Dwell* on these things." And that word *logizomai* is a word that calls for reflection, for intentional consideration, for pondering, for taking into account, and for letting one's mind dwell on something. The Apostle Paul uses this word in Romans chapter 6 verse 11, when he exhorts the child of God, "Even so *consider* yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." "*Think* of yourself this way; *meditate* on these truths of the Gospel such that you can come to regard yourself as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ." This is a

patient deliberation and evaluation that allows one sufficient time and seriousness to come to grips with a certain reality.

This kind of reflective, considerate, ponderous, meditative thinking—this call to **know the truth**—is commanded of every believer. Just as much as we are commanded not to steal, lie, murder, or commit adultery, so are we commanded to deep and disciplined thinking. And as I said, this is absolutely replete throughout the Scriptures. In Matthew 22:37, the Lord Jesus says that the greatest commandment in the Law is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your *mind*.” In Romans 12:2, Paul commands, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*.” Transformation into Christlikeness happens by the renewing of our mind. Christianity is a lifelong renewal of the mind. The Proverbs put that same sentiment so simply, Proverbs 23 verse 7: “For as [a man] *thinks* within himself, so he is.” Pastor John goes so far as to say that, “Careful thinking is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith” (*Philippians*, 286).

Now, why is that so? It is because the whole of the Christian life has as its ultimate aim the glory and praise and worship of God in Christ. And you can’t worship what you don’t know! See, the joyful, eager, willing obedience to Christ to which we are called can only be produced by a heart that loves Christ—a heart that is singularly and faithfully devoted to Christ! And that kind of love and devotion to Christ can only be produced by an accurate knowledge of Christ as He actually *is*. Do you follow that? You can’t love and delight in what you haven’t *known* as lovely or delightful. So Calvin said, “For unless there is knowledge present, it is not God that we worship but a specter or ghost.” If we don’t know God as He is, and we just decide to think thoughts about Him, and His work, and His Word that make sense to *us* but which are unmoored from His own revelation of Himself in the Scriptures, we don’t worship *God*; we worship a figment of our own imagination—an idol that we’ve fashioned in our own image. No, it is only disciplined, biblical *thinking* that issues in a love for Christ that obeys Him joyfully.

And we saw that recently in our study of 2 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, as Paul is aiming to safeguard the Corinthians from the damning doctrine of the false apostles, he says, “I’m afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your *minds* will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” Listen to that! It is our *minds* that are led astray from *devotion* to Christ! This is why theology—**knowing the truth**—is of paramount importance in Christian discipleship! A sincere and pure devotion to Christ is founded upon sound doctrine! Satan comes to lead our minds astray from pure devotion to Christ, because it’s truth perceived in the mind that fires the furnace of our love to Jesus. Doctrine drives devotion. Theology is the only engine for doxology. And so we must have done with that anemic counterfeit of Christianity that disdains deep study and dedicated thinking. “Gird up the loins of your *mind*,” 1 Peter 1:13! “Retain the pattern of *sound words*,” 2 Timothy 1:13! “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and *mind*!”

This means that discipleship is going to involve the teaching and learning of the great doctrines of the faith. Disciples **know the truth** about the nature and character of God—that He is incomprehensible and yet knowable, that He is spirit, invisible, simple and uncompounded, that He is infinite, eternal, and immense, immutable and impassible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, that He is holy, righteous, loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, and sovereign.

Disciples **know the truth** about the nature and character of Christ—all of the truths we celebrated in our first message in this series!—that He is God the Son from all eternity, who took on a human nature just as ours is yet without sin, that in His single person there subsists two distinct natures, divine and human, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation, that He is the one Mediator between God and man, who lived a perfectly righteous life to accomplish our righteousness, and died a wrath-bearing substitutionary death to pay for our sins, who rose again and is coming again.

Disciples **know the truth** about the Holy Spirit—that He is not merely a force but is the eternal third Person of the Godhead, consubstantial with the Father and the Son, that He is the author of Scripture, the giver of illumination, the one who quickens spiritual life in regenerating grace, who baptizes believers into union with Christ and thereby communicates unto them all the blessings purchased by Christ, that He fills and empowers the believer to live holy lives in obedience to all that Christ has commanded, and gives gifts for the edification of the Church.

Disciples **know the truth** about the Trinity of God—that He is one God but that He eternally subsists in three co-equal and consubstantial Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding, that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Disciples **know the truth** about man—his creation in the image of God and his fall into sin, our universal sinfulness by virtue of our union with Adam, the representative head of all mankind, that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us and therefore the corruption of his sin is imparted to us, that therefore, by nature, man is born into this world enslaved to sin, our wills bound to serve sin and reject God, totally unable to commend ourselves to God, and therefore we are liable to His justice, deserving only His wrath.

Disciples **know the truth** about salvation—that it is wholly of God and none of man, that the Father sovereignly and unconditionally chooses from eternity past all those whom He will mercifully rescue from damnation, that salvation is accomplished through the perfectly efficacious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, who lays down His life for His sheep that His Father had given Him, that the benefits of Christ's death are applied through the Holy Spirit's

ministry of monergistic regeneration, which births in the newborn sinner the repentant faith that is the sole instrument of justification, that is, that man is justified by faith alone apart from works of the Law, that the justified sinner is adopted into the family of God, set apart for holiness and service to the Lord all the days of his life, and therefore progressively transformed into the image of Christ as he avails himself of the means of grace, kept and preserved by the sovereign grace of God until he dies or the Lord returns, at which time man is perfected unto glorification.

And disciples **know the truth** about pursuing obedience to all that Christ commanded us, how to battle temptation, to mortify sin, and to make progress in holiness.

Dear friends, if we are going to carry out effective discipleship in the local church, we must *teach* one another to **know the truth!** You say, “I don’t know a lot of what you just ran through, there. A lot of that is very unfamiliar!” Well, *that’s* why you need discipleship!

B. Love the Truth

And there’s so much more we could say, so much more truth that we must know! But I need to move on to a **second responsibility** that is entailed in the ministry of teaching every man with all wisdom. Not only are we to know the truth. We must also, number two, **love the truth**.

Earlier I said that discipleship is a fundamentally intellectual endeavor. And it is. Knowing the truth is at the foundation of spiritual growth and discipleship. But though discipleship is a *fundamentally* intellectual endeavor, it is not an *ultimately* intellectual endeavor! It doesn’t stop with knowledge. Discipleship has not taken place simply when one has amassed a working notional knowledge of the history of redemption, of the content of individual books of the Bible, of theological terms and definitions, and of the history of Christian thought. No, it is not enough to *know* the truth; we must teach one another to **love the truth** we know.

The truth that we perceive in the mind must be brought to bear on our affections. It must be treasured in the heart. We must be a people affected by what we know. Because it is only out of a heart affected by the truth that genuine, God-honoring obedience flows. As much as we must repudiate an anti-intellectual emotionalism that seeks to bypass the mind in favor of intense feelings about God even if they’re devoid of substance, so also must we repudiate an anti-emotional intellectualism that dichotomizes head and heart. We want light *and* heat! Mind *and* heart! Truth *and* love!

Because just as much emphasis as Scripture places on the mind, it places just as much emphasis on the heart. We are to love the Lord our God with all our *heart*, soul, mind, and strength. In Matthew 15:8–9, Jesus says He’s not interested in the worship of those who honor Him with their lips but whose hearts are far away from Him. They may know the right things to say, but if

they don't **love the truth** they know, their worship is vain. In Matthew 18:35, Jesus calls us to forgive one another *from your heart*. What does that mean? That going through the motions of forgiveness without genuine affections of forgiveness is unacceptable. In Romans 6:17, Paul erupts in thanksgiving to God His work in the lives of believers, who, he says, "became obedient *from the heart* to that form of teaching to which you were committed." And we would need to be obedient from the *heart*, because we are commanded not only to *behave* righteously, but to *be* holy—commanded not only to *do* justly, but to *love* mercy (Micah 6:8), not only to give *generously*, but to give *cheerfully* (2 Corinthians 9:7), not only to shepherd the flock, but to shepherd the flock *willingly* and *eagerly* (1 Peter 5:2). We are commanded not to covet, to be content, to hope in God, to fear God, to experience peace, to be tenderhearted, to be broken in spirit and contrite over sin, and to rejoice always. None of these heart attitudes can really take root in our souls if we do not **love the truth** that we know. And one final text. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul defines unbelievers as those who "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." This means that **loving the truth** is a mark of all genuine believers.

One of the most personally impactful and life-changing paragraphs that I've ever read outside of the Bible was written by Jonathan Edwards. He wrote this: "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory; and that it might be received both by the mind and the heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [does not] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it" (Miscellanies, No. 448).

God is more glorified by those who *delight* in His glory than those who merely *understand* His glory! Because, in the truest sense, you can't truly understand the glory of God without delighting in Him. Because He is supremely, objectively delightful. God is not the kind of Being who can be known to a greater degree without being enjoyed to that same degree. To know God *is* to enjoy Him! And to know His truth therefore must be to **love His truth**. To study God and His truth dispassionately, entirely unmoved by the stunning beauty that we behold in the face of Christ, would be woefully dishonoring to God. To gaze upon the most glorious exhibition of beauty and genius, and to be intellectually stimulated without being affected and moved in the depth of your soul, is to dishonor God. It is to treat as common that which is holy.

And therefore, our discipleship in the local church—though it must begin with the mind—can never stop merely at instruction. We must exhort and admonish one another to **love the truth** that we know. We must draw out one another's affections, and ensure not only that we *understand*, for example, the doctrine of God's unconditional election, but that we *love* it! That we *delight* in it! That we see the glory and the beauty of a sovereign, saving God, acting in the glory of beneficent freedom to rescue rebel sinners from deserved condemnation, and to bring

them into everlasting joy and peace with Himself! Teaching every man with all wisdom involves cultivating godly affections in one another. It involves training not merely students, but worshipers. Not merely analysts, but admirers and adorers.

C. Practice the Truth

But you know, it doesn't stop there either. It is not enough to know the truth, though it is essential. And it is not enough to love the truth, though that is essential. A **third responsibility** that lies upon each of our shoulders is to teach every man to **practice the truth**.

The Great Commission is not, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them all that I commanded you." That sounds awfully close, but that's not it. The Lord's Great Commission to His Church is: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them *to observe* all that I commanded you." We are not merely to *teach* people. We are to teach people to *obey*! The goal of discipleship is to see every man presented complete in Christ—to see every Christian sanctified, to see their lives transformed.

Earlier we mentioned Philippians 4:8, and I'd like to go back there. In that verse, Paul calls the church to *dwell on* whatever is true, honorable, right, and so on. But then in verse 9 he says, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *practice these things*, and the God of peace will be with you." Dwell on these things; practice these things. I love Martyn Lloyd-Jones' comments on this passage. He writes, "You see the perfection of the Apostle's method? In verse 8 he has dealt with the realm of thought. Ah, but the Apostle knows the subtle danger that is always confronting us, the danger of being content with theoretical knowledge, the danger of being satisfied with doctrine only, the danger of failing to put into practice that which we know. . . . You can be a great student even of the Bible and live a life that is utterly contrary to it. . . . It is the masterpiece of Satan to make us put theory and practice into separate watertight compartments, to make men so interested in the Book that they forget to apply its teaching. What you have seen, says Paul, practice!" (*Life of Peace*, 194, 196).

You see, there are some Christians who are the intellectuals—the good students. They love devoting their mind to the study of exalted themes—to Scripture and theology. That kind of thing excites them. They could tell you all about the historical context of Obadiah at the drop of a hat. They could wax eloquent about the fine points of distinction between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. They may even have a great interest in apologetics, in defending the faith against attacks from unbelievers.

And yet, despite their commitment to giving their minds to the study and consideration of the loftiest of themes, there are those who seem unable to make any progress in sanctification. They've become great theoreticians, but they don't seem to have the self-discipline to translate

all that knowledge into godly practice. It's as if they're content with the theory only—as if they believe the Christian life consists merely in thinking the right thoughts about things or having the right theology.

But friends—and I want you to note this carefully, especially those of you who, like me, love theology. Theology not practiced is theology aborted. The whole purpose of theology—the whole purpose of disciplined study, the whole purpose of thinking deeply—is to have the truth mold your affections, to have your affections inform your will, and to have your will spur you on to love and good deeds, so that you might put into **practice** what you know, that your lives might be shaped and driven by the truth. We are to teach one another to obey.

And this is everywhere confirmed by Scripture. James 1:22: “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” The man who hears the word and doesn't do it is like the man who forgets his own reflection. But the one who **practices the truth**, James says, “not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” In John 13:17, Jesus speaks of His teaching and tells His disciples, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” What's the implication? If you know these things and don't do them, you are not blessed! In the final verses of Matthew 7, as Jesus brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close, what does He say? “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine *and acts on them*,” is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. But “Everyone who hears these words of Mine *and does not act on them*, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” And so the Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his excellent treatise, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, summarizes this thought by saying, “Know that it is not the knowing, nor the talking, nor the reading man—but the doing man, that at last will be found the happiest man.” We are to teach every man with all wisdom, so that they might **practice the truth**.

But this teaching to obey doesn't happen by a teacher merely telling students what to do or how to live. It involves living life alongside them—moving from “Tell me what,” to “Show me how.” Mark Dever writes, “What happens in a discipling relationship requires more than classroom teaching (like we do every Sunday). It requires the kind of instruction that occurs through an apprenticeship at a job, or with a personal trainer or coach. An apprentice learns by listening *and watching and participating*, little by little, with more responsibility being earned over time” (*Discipling*, 39–40). He goes on to say, “Discipling is inviting them to imitate you, making your trust in Christ an example to be followed. It requires you to be willing to be watched, and then folding people into your life so that they actually do watch” (*Discipling*, 40).

The task of discipleship—of teaching every man with all wisdom, of teaching all nations to obey all that Christ has commanded, of teaching Christians to **practice the truth**—requires that the discipler and the disciple *spend time* with one another. In Mark 3:13–14, Mark makes a comment

about Jesus calling His disciples. He says, “And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, *so that they would be with Him*,” and so He could send them to preach. And then in Acts 16:3, Luke records Paul’s calling of Timothy to join him on his missionary journeys—sort of Timothy’s call to discipleship under Paul. And the text says, very simply, “Paul wanted this man *to go with him*.” You see, at the very heart of the discipleship relationship is being with one another. And so as we aim to engage in effective discipleship in the local church, we’re just going to have to resolve make it a priority to be with one another, to spend time with one another, to be in each other’s lives, to walk through life together. There simply are no shortcuts!

And the reason for spending that time together is because it’s in the context of time together that the discipler can model biblical, obedient living for the disciple, that he can be an example. That is another key concept in discipleship: the power of example. And Philippians 4:9 addresses that as well. The command to “practice these things,” comes at the end of the verse. At the beginning Paul says, “The things you have *learned* and *received* and *heard* and *seen* in me, practice *these* things.” You see? He’s calling them to **practice** the very things that they had *seen* in him! They didn’t only learn and receive instruction in these things; they have observed these things with their own eyes in the patterns and practices of his life lived out before them. They saw that he not only talked the talk but walked the walk. They were able to observe that Paul lived and ministered in integrity, because the very things that he preached were the things that he practiced. In Philippians 1:30, he says that they were now experiencing the same conflict which they had seen to be in him. They saw *him* suffer, and so he was able to call on the power of that example to help *them* suffer. In Philippians 3:17 he says, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” In 1 Corinthians 4:16 he says it plainly: “Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.” And in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Living life together such that we can be an example to one another of **practicing the truth** is absolutely indispensable to discipleship. Pastor John writes, “Perhaps the single most important aspect of spiritual leadership is having a godly life to emulate. Personal example illustrates biblical principles in action, showing how they should be lived out.” (*Philippians*, 190). Thomas Brooks summed that up simply by saying, “Example is the most powerful rhetoric.” In other words, you can lay out principles and inform men and women of their duty, and you can use all the finest tools of rhetoric, and oratory, and persuasion as you do it. But the most powerful rhetoric—the most powerful form of persuasion and the most effective form of discipleship—is that of example. We know the principles laid out in Scripture well enough. But in order to get those principles from our heads to our hands we need to see how those principles translate into action in the theater of a real, tangible, godly example lived out right in front of us. We benefit so much more when we move from, “Tell me what,” to “Show me how.”

And I'll quote Pastor John again. He says, "You need to be able to say to people, 'Follow my life, see what I do, see how I talk, see how I act in my most public and my most private moments and all in between. My life is an open book.' ... An open life with no compromise—that's critical in being an example. You need to be among the people, with the people, in and around the people. You don't live an isolated, privatized life, you let them see the work of Christ in you in every aspect of life."

Conclusion

And that's the great challenge for us as we seek to implement biblical discipleship in GraceLife, and in Grace Church as a whole. If we are to have any hope of presenting every man complete in Christ, we must faithfully proclaim Christ to our brothers and sisters. And proclaiming Christ means to admonish every man, and to teach every man with all wisdom.

And what must we teach? We must teach one another to **know the truth**. We need to gird up the loins of our minds and devote ourselves to the careful study of the Scriptures, and thereby to arrive at sound doctrine. We need to love the Lord our God with all our minds, so that, unlike how the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, our minds will not be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. We need to recognize that careful thinking is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith, and thus we must devote ourselves to being good *students* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must also teach one another to **love the truth** that we know. We cannot be content with intellectual notions that do not affect our hearts. We must not be satisfied with *seeing* God's glory; we must *rejoice* in it! We must *delight* in it! And if our hearts are dull and backward, so that our affections for God and His truth don't catch up to our knowledge of God and His truth, we need to go to work on our hearts, and tune our hearts to sing His grace. We cannot merely analyze and assess; we must admire and adore. More than mere students, we must be *worshippers*.

And finally, we must teach one another to **practice** the truth. In teaching one another to obey all that Christ commanded, we need to live life alongside one another—our lives as open books before our brothers and sisters—so that they can see and observe how we fight sin, how we treat our spouses, how we discipline our children, how we do family devotions, and, when we fall short in any of those areas, how we respond to failures in confident hope in the grace of God. We need to observe faithfulness in the lives of saints more mature than us, and we need to model faithfulness to saints less mature than us.

This is the call of discipleship. The health and the growth and the purity of the Bride of Christ depend on it. May God grant that we be faithful to answer this call.