

The Bible's Teaching on Discipleship

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Introduction: Christians or Disciples?

Which label best defines who we are? Do you have a personal preference? Or do you think that the first includes the second? If we are really Christians, then certainly we must also be disciples of Christ. If such are your thoughts, you are right. But allow me to point out why today in many parts of the Christian church there is a strongly felt need to emphasize discipleship.

No one wishes to jettison the term "Christian." While this term is found only three times in the Scriptures, from the second century onward it became the favorite designation of the followers of Christ. It meant belonging to Christ or even being like Christ.

Today, however, many fear that due to the long history of the church the label "Christian" is no longer clearly defined and its content has been diluted. Now it has various meanings ranging all the way from persons who profess belief in Jesus or in the Christian religion, to persons who consider themselves Christians simply because they are citizens of a "Christian" nation. Even when the term retains its strong sense of belief in Jesus or in his teachings, the emphasis often falls on what one believes rather than on being like Jesus. So even genuine Christians easily fall into the trap of thinking that if they believe the right doctrines and attend church, they fulfill what it means to be a Christian.

For reasons such as these, many think that today the term "Christian" must be strengthened by a deliberate focus on the category of discipleship. In the church there are too many "undisciplined disciples." For disciples must not only learn and believe their Master's teachings, they must also walk in his footsteps. Christian belief intends to shape a Christian lifestyle. A disciple is one who accepts a disciplined lifestyle. If Christians are to become a light in the world or a leaven in society, they must become disciplined disciples.

This summary of the Bible's teaching on discipleship has as its purpose mutual reflection on the question whether our churches are producing such disciples. Are we as followers of Christ having the impact on our world or our own community that Jesus desires? Are we actually a leaven in society? What can we as churches do better? Are we perhaps overlooking important aspects of what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ?

The term "disciple" is found some 262 times in the New Testament, but exclusively in the Gospels and Acts. It does not appear in the rest of the New Testament. While the apostle Paul speaks of being in Christ and becoming imitators of Christ, he calls believers "saints," "brothers and sisters," "slaves or servants," but never "disciples." For this reason our study will not be limited to texts that explicitly mention "disciple;" rather our focus will be on what discipleship means no matter what terms are used to express it.

Discipleship was not invented by Jesus, but the pattern he created was distinctively shaped by his own person and mission. For example, while Jewish rabbis hoped that their outstanding disciples would themselves become rabbis, the disciples of Jesus were never to be called "rabbi," for they had only one teacher, the Christ himself (Matt. 23:8-10). The person of Christ, both his life and his teaching, permanently shapes the essence of discipleship for those who follow him. We are always and only Christ's disciples.

Old Testament Background: Five Important Themes

The New Testament teaches that no one can understand Jesus apart from the Old Testament because he is the descendant of Adam, of Abraham and David, the one in whom the covenants and prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. If Jesus is severed from this rich Old Testament background, his identity and mission cannot be understood. Hence if we claim to be his disciples, we must examine this Old Testament background which illumines

his mission and ours. If we overlook the Old Testament, the result will be not only a very narrow view of the purpose of Jesus' mission but also of what Jesus expects his disciples to be and to do in this world.

At least five important Old Testament themes shape the contours of the mission of Jesus and his disciples:

- The Servant of the Lord
- Stewards of God's Creation
- God's Covenants
- The Law and Holiness
- The Promised Restoration

These themes provide the essential background for a clearer understanding of Jesus and his disciples.

I. The Servant of the Lord

The Servant Songs of Isaiah shape the ministry of Jesus and his pattern of discipleship. Because Israel had failed to be God's servant among the nations, God appointed one who would atone for Israel's' sins and restore Israel as God's servant to the nations. This individual servant would himself listen obediently to the teaching of the Lord (Isa. 50:4-5) and through his obedience someday all would be taught by the Lord (Isa. 54:13). In addition, this servant taught by the Lord would be a light to the nations, establish justice on earth (Isa. 42:4,6), and bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

Jesus is that servant of the Lord who appointed twelve disciples as the symbol of restored Israel and commissioned them to be the light of the world (Matt. 28:19,20). Both Jesus and his disciples are God's servant with a mission for both Israel and the nations. Since Jesus is the God-appointed servant through whom Israel was to be restored, and since Jesus' disciples are that restored Israel, it is important to understand what Israel was called to be and to do.

II. Stewards of God's Creation

The ultimate background for understanding Jesus and Israel is the story of creation and the Fall into sin. Adam and Eve were created good and were placed in a creation structured by righteousness and justice, by the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord (Ps. 89:14; 33:4ff.). As stewards of this creation they were responsible for developing it according to its God-given structure, a structure which reflected the attributes of God himself. Human work and culture were intended to express the nature of human beings created in the image of God who as stewards managed well the creation. However, the Fall into sin introduced human failure, the decision not to be subordinate to God nor to live according to the order reflected in the creation.

Consequently, man and woman were alienated from God, from themselves and one another, and from the creation. The task of stewardship would be neither as easy nor successful as originally intended because now a divine curse upon the ground resulted in painful toil, sweat, and death. The original form of discipleship was corrupted by the human decision not to follow either the call of God, the teaching of God, or the task assigned. Nevertheless, the Creator intervened with a promised hope that someday, somehow, a descendant of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, later called Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. God promised that he would make possible again the original form of discipleship.

III. God's Covenants

How God would accomplish his promise to defeat evil is the story of Israel in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament. God called Abraham and made a covenant with

him promising that through his descendants blessing and salvation would extend to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3). This call of Abraham and his descendants began a long journey following a pilgrim God who led them out of bondage in Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. On the way Israel discovered there could be no rest, no settling down, until the goal was attained, a goal attainable only by faith and obedience. When Israel lacked faith on the borders of the Promised Land, they were turned away to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

Yet in spite of their fears, their lack of faith and open disobedience, God brought the next generation into the Promised Land. Because of their need for human leadership, God sent judges and eventually gave Israel kings. He established a covenant with David promising that one of his descendants would sit on his throne and God would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. God would establish David's house and David's descendant would build God's house (2 Sam. 7:11-16). Thus a temple was built and for a time God settled down with his people, but the era of rest and shalom did not last.

IV. The Law and Holiness

At Sinai God gave his people the law which instructed them how to live in a world originally structured by justice and righteousness, by steadfast love and faithfulness. If they were obedient to covenant and law, they would be for God "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"(Ex. 19:6). However, Israel proved not to be obedient and God had to send prophets to Israel and her kings to call them back to the way of righteousness. For example, the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls"(Jer. 6:16). These ancient paths in which Israel should walk had been mapped out at Sinai and in Deuteronomy; in fact, these ancient paths had been carved out in the original creation itself for it had been structured by justice and righteousness, by the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord. The law had only reissued for a sinful people the will of God the Creator. Yet Israel, often led by her kings, strayed onto bypaths not mapped out by God. Consequently, God's presence departed from the temple and Jerusalem was no longer the City of God. Both temple and city were destroyed and Israel with her kings was forced out of the Promised Land and herded into exile.

What Israel lacked was holiness. Consequently, neither the holy God nor the holy land could tolerate Israel's presence. God had warned that if Israel disobeyed his covenant law and defiled the land, the land would "vomit you out as the land vomited out the nations that were before you" (Lev. 18:28). Still because God was their covenant Lord who had given promises of salvation, neither God's absence from temple and city nor Israel's exile could be the final word.

V. The Promised Restoration

To Israel in exile God promised that he would build a highway, called the Way of Holiness, so that he could lead Israel again into Zion, the City where God dwelt. But only those who were holy, only those redeemed of the Lord, could follow God on that highway to Zion (Isa. 35:8-10).

How could Israel become holy? Israel had profaned God's holy name by her conduct which led to exile. Instead of displaying God's holiness, righteousness, love and justice so that the nations could know who God is, Israel departed from the way of holiness by conforming to the ways of the pagan nations around her. She had failed to be a light to the nations.

So for the sake of his holy name and for the sake of the nations, God promised both to save Israel from her uncleanness and to show himself holy through Israel so that the nations would know that the Sovereign Lord is God (Ezek. 36:20-38). God cannot be truly known

by others apart from the conduct and mission of his people. Thus the salvation promised to Israel is for the purpose of making God's name known among the nations. To accomplish that purpose, God promised to give his people a new heart and to place his Spirit in them so that they will keep his laws (Ezek. 36:26- 27). Beyond this promised restoration of Israel for the sake of the nations, God promised also to completely renew and restore the creation itself (Isa. 66:22).

Thus these Old Testament themes provide important perspectives for understanding the purpose and scope of discipleship, even though the Old Testament never uses that term. Israel is called to follow God wherever he leads, is instructed in the ways of the Lord, and is assigned the task of revealing God to the nations. As those redeemed by the Lord, Israel is called to live in all areas of her life, from agriculture to government, according to God's will revealed in his law and in the creation. As the redeemed who worship the Lord, Israel has the special task of calling all nations to worship him. However, because of her disobedience, God has to breathe new life into Israel to enable her to fulfill her task. That event of renewal will be like a resurrection from the dead (Ezek. 37). In this way the Old Testament anticipates the coming of Jesus and his calling of disciples to be this renewed Israel.

New Testament Teaching on Discipleship

The New Testament teaching on discipleship is summarized under four main headings:

- Disciples Are Called
- Disciples Are a New Creation
- Disciples Are Equipped for Their Task
- Disciples Are Commissioned for a Mission

The first topic seeks to answer such questions as *How does one become a disciple?* and *What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?* The second and third topics seek to answer *How is it possible for ordinary human beings to walk in the footsteps of Jesus?* and *How can God's presence be manifested in the lives and activities of ordinary persons?* The fourth topic answers *What is a disciple expected to do? What are the tasks assigned by Jesus? How should disciples of Jesus live?*

I. Disciples Are Called

A. Called by Jesus

While it may seem that disciples make up their own minds to follow, the initiative actually lies with Jesus. As God once called Abraham to leave his country and his father's household to go to a land that God would show him (Gen. 12:1), so Jesus calls individuals to follow him. Remarkably, they hear the call of Jesus as a call from God himself and, like Abraham, they respond immediately and do what the Lord commands: Peter and Andrew leave their nets, James and John leave their boat and their father, Matthew leaves his tax collector's booth, and they follow Jesus. Sometimes the call is given by someone who has already responded to the call of Jesus, but in every case the call to discipleship has its origin in Jesus.

Jesus calls his sheep by name and they listen to his voice and follow him (John 10:3,27). Behind this recognition of Jesus' voice as the voice of God himself (John 6:45) lies the mystery of rebirth. Recognizing Jesus and becoming his disciple is not simply an activity of the human will willing to do the right thing. Instead, as Jesus said to Nicodemus, the ability to so will rests mysteriously in being born from above, born of the Spirit. The initiative lies with Jesus and the Father for Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). When we respond to Jesus' call and become his disciple, we give evidence of God already being at work within us.

B. Called to Follow Jesus

Disciples are committed to follow their Master unconditionally wherever he goes. Jesus is on a journey and until that journey's end he has nowhere to lay his head (Matt. 8:20). Consequently, following Jesus can be an uncertain and risky business. Disciples must count the cost.

The first disciples experienced this risk and uncertainty when they followed Jesus into the boat and ended up in a furious storm. From the unique language Matthew uses to describe the storm, it is clear that Matthew wants his readers to understand this story as a parable of what discipleship entails. Discipleship means following Jesus into the storms of life and history: sufferings, oppression, and persecution, in the midst of which the church at times seems almost to disappear. What is required is faith, faith in the midst of suffering before the miracle that stills the storm. In the boat Jesus had great faith and no fear for he was sleeping during the storm, demonstrating an attitude of complete faith and trust in God. The disciples feared for their lives and were rebuked by Jesus as men of little faith (Matt. 8:23-27). While faith after a miracle is easy, faith in the midst of the storm and prior to any miracle is the test of genuine faith and discipleship.

Although Jesus had nowhere to lay his head, the goal of his journey was certain. Early in his ministry "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) where he had to be betrayed, killed, and after three days rise again. Beyond his death and resurrection, his destiny was to return to his Father (John 17). Jesus faithfully walked the Way set before him and he arrived at the goal of his journey. Hence early Christians were described as followers of the Way (Acts 22:4). This Way is the ancient path shaped by God's will and commandments, and defined by and accessed through Jesus who is the Way.

The goal of following this Way is God the Father or Zion, the New Jerusalem, the City where God dwells. Hence the author of Hebrews encourages disciples of Jesus to fix their eyes on Jesus who endured the cross, despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2). And Jesus himself encourages his committed followers who remain faithful that they will sit with him on his throne, just as he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne (Rev. 3:21). Whatever may happen on the Way to that City, the destiny of the disciples' journey is certain if they overcome by faithfully following Jesus.

C. Called to Imitate Jesus

Mimicking may be a form of imitation but it is completely superficial. Imitating Jesus speaks of a far deeper reality. As Jesus was, so his disciples must be. Discipleship is an act of identification with the Master. This identification is so realistic that disciples actually become the bearers of Christ's presence in the world. Still this identification is now neither perfect nor complete because we are not yet what we shall be.

Perfect identification with Jesus will occur only when he appears for then we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Nevertheless, already now as imitators of Christ we are the shape of his presence in the world.

Identifying with Jesus requires the surrender of one's independence, self-denial, taking up one's cross and following him (Mark 8:34). Taking up one's cross is a public act of identifying oneself with the cross of Christ, of dying to sin and the world's standards, and of living one's life for the sake of Christ and the gospel (Mark 8:35). Since no servant is greater than his Master, if the world persecuted the Master they will also persecute his disciples. Disciples are identified with their Master and are no longer on the world's side. Such identification may become a source of difficulty for the disciple but it remains a rich experience and a high privilege. For just as Jesus was the visible expression of God in the world, so Jesus appoints his disciples to be the bearers of God's presence in the world (John 17:20-23). And just as in receiving Jesus one receives the Father, so whoever receives Jesus' disciples receives Jesus (John 13:20). This identity between Jesus and his disciples depends upon the disciples abiding in Jesus and being his imitators.

The apostle Paul urges Christians to imitate him because he is imitating the example of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The scope of such imitation is wide ranging. For Paul it certainly consists of integrity, sincerity, contentment, striving for the peace and unity of the church, and even a willingness to suffer hardship or martyrdom for the sake of Christ and the gospel. But being imitators of Christ means especially not to seek "one's own good but the good of many that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33). As Paul writes in Romans 15:2-3, "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up, for even Christ did not please himself." Imitating Christ means becoming a servant of others for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

Becoming such servant-imitators is rooted in Christ's voluntary surrender of his privileged position for the sake of the salvation of the world (Phil. 2:5-11). Disciples are called to imitate Christ's selfless acts of servanthood and thus to be controlled by "the mind of

Christ." As Christ surrendered his riches for poverty, so disciples should give lavishly for the poor (2 Cor. 8:9). As Jesus washed his disciples' feet, so disciples must wash one another's feet (John 13:14). Imitators of Christ who live to serve rather than to be served (Mark 10:45) become imitators of God himself by living such lives of love (Eph. 5:1).

D. Called to Learn from Jesus

Disciples are always followers, imitators, those who learn from their Master. They never achieve independence, not even the leaders among them. When leaders forget that they are followers who must continuously learn from Jesus, they work havoc in the church (Acts 20:30; Phil. 2:20-21). When leaders think they have learned all there is to know, they overlook Jesus' admonition that his disciples were not to be called teachers for they have only one Teacher, the Christ (Matt. 23:10).

What must disciples learn from Jesus? They must learn from observing his attitudes which shape his actions, and they must learn from his explicit teaching. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29). Jesus was never arrogant or proud but always submissive to his Father's will. He walked the ancient path carved out by the commandments and will of God and, therefore, promised rest for those who learned from him. Disciples are under constraint for they have taken upon themselves a yoke which constrains and directs them. Their wills are no longer autonomous for they must will to do only what their Master wills. This servant attitude they learn from Jesus.

Disciples learn also from Jesus' teaching. While John the Baptist as a prophet had called Israel back to the way of righteousness, Jesus in a much more radical manner unveiled the essence of that righteousness. Jesus taught that love of God and love of neighbor constitutes the essence of righteousness, that each and every commandment is an expression of what it means to love God and the neighbor. Consequently, Jesus' teaching describes the contours of the ancient path less legalistically than did the scribes and Rabbis of his day. Without this greater righteousness, Jesus said, no one could enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20). Disciples must learn this greater righteousness and live it as Jesus did. Disciples have only one Teacher. They must learn from him and walk in his footsteps.

E. Called to Enter the Kingdom of God

John the Baptist prepared Israel for the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. Jesus inaugurated that Kingdom in this world and invited people to enter it. Jesus' disciples become citizens of that Kingdom who owe their allegiance and obedience to its King. Therefore, they must always "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

The Kingdom Jesus inaugurated was shaped differently than had been expected. The expected judgment of evil announced by John the Baptist was curiously delayed. Consequently, Jesus' teaching in the parables of the Kingdom struck many as impossible and even absurd. For the parables taught that although the Kingdom was present, its righteousness would not yet eliminate evil from the creation; instead, the goodness of the Kingdom and the reality of evil would coexist for a time. This delay of judgment reflects the righteousness of God displayed as steadfast love for the world. Yet because of this delay of judgment, the Way of the Kingdom becomes incredibly a Way of suffering and dying like a seed that is sown awaiting the harvest. God's delay of judgment signals his time of grace.

This radical teaching about the Kingdom of God and its righteousness undergirds the centrality of Jesus' teaching about his own suffering. God's Kingdom and righteousness accomplish their goals through the cross of Christ. Prior to the cross the disciples could not accept or even understand this radical teaching. It took the resurrection to open their eyes. To understand and to believe in God's Kingdom and righteousness requires that we learn

from and accept Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through such acceptance disciples enter the Kingdom of God.

As citizens of God's righteous Kingdom, Jesus' disciples are called to be a display of God's righteousness and praise before the nations (Isa. 61:11). As citizens they owe their allegiance solely to God, and they must not confuse God's standards of righteousness with those of the world. For if they do, God's Name will be profaned and the world will not be able to know who he is. But disciples are followers of Jesus, David's eternal Son who inaugurates the Kingdom of God which is also the restored Kingdom of David (Acts 15:16-17). As citizens of this Kingdom, disciples are also the renewed Israel called to be the light of the world (Isa. 42:6; Matt. 5:14).

Jesus' call to discipleship is a high and noble calling. In fact, it may seem impossible in a world in which evil still exists and exerts its influence over people and nations. Since Old Testament Israel failed in its mission to be a light to the nations, why does the Lord expect his disciples not to fail?

II. Disciples Are a New Creation

The clearest and briefest statement of why the Lord expects so much from his disciples is the apostle Paul's astonishing declaration: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). A radical transformation occurs in those who believe and follow Jesus because Jesus has inaugurated a new era in human history which removes the characteristics of the old era. The old era stood under the shadow of Adam by which humanity is trapped in sin and falls under the judgment of death. The new era is shaped by Christ, the second Adam, by whom humanity can receive his righteousness, escape judgment, and participate in life (Rom. 5:12-17). A genuinely new creative act occurs in Christ, and his disciples are new creatures. How does this occur?

A. Baptized in the Name of the Triune God

Disciples are a new creation because they have the Name of God written on their foreheads (Rev. 3:12). At baptism the Name of God was called out over them as a mark of ownership (James 2:7). Disciples no longer belong to themselves because they were bought at a price (1 Cor. 6:20). This baptismal mark of belonging to God is also a sign of living under God's protection (Rev. 7:3). God will protect those whom he has sealed so that they do not lose the life promised to them at their baptism.

Disciples are a new creation because they have been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:1-10). Water baptism is a sign that sins have been washed away because baptism symbolizes that one is joined to Christ in his death and resurrection. Thus believers in Christ share in the redemptive events that brought the old era to an end and ushered in the new era. By his death and resurrection Christ removes the shadow of Adam hovering over humanity and inaugurates a new era of life and peace. Those who are in Christ have been justified by faith and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). The shadow is gone for Light has come.

B. Freed from Sin

Disciples are not perfect, yet amazingly God declares them righteous even though they are still sinners. This important teaching of justification by faith was strongly emphasized by the Reformation. Nevertheless, the power of Christ's death and resurrection also reaches into the lives of his disciples to free them from sin. We must not overlook the fact that "everyone who sins is a slave of sin" and that Jesus sets his people free: "if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-36). And Revelation declares that Jesus "has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5). Disciples are sanctified both by Jesus' death on the cross and by his Word which is the Word of God (John 17:17-19). This being sanctified, or made holy or

freed from sin, does not happen automatically or even all at once. Instead, it requires of disciples that they continue to hold to Jesus' teaching and to abide or remain in him (John 15:4).

The apostle Paul teaches the same lesson. Those baptized into Christ are changed from being slaves to sin to becoming slaves of righteousness. They "have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God" (Rom. 6:15-22). The purpose of this redemptive freeing from sin through the work of Christ and the Spirit is that "the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). Because of this marvelous redemptive activity of God, Jesus' disciples now have the potential to truly live as the Israel of God called to reveal the Sovereign Lord to the nations. To maintain their status as God's new creation, Jesus' disciples must continue to abide in Christ, to be filled with the Spirit, and to live according to the Spirit.

C. Bearers of the Presence of God

The original bearers of the presence of God were Adam and Eve created in the image of God. However, the Fall into sin created distance between God and humanity. God then called Israel to be his people and his glory or presence dwelt in their midst in tabernacle and temple. But Israel profaned his holy Name and God withdrew his presence from temple and city and sent Israel into exile. The third bearer of God's presence was God's own Son in whom God's glory dwelt (John 1:14). Jesus became the new temple, the place of atonement and of the presence of God. To see him was to see the Father (John 14:9). Astonishingly, when Jesus departed he transferred his glory to his disciples, and promised that as the Father was in him so he and the Father would be in the disciples (John 17:20-23). Thus Jesus' disciples became the bearers of the presence of God in the world. As the glory of God once dwelt in the temple, so now it dwells in Jesus' disciples for the sake of revealing Jesus and the Father to the world. This indwelling presence of God creates unity among the disciples (John 17:23). This is how God intends to make his Sovereign Name known to the nations (Ezek. 36:23).

While John speaks of the presence of God's glory in the disciples, the apostle Paul says directly that believers "are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). As the new temple of God in the world, disciples are called not only to unity but also to holiness. The temple is holy because God dwells in the temple. Consequently, believers are obligated to live holy lives, to be separated from all that is evil in the world (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Believers must model God's holiness, for without their holiness God can neither dwell with them nor reveal himself to the world. Disciples must offer their "bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God --this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1). Only when one's entire life becomes an act of worship, only when by the renewing of their minds disciples do "God's good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2), will Jesus' disciples be able to reveal God's presence to the world.

III. Disciples Are Equipped for Their Task

Disciples are a new creation because God is present within them. Hence God's presence is the source of the renewed capacity to live holy, righteous, and obedient lives. We must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13). In this way Jesus equips his disciples to carry out the tasks he has assigned to them.

A. Empowered by the Spirit

The Book of Acts tells a story about power: power to witness, power for mission, power for unity. At the conclusion of Luke's Gospel, the disciples were waiting because Jesus had told them to "stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Acts tells what happened when disciples are clothed with power from on high.

Previously the Holy Spirit had been given exclusively to Jesus in his earthly ministry, but now that same Spirit is poured out on all his disciples to equip them for ministry. The amazing result is that the ministry of Jesus continues to occur on earth in the ministry of Jesus' disciples. What once described the ministry of Jesus in the gospels now describes the ministry of his disciples in Acts.

The parallels between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of his disciples are striking. As Jesus had once been anointed, led, and empowered by the Spirit (Luke 4:1,11,18), so now after Pentecost the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit and guided in their mission (Acts 8:29; 13:2-4; 15:28; 16:6-7; 21:11). As Jesus had been anointed to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, so his disciples were anointed to proclaim to the nations the good news of salvation in Christ. As Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, so in Acts the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, heal the sick and raise the dead. As Jesus has announced his inauguration of the Year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18-19), so in Acts his disciples, having received "much grace" through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, put into practice Jesus' Jubilee teaching concerning the use of wealth to care for the poor (Acts 2:44-45; 4:33-35). By pouring out his Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28-29), God provided what had been lacking in the lives of his Old Testament people. Now Jesus' disciples had received the power both to live obediently as God's renewed Israel and to fulfill Israel's mission to the nations (Acts 3:25-26).

The central task of Jesus' disciples is to be his witnesses to the nations. For this task the presence and work of the Holy Spirit is especially significant. When Jesus commissioned his disciples by sending them as the Father had sent him, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit to qualify them for this task (John 20:21-22). The Holy Spirit would take Jesus' place and be for them a Paraclete or Counselor, one who is called to one's side to assist or to defend. Thus the disciples would not be defenseless (John 14:18) because the Holy Spirit would empower their testimony (John 15:26-27) by reminding them what Jesus had said, by teaching them to understand Jesus' message, and by leading them into all the truth (John 14:26; 16:12). The spoken testimony of the disciples would be like the testimony of Jesus whose "words are spirit and life" (John 6:63) because the Holy Spirit would be witnessing through the disciples' witness. Their witness to the world would have the power both to convince hearers and bestow life, or, if rejected, to convict and place under judgment (John 16:8-11). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, their words become the very words of Jesus and have the same result.

The task of witnessing to the nation is not limited to verbal witnessing. Actually, the disciples of Jesus witness in two ways: by verbal testimony and by living as the community which loves one another. For both kinds of witnessing, the presence of the Spirit, of the Father and the Son, is absolutely essential.

B. Gifted by the Spirit

The Lord loves his church and cares for it as his own Body. As his Body, the church must become more and more like Jesus because it has the responsibility of making Christ visible to the world. To make that possible the Lord bestows spiritual gifts for the common good of the church.

Today some get hung up on the question whether a spiritual gift is always a supernatural ability not present before rather than a human ability or talent already possessed. Perhaps this distinction is not important. While some gifts clearly go beyond ordinary human talent, others as listed in Romans 12:5-8 seem not to. What is important is that the Spirit communicates grace to persons through these gifts, whether specially given or naturally present. A spiritual gift is not so much an endowment permanently possessed by an individual, as it is an instrument by which God's gifts of grace are communicated to others.

For example, the gift of healing is not so much an ability possessed by an individual as it is the actual healing received by someone through the words, touch, or prayer of another. If this is so, the important question is not whether the gift is "supernatural" or "natural," but whether the Spirit uses the gift to bless others. Gifts then are not to be claimed by individuals as their possession; rather gifts are to be identified by those who receive blessings through them. Giftedness is ascribed to persons within the church not by the gifted persons themselves, but rather by those who are spiritually blessed by their actions, words or prayers.

The three major lists of spiritual gifts should not be considered a complete or exhaustive list of possible gifts. The list in Romans 12:6-8 contains gifts of leadership such as prophesying, teaching, and governing; as well as gifts of service, encouragement, generosity, and mercy. I Corinthians 12 repeats several found in the prior list but adds gifts of wisdom and knowledge, healing and miraculous powers, distinguishing between spirits, speaking and interpreting tongues. In addition Paul speaks of commissioned persons as gifts, such as apostles, prophets, and teachers. Yet Paul stresses that love is the greatest gift for it alone achieves the true unity of the church. All other gifts will pass away, but love will last forever. The final list is found in Ephesians 4:11-13 which again speaks of commissioned persons as gifts to prepare God's people for service and to bring them to maturity in Christ. All gifts are intended to contribute to the process of making Christ's followers to be more and more like Jesus and thus to be more effective witnesses in the world.

The Lord will always give whatever gifts are necessary for the church to live as his Body and to fulfill its mission in the world. Perhaps at the Reformation the most important gifts were teachers as theologians. The absence of certain gifts during certain periods in the history of the church is not a sign that the Spirit is absent. The Spirit gives only what is necessary for the common good of the church and for its effective witness to the world. If healings are necessary for such a purpose, the gift of healing will be present. If speaking in tongues is necessary for the welfare of the Body, then speaking in tongues will occur. At every time and in every place love is the one gift essential for the common good and the effective witness of the church.

Without spiritual gifts the church lacks vitality and power. We must pray that the Spirit will provide the gifts we need to become mature in Christ and to be effective witnesses to the world. We must also recognize spiritual gifts that have been given for they are reminders that we live in Christ and for our existence and witness are dependant upon his presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. All of Jesus' disciples must drink of the one Spirit and be continually filled with the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:18).

C. Disciplined in the Spirit

Disciples are not self-made nor are their actions merely self-willed. Instead, disciples live from the presence of God within and from the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the presence of the Spirit does not instantaneously change a disciple into a perfect replica of Jesus Christ. Instead, becoming a true disciple is a life-long process of becoming more and more like Jesus.

To achieve this goal Jesus' disciples must engage in spiritual actions and activities designed to strengthen the will and overcome bad habits and sinful thoughts. For example, the apostle Paul exhorts believers to set their minds on the things where Christ is and to put to death the actions and desires flowing from their sinful nature. Jesus' disciples must get rid of anger, rage, malice, slander, immorality, and filthy language. In place of such thoughts and habits, they must clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love (Col. 3:1-14). Achieving such goals requires

disciplined attention to the source of power that enables one to act and live as Jesus acted and lived.

This necessary disciplined focus on Jesus Christ and on "whatever is true, noble, right, pure and lovely" (Phil. 3:8) is strengthened by practicing the traditional spiritual disciplines. Such disciplines are not only for a select few because all disciples need to discipline their own spirits in the Spirit so that they learn to walk according to the Spirit. The spiritual disciplines are many but we will focus on a select few without which we cannot be disciplined in the Spirit.

1. The Spiritual Discipline of Study

We usually think of study as a scholarly discipline associated with school. Some of us enjoy such study, others do not. But here we are not thinking of the scholarly study of the Word of God. Instead, this is the kind of study that any disciple who can read should do.

For many years there was a tradition of reading through the Bible one chapter at a time at the close of every meal. This was one form of the spiritual discipline of study. Through such repetition year by year the Word of God became familiar. Those who listened could reflect on that Word because its patterns became deeply engrained in their hearts and minds. With the Psalmist many could say, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). The Word of God sanctifies and overcomes sinful thoughts and actions (John 17:17). It is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Ps. 119:105). Jesus said, "my words are spirit and life," and he promises his disciples, if they continue in his word, they would know the truth and the truth would set them free (John 8:31-32). The Word of God must be absorbed into our very being and become our constant companion if we are to gain maturity in Christ.

Unless study of the Word becomes a routine discipline in our lives, our fast-paced lives will leave no time for it. The shape and timing of such study will vary with individuals, but time must be set aside for it. Such study will be enriched by Sunday sermons, by group Bible study, and it may be enriched by the work of scholars and teachers contained in Study Bibles and commentaries. The purpose of all such study is to learn to think God's thoughts after him and to discover the shape of the narrow path that leads to life. God's Word will not only inform our faith, it will also strengthen it.

The fruit of practicing the spiritual discipline of regularly studying God's Word is that when choices are encountered and decisions must be made, we as Jesus' disciples will be enabled to act as Jesus acted in his life on earth. We must remember that "all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

2. The Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

Meditation is the spiritual discipline of quietly listening to hear what God is saying. It requires times of solitude and silence, or at least blocking out the noise and frenetic activity of modern life. The Psalmist meditated on God and his promises during the watches of the night (Ps. 63:6; 119:148). The person is blessed who meditates on God's law day and night (Ps. 1:2).

Since the object of meditation is primarily the Word of God, meditation should be part of our study of the Word. Its purpose is to listen, to hear God's voice addressing us in our lives so that we truly hear and rejoice, listen and obey. Meditation goes beyond an intellectual understanding to an actual experience of God's grace and truth. It seeks to develop a closer fellowship with God, a greater awareness of the Father and the Son who dwell within, a greater sensitivity to the controlling presence of the Holy Spirit. Such

strengthened fellowship shapes and energizes the lives of Jesus' disciples so that they are better able to display the presence of God to others.

Although meditation on the Scriptures is primary, there can be other objects of meditation. One may meditate on one's life, one's frustrations and difficulties, listening all the while for God's voice speaking to one's situation. Meditation may focus on God's creation, attuning one's mind to his glory and majesty displayed in its wonder and power, its beauty and intricate design. Or one may even meditate on world events seeking to understand what God is saying through them. In each of these forms of meditation one must be guided, of course, by what God has revealed in his Word. For this reason meditation on the Word of God is the primary focus of this spiritual discipline.

Meditation should not be reserved for monks and hermits only. It is an absolutely necessary spiritual discipline especially for busy people. Jesus also withdrew to commune with his Father, to hear his voice. He calls his disciples to follow his example. If we do, the practice of this spiritual discipline will create habits deep within us that enable us to become more like Jesus.

3. The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

Prayer is communion or fellowship with God by which we seek to enter his presence and attune our wills to his. Jesus taught us to pray, "thy will be done." Prayer is as well an act of listening to God to discover his will as it is talking to God. Prayer intends not to change God but to change us.

God need not change, but we do. The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is, "Hallowed be your name." Certainly God does not need to become more holy; rather, his holy Name must become better known among the nations. Hence this petition is actually a request that God so act that we become more holy, that his will be done more perfectly by us, so that God can make his Name known to the nations through us (Ezek. 36:23). The second and third petitions, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," are requests that God's rule become more visible in and through his people so that his holy Name will be honored among the nations. Thus the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer are actual a request that God so act within us that we become better disciples.

Our requests must always be in accordance with God's will. Jesus said, "if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you" (John 15:7). Thus effective prayer is tied closely to the study of and meditation upon God's Word so that our praise and petitions may be in harmony with God's will and purpose. In Gethsemane Jesus both knew God's will and struggled to listen for God's will applied to his life. Such prayer can be strengthened by periods of fasting, for fasting feasts on God's Word and focuses our minds upon God. Like Jesus, his disciples have other food to eat because they live not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4; John 4:32,34).

Such prayer is world-changing for it asks God to so act as to produce change in and bestow blessings upon persons and nations. It requests that God's gracious rule and kingdom become more visible and his Name hallowed among the nations. Such prayer can be uttered in confidence because the Lord promises to do whatever is asked in his Name and assures us that the prayer of the righteous is effective. Sometimes such effective prayer has as its result that God acts in judgment upon the nations in order to bring about repentance and an open door for the gospel (Rev. 8:35).

Is such prayer actually a spiritual discipline? Should not prayer be for the believer as natural as breathing? Jesus seemed to observe the frequent practice of prayer naturally, "very early

in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35). The apostle Paul exhorts believers to pray without ceasing, to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). Yet Christian experience teaches that if prayer is to become as natural as breathing, it must first become a habit. Habits must be learned and learning requires discipline on our part. Prayer takes time and effort. It should be viewed as a spiritual discipline which, if practiced, will gradually become a natural and essential part of our daily existence. Prayer practiced as a spiritual discipline is not, of course, a burdensome obligation for it is "the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 45).

Prayer is an expression of thankfulness because it acknowledges and praises the holy and eternal God, the Creator of all that exists and the Redeemer of the world. In such prayer of adoration and praise we participate in the worship of the Creator and the Lamb sung by the heavenly creatures around the throne (Rev. 4-5). We pray also for that day when God's redemptive purposes among the nations are complete and God will perfectly receive the praise that is his due. So we continue to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

4. The Spiritual Discipline of Worship

Public worship is an experience of the presence of Christ. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). Jesus is present when his community gathers because it is believers together who constitute the temple of God, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). Through his Spirit, Word and Sacrament, and by means of the gathered community itself, God is present in Christ in the public worship service. Believers are exhorted, therefore, not to neglect meeting together (Heb. 10:25).

Spiritual disciplines order the lives of believers so that they live, think, and act as disciples of Jesus. Worship is central to that proper order because it is a public acknowledgement and celebration of the God who sits on the throne of the universe and is at the center of human life. Although believers also worship God through their personal prayers and obedient living, public worship is a necessary part of ordering one's life for there Jesus' disciples are strengthened and encouraged through the communal experience of God's presence. In a broken and divided world the public worship of God becomes a witness to the world of the reconciliation, unity, joy and peace that God gives. Persons who do not worship have nothing at the center of their lives capable of holding life together and giving it significance.

Worship not only provides benefits to those who participate, it is important also because it is an honor due to God. God as Creator and Redeemer sits on the throne of the universe and his creatures owe him praise and adoration for all that he is and all that he has given as Creator and Redeemer (Rev. 4-5). This is expressed in songs and hymns, in prayers and words of adoration. Such worship is the most important activity in the universe to which human beings are called. It is the one event ceaselessly going on in heaven, and it must go on on earth as it is in heaven. Without worship people lose what is essential to being fully human.

Thus regular attendance at worship is a discipline that shapes our spirits. It is a joyful exercise and a regular reminder that we are creatures created in God's image who have been restored as members of God's family in Christ. To neglect communal worship is to miss that event which most centrally orders one's life as God's dwelling place in the Spirit. Communal worship empowers believers for their lives of worship in the world (Rom. 12:1).

The spiritual disciplines take time, effort, and personal decision, but their regular exercise provides rich benefits. They equip believers for their tasks and turn Christians into disciplined disciples.

IV. Disciples Are Commissioned for a Mission

Commissioning concerns tasks. Jesus' disciples are sent on a mission. Jesus commissions his disciples to be his representatives to the world. Their mission continues Jesus' mission to the world. To fulfill that mission disciples are commissioned

- to be Christ's witnesses
- to be Christ's community, and
- to walk in the truth.

A. To Be Christ's Witnesses

Witnessing is the means by which God extends his blessings to the nations. From the day that God established his covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12) and commissioned Israel to be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6), God intended that not only Israel but all the nations should be the recipients of his blessings. Therefore, Jesus, who is the Light of the world, commissioned his disciples to "make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19,20). The mission of the disciples is for the sake of the nations.

The first disciples were commissioned to witness concerning all that they had seen and heard in the life and ministry of Jesus (John 15:27). To ensure that they would be truthful and courageous witnesses, Jesus sent another Counselor, the Holy Spirit, who would remind them of everything Jesus had said, guide them into all the truth, and would himself actively witness through the witness of the disciples (John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13). Thus Jesus sends his disciples to the ends of the earth with a witness to the truth empowered by the Holy Spirit. In this way the words of the disciples, like the words of Jesus, are "spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Although this commission was given first of all to the apostles who had been eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus (Acts 2:21-22), it applies to Jesus' disciples throughout history. For the apostles, who were called the Twelve (Acts 6:2), represent the entire church as the renewed and empowered Israel. Therefore, the church in history has the task of carrying the original eyewitness testimony of the apostles to the nations. It can do this by commissioning specific persons to go to the nations (Acts 13:1-4) and by encouraging members themselves to proclaim the good news wherever they happen to be (Acts 8:4; 10:20). Not every disciple of Jesus becomes a traveling missionary, just as in Jesus' day not every disciple literally followed Jesus on his journeys. Still as a community the entire church has the task of being a blessing to the nations by seeing to it that the gospel is proclaimed. Wherever the church is filled with the Holy Spirit it will speak the Word of God boldly (Acts 4:31). Consequently, the Book of Acts is filled with stories both of marvelously successful missionary journeys to the nations and of believers witnessing in their own cities. Only when the church faithfully carries out this task can the nations share in God's blessings and God's will be fulfilled.

Throughout history nations lose their way and no longer know how to live in this world (Isa. 2:3; Zech.8:23). This world is God's creation structured by righteousness and justice, by the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. So God can use this sense of lostness as an opening for the witness of his people because they have been taught by God how to live in this world. For this reason the discipling of the nations includes teaching them all that Jesus has commanded. Jesus commands are interpretations and fulfillments of the law of the Old

Testament (Matt. 5-7). That Old Testament law taught Israel how to live justly, righteously, and mercifully in this world. Therefore, disciples and the nations must be taught that law as interpreted and fulfilled in Jesus because this teaching reveals how God wants humanity to live in his world. God's world and Kingdom is structured by justice and righteousness. When nations live contrary to that righteousness, the earth as God's creature will "vomit them out" (Lev.18:28). If nations are to escape judgment, chaos, and destruction, they must learn the disciplined obedience required for experiencing God's blessings of righteousness and peace. Thus the witness of the church must include both the message of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ, as well as instruction in the disciplined obedience required for life in this world as the Kingdom of God.

The mission of the church is clear but the circumstances may be difficult. Jesus places the witness of his disciples in a context of persecution: "you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me" (Matt. 24:9). When nations and their rulers are strong and powerful and lose their way, they do not like to be told that their ideology is mistaken. Those who oppose national ideologies are often silenced. Consequently, witnesses to Christ often become martyrs. In fact, the Book of Revelation declares that among Christ's witnesses there is a necessary number of martyrs that must be completed (Rev. 6:11). Martyrs are faithful witnesses who "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev. 12:11). Jesus encourages his faithful witnesses by promising that if they overcome, they "will sit with him on his throne, just as he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21).

Because a servant is not greater than his Master, the lives of Jesus' disciples are shaped by his life: "if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). Just as Jesus witnessed to the truth and gave his life for that testimony, so his disciples must continue that testimony and, if required, give their lives for it. In the twentieth century there have been in number more Christian martyrs than in all the prior centuries of the church's history. It is by means of such witnessing and martyrdom that God brings his salvation and Kingdom to bless the nations of the world. The end of history cannot occur until the gospel of the Kingdom has been proclaimed to all nations (Matt. 24:14). Until then the church is called to be faithful in its witness even to the point of death (Rev. 2:10).

B. To Be Christ's Community

Christian witness must be given not only as a verbal testimony but as a life that is lived. Christ came to bring all things together in unity under him (Eph. 1:10). He came to overcome the divisions among humanity by creating a new human community in which everyone is reconciled to God and to each other. This is a community from which hostility has been removed and in which peace and fellowship are enjoyed (Eph. 2:14-18). In fact, the purpose of proclaiming the gospel is precisely to create such a fellowship in the midst of the nations (1 John 1:3).

Thus the church gathered in Jerusalem after Pentecost is described as being devoted to the apostolic teaching and to the fellowship. They shared their goods with each other and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:42-47). In fact, "all believers were one in heart and mind" sharing all they had so that there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:32-35). The disciples of Jesus Christ are a community called to visibly demonstrate to the world the power of the gospel to change human lives and conduct.

The new commandment Jesus gave to his disciples was that they love one another as he had loved them (John 13:34). The love of the crucified and resurrected Lord is the source of love that makes genuine human community possible (John 15:1-10). Such a community becomes possible because God himself, who is love, now dwells in those who believe in Jesus and keep his commandments. Therefore, Jesus prays that his disciples may be one

with him and his Father just as he was in the Father and the Father in him. It is the presence of God in us that makes genuine human fellowship possible. When God is present, the result is always visible unity and true community. Such unity is an important part of the church's witness to the Truth. Only if Jesus' disciples visibly form such a community of love and service can the world discover the power of the gospel and the reason Jesus Christ came into this world. (John 17:20-23; 13:35).

All human beings are searching for love, acceptance, harmony, fellowship, community. Throughout history nations and empires with their ideologies have tried to impose unity and coerce community without ultimate success. The church has been commissioned by its Lord to stand visibly before the world as a demonstration of the only lasting, genuine, non-coercive human community. But when unity fails, the church obscures the power of the gospel and the presence of God in the world. Therefore, if the disciples of Christ are "to live a life worthy" of their calling, they must "be completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love," and they must "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). Disciples do not create unity; rather, unity is created by God in Christ through the Spirit. Disciples are called to preserve what God has created and display it before the world.

The complete unity of all things in heaven and on earth will be fully manifested only at the end of history. Until then the church stands on the frontier of human history beckoning the world to acknowledge its destiny. Until Christ returns the church exists as a sign which demonstrates God's purpose for all things in Christ. In the midst of the world's divisions, conflicts, and chaos, the church is commissioned to stand as a beacon of light which illumines the way to forgiveness and reconciliation, to the peace and unity which God gives in Jesus Christ.

C. To Walk in the Truth

The unusual phrase, "to walk in the truth," comes from III John 3. To modern persons the phrase sounds strange because truth is associated with ideas, statements, or beliefs which one accepts with the mind. How can one walk in them? The apostle John also uses the phrase, "to walk in love" (2 John 6). This phrase seems easier to grasp, yet in the Scriptures truth and love are intimately related.

Because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ who is the Truth, truth and love can never be separated. Jesus was the truth as the expression of God's love for the world (John 3:16). He is, in fact, the presence of God who is love (John 1:14; I John 4:16). Thus Jesus not only speaks the truth and manifests love, he is the truth and love of God in incarnate form. For this reason the apostle John urges his spiritual children not only to speak words of truth and love, but also through deeds and lifestyle to walk in love and truth (1 John 3:18). Love and truth must become incarnate in the disciples of Jesus. For then the disciples of Jesus are as Jesus in the world (1 John 4:17).

In similar words the apostle Paul urges his fellow Christians "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). One's entire bodily life in this world, including every thought and act, must become a spiritual act of worship. Nothing in one's life is merely secular, excluded from the service and worship of God. The obligation to love God and one's neighbor is the summary of the law which describes in great detail how one ought to live obediently in all areas of life. That law of God maps out the ancient path whose goal is life.

Thus walking in truth and in love describes the Christian lifestyle. This topic is immense, as big and complex as life itself. We intend only to briefly sketch in some of its contours. Disciples are commissioned to walk in the truth: 1) by doing good deeds, 2) by displaying a faithful lifestyle, 3) by living as pilgrims on a journey.

1. By Doing Good Deeds

God has always required of his people that they live according to the righteousness revealed in his law. Jesus teaches that the essential intention of every commandment is that we love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40). Thus if Jesus' disciples seek God's Kingdom and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33), they must be merciful, humble and pure in heart and conduct, peacemakers. They will defuse conflict by seeking reconciliation, ready always to forgive others as God has forgiven them. They will be generous with their wealth seeking to alleviate the needs of others. They will even love their enemies and thus reveal that they are children of God who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). Such is Jesus' explanation of the greater righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). This greater righteousness describes the good deeds of those who have become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Zacchaeus is the prime example of what a disciple of Jesus should look like according to the Gospel of Luke. The salvation Jesus brought to his house released him from his sinful obsession with wealth and gave him the freedom to give half of his wealth to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). The Song of Mary celebrates God's salvation as turning an upside-down world right-side up: the proud are scattered, rulers knocked off their thrones, and the rich sent empty away, while the humble are lifted up and the hungry are filled (Luke 1:53). The salvation Jesus brings intends to alleviate and ultimately remove oppression and injustice by establishing justice, righteousness, and love. Salvation is all about release: release from sin, release from debts, release from oppression and bondage. According to Luke, salvation is the arrival of the Year of Jubilee with its restoration of freedom, justice, and peace.

Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet reflects these Jubiliary themes. If anyone wishes someday to eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God, they must invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind to their own dinners and banquets on earth. For God's banquet will be peopled by such persons (Luke 14:13,21). Thus Jesus' disciples must not act like the fool in the parable who was condemned for hoarding his wealth for his own enjoyment (Luke 12:13-21), nor like the rich man who refused to share his banquet with the poor beggar, Lazarus (Luke 16:19ff.). Instead, disciples must be wise as the shrewd steward to use wealth to make friends of persons, such as the beggar Lazarus, so that when one's life is over such persons "will welcome you into the eternal habitations" (Luke 16:9). Because the Father gives his kingdom as a free gift to Jesus' followers, Jesus tells his disciples to sell their possessions and give to the poor (Luke 6:32-34). As we have seen, the early Christians in Jerusalem literally put into practice this Jubiliary teaching and there was no needy person among them.

Walking in the truth by doing good deeds is walking the ancient and narrow path that leads to life, rest, and peace. Jesus' disciples walk that path not only to secure life for themselves but also to be a demonstration to the world that God's Kingdom has come, that his righteousness is already turning an upside-down world right-side up. The good deeds of Jesus' disciples are light shining in the darkness enabling others to praise our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

2. By Displaying a Faithful Lifestyle

God has always intended that his people be a light in the world, a display of righteous living before the nations (Isa. 61:11). The apostle Paul describes believers as "a letter from Christ" to be "known and read by everybody" (2 Cor. 3:2-3). The disciples' lifestyle must distinctively reveal the truth and love of Jesus Christ. To illustrate these obligations we select three significant arenas of life: a. Marriage and Family, b. Society, c. Work.

a. In Marriage and Family

The institutions of marriage and family have come under stress in our society. Marriage has become merely a matter of personal choice entered at will and voided at will. Both marriage and family are thought to serve no higher goal than personal self- fulfillment and convenience. Consequently, marriage and family have become fragile institutions with serious consequences for society.

Biblically marriage and family are rooted in creation and redemption and, as such, constitute an important arena for Christian discipleship. Marriage is neither a human invention nor an experiment in social relationships which can be altered or abandoned at will. Instead, it is a God-ordained, monogamous structure requiring faithful commitment on the part of husband and wife (Gen. 2:24). It is a covenantal relationship sealed with vows. In these vows uttered before God, love is promised and fidelity is pledged. Fidelity involves loyalty, trust, love, devotion, reliability and responsibility for the other. The breaking of the vow and the betrayal of trust involves sin against the marriage partner and guilt before God. Marriage is intended by God to be permanent, to last until death terminates the relationship (Matt. 19:6; Rom. 7:2-3).

Marriage serves the mutual benefit and enrichment of husband and wife because, as created in God's image, men and women were not intended to live in isolation but in community. In fact, marriage and family are the most basic forms of human community. Because sin disrupted human community, Christ came to make it possible again, also in marriage and family (Eph. 1:9-10; 5:23-32). Actually in restoring the human community, Christ fulfills the essential goal of marriage. For in Christ the ultimate goal of human community is found in his Body, the church, the manifestation of Christ's overcoming division by creating the one new-person-in-community (Eph. 2:15).

This fulfillment in Christ has important implications for Christian discipleship in marriage and family life. First, while marriage and family continue to be important, they are not the most significant communities in which one lives. Instead, the family of God, the Body of Christ, is more important. Jesus indicates this when his mother and brothers ask for him and he replies, "whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother"(Mark 3:35). And again on the cross when he says to his mother and to John, "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother"(John 19:26-27). Our family relationships are taken up into and are superseded or fulfilled by the relationships established in the family of God. Consequently, when God's Kingdom is fully present, there will no longer be any marriage (Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36). There will then be only the one family of God.

Second, the New Testament indicates that marriage is not necessary as a Christian obligation, nor is it necessary for personal fulfillment. All that is necessary for discipleship and fulfillment is membership in the family of God. Since the basic purpose of the institution of marriage has been fulfilled in Christ, one may choose or be called not to enter marriage (celibacy is one form of discipleship), or one may choose or be called to be married (marriage is also one form of discipleship). Hence Christian single persons should be able to find in the Body of Christ, the church, that community of fellowship and love which every human being needs for personal fulfillment and effective service. This is a different view of the relationship between human sexuality and personal fulfillment than the one which seems to govern our culture today.

Third, even though the basic goal of marriage is fulfilled in Christ, marriage continues as an order of creation until the new creation comes fully into being. Because of fulfillment in Christ, the good news is that Christian marriage can fulfill its God-ordained purpose precisely by participating in and serving God's plan for establishing the new human community as the family of God. In fact, the highest goal and ultimate purpose of both

Christian marriage and family life is to serve the establishment and welfare of the family of God and to extend his Kingdom.

Thus Christian marriage and family are not ends in themselves. When marriage and family become ends in themselves or serve only personal goals, they have become idols. When marriage is used only as a means to personal or sexual fulfillment, when marriage and family are used primarily to establish a clan, build a name, control wealth or relationships, they constitute idolatry. Christian marriage and family must serve God's basic purpose of establishing the new community created in Christ.

Of course, Christian marriage and family life contribute to God's purpose in their own unique ways. The Christian family serves as the basic training ground for life in God's family because in the family children are trained in the way they should go (Prov.22:6). Here God intends that children be nurtured in a safe and secure environment without abuse of any kind. In the Christian family persons are shaped and molded for living with others in the genuine unity of the family of God. For it is in the intimate relationships of marriage and family life that we discover who we are, that we experience acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation, and that we learn what it means to give oneself for the sake of another. Here we learn what community is, what love is, and here in a very direct way we experience the care and concern of God himself through the care and concern of others. In this way Christian marriage and family life can be a means of grace because they are our primary lessons in living in community in Christ. With such lessons learned in the Christian home we are prepared for living in the broader family of God.

Christian marriage and family life are also a witness to the world. They display how God originally intended that marriage and family life should be lived if persons are to experience his blessings. At the same time they display to the world what Christ has done to make genuine love and community possible in marriage and the family. Such a witness is sorely needed in our world today because marriage and family are the basic institutions for a well-functioning society.

b. In Society

Jesus' disciples live in a great variety of societies. Sometimes Christians have thought it necessary to withdraw from contact with the world, but it seems more appropriate for Jesus' disciples to have the same love for the world that God himself had in sending his Son into the world (John 3:16). Such love does not approve sinful conduct in the world but it does embrace persons even though they are still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Although the apostle Paul instructs believers not to associate with persons who call themselves Christians but continue to live in sin, he explicitly states that this instruction does not apply to the relationship of believers to unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:9-10). Instead, in this relationship the command to love one's neighbor as oneself applies, "each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up"(Rom. 15:2). Such conduct is necessary to lead others to Christ. In such relationships Jesus' disciples should not seek their own good "but the good of many so that they may be saved"(1 Cor. 10:33). While Jesus' disciples are not of this world, they have been sent into the world and must be prepared to share with others the "reason for the hope that they have"(1 Pet. 3:15).

Jesus' disciples are citizens of God's Kingdom which is structured by righteousness and justice. This righteousness is not a private righteousness intended to be practiced only by a few because this righteousness is the foundation of God's throne (Ps. 89:14) and, therefore, it is the very structure of the creation itself. Consequently, this righteousness is not a private morality intended for Christians only; rather, it is a cosmic order of righteousness that is normative for all people. Since Jesus' disciples know this order of righteousness revealed by God, they must proclaim it to the nations. In the Great Commission Jesus instructs his

disciples not only to baptize, but also to teach the nations everything that Jesus has commanded. Jesus' disciples are called to teach the nations how to live in this world.

There is a way to live in this world, an ancient and narrow way that leads to joy, peace, and rest. Jesus came to make it possible for persons to walk this way of holiness, righteousness, and justice. Therefore, Jesus' disciples must become advocates of justice, righteousness, and peace in every society. They must continue the ancient prophetic voice which calls peoples and their rulers to repentance and to walk in the ways of the Lord. In addition, Jesus' disciples must speak and act as those who have already entered the Year of Jubilee inaugurated by Jesus, the Year which reveals that God is already at work to release the oppressed, to feed the hungry, to enable the poor to be satisfied and those who weep to laugh (Luke 1:53-54; 4:18-19; 6:20-21). For the earth is the Lord's and everything in it belongs to him. As Creator God intends that all of his creatures share in its wealth and blessings. Hence any political or economic system that privileges only certain persons or classes at the expense of others flies in the face of the Creator's will. Jesus' disciples must not only prophetically proclaim but also demonstrate by the way they live, by their care and concern for the poor and the oppressed, that they know and obey the Creator's and the Redeemer's will. Only then will their prophetic voice have power.

Every human society is held together and directed by governing authorities. Jesus' disciples are instructed to submit to such authorities because human governments are God's servants. Therefore, Christians owe such governments taxes, respect, and honor not just because governments have power but for reasons of conscience (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17). Christians are called to be good citizens.

However, sometimes governments abuse their power and exceed their God-given authority. When governments become unjust in their use of power, Jesus' disciples "must obey God rather than men"(Acts 5:29). They must hold faithfully to the testimony of Jesus and obey God's commandments. Where such faithfulness to the truth results in conflict with the government, Jesus' disciples are called to patient endurance and faithfulness even to the point of death (Rev. 2:10; 12:11,17; 13:10). In every society and in every circumstance Jesus' disciples must remain faithfully committed to God's righteousness in Christ and God's righteous requirements for living in human society.

c. In Work

God placed human beings on earth to be his earthkeepers. From agriculture to industry, from music to nuclear physics, human work is creative, productive, and the means by which God blesses humanity with health and wealth, with joy and delight. Work is essential to the well-being of every human being. It is so essential that to deny a person the right to work is a violation of God's commandment, "You shall not kill." Everyone must be given the right to work.

Work is an important arena of Christian discipleship because it fulfills obligations to God the Creator and to the neighbor. God expects all human beings to make his created world as productive and useful as possible for the welfare of all people and all living creatures. Jesus' disciples must work with the awareness that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it," including not only people but also the animals of the forest, the cattle on a thousand hills, and the birds and creatures of the field (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12). Such work should be a delight for through it humanity discovers the wisdom of God embedded in the creation. But working with God's creation, by sifting it through our fingers, by tilling the ground, by peering through microscopes and telescopes, we learn creation's secrets, we discover its order, how it functions, and how it is designed to sustain and produce life (Isa. 28:23-29). With the Psalmist we learn to exclaim, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth"(Ps. 8:9).

The entrance of sin into the world has affected also human labor. Work is harder than originally intended (Gen. 3:17-19). Sin leads many to view the fruit of their work selfishly, even to steal from the honest labor of others. Human greed leads to oppression. Sloth leads some to idleness and the desire to have others support them. Jesus' disciples know that whatever work they do must be done with sincerity and reverence for the Lord because they are working for the Lord and serving Jesus Christ (Col. 3:23-24). Disciples must work with their hands and their minds so that their "daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that (they) will not be dependant on anybody"(1 Thess. 3:6-12). Apparently, in Thessalonica some had become idle because they thought the return of the Lord was near. For such, the apostle Paul issued this rule: "if a man will not work, he shall not eat," and Paul himself worked with his hands to provide a model for them (2 Thess. 3:6-12).

In addition to developing God's creation and so providing for oneself and one's family, another purpose of work is to "have something to share with those in need"(Eph. 4:28). This purpose is deeply rooted in the Old Testament law and prophets and in the teaching of Jesus. It is exemplified in the laws of gleaning (Deut. 24:19-22), in prophetic rebuke (Amos 8:6; Zech.7:8-14, and in Jesus' parables (Luke 16:19-31). God's will that there be no poor among his people is reflected in the laws governing the abolishing of debts and the restoration of property in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25), in Jesus' instructions to his disciples to sell their possessions and give to the poor (Luke 12:33), and in the examples of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the early church who shared their possessions with the poor (Acts 2:42f.; 4:32f.).

Everything made or earned belongs to the Lord and must be used according to the lord's will. God has a claim levied on all human wealth and clearly demands that it be used to serve the needs of all and to advance his Kingdom. By means of the generosity of those blessed with more than they need, the needy experience the generosity and care of their heavenly Father. Thus, while human labor may be difficult, it is an obligation and source of joy before the Lord, necessary for human well-being, and contributes to the needs of all. In this way, through ordinary human labor Christian discipleship can be displayed in God's world.

3. By Living as Pilgrims on a Journey

Pilgrims cannot settle down until they arrive at the goal of their journey. They live by faith, not by sight, with hope focused on the future. Adam and Eve were not pilgrims when they were settled in the Garden of Eden where God also walked "in the cool of the day"(Gen. 3:8). After the Fall into sin and in response to the call of God, Abraham began the long pilgrimage of the people of God toward that "city with foundations whose builder and maker is God"(Heb. 11:10,16).

In the Old Testament God himself became a pilgrim-God leading his people out of bondage, through the wilderness, and into the promised Land (Ps. 68). There, for a time, God settled down in the temple and Israel settled in the Land. But this settled period did not last because the disobedience of Israel caused God to depart from the temple and to expel his people from the Land. The people of Israel became wanderers on the face of the earth, and even their return from exile did not really accomplish the goal of being a people settled down in righteousness and peace with God dwelling in their midst. So God sent his Son to live the life of a perfect pilgrim on earth until he arrived at the goal of being seated at God's right hand. Now Jesus calls his disciples to walk in his footsteps as pilgrims who have their eyes fixed on him and who will follow him into the presence of God (Heb. 12:1-3).

Jesus' disciples must not settle down prematurely before the arrival of that city with everlasting foundations. Until that city arrives, Jesus' disciples live as "aliens and sojourners in the world"(1 Pet. 2:11). Temporarily Jesus' disciples hold citizenship in the cities and

nations of this earth, but their ultimate commitment and citizenship lies elsewhere. Their eyes are fixed on that city which someday will descend from heaven (Rev. 21). Until then Jesus' disciples are called to live in this world as pilgrims

- whose citizenship is in heaven
- who are on a journey toward the New Jerusalem, and
- who anticipate Eden restored.

a. Whose Citizenship Is in Heaven

The people of God have always been citizens of God's city. In the Old Testament that city was Jerusalem (Ps. 48:1-2), and salvation was promised to those who were truly citizens of that city (Ps. 87:5-6; Isa. 4:3). But with its rejection of Jesus, earthly Jerusalem came under judgment and lost its significance as the city of salvation (Luke 19:41-44; Gal. 4:25). Now the city of salvation is no longer the "present city of Jerusalem" but the "Jerusalem that is above." Of that city Jesus' disciples are citizens (Gal. 4:31; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12).

Consequently, Jesus' disciples cannot give to any other city or nation their complete or unconditional allegiance. Sometimes on their long pilgrimage through the history of the nations, Jesus' disciples will experience conflict between their citizenship in a nation and their citizenship in the City of God. That conflict may result in oppression and martyrdom (Rev. 13). Disciples are called to be faithful to their ultimate allegiance to the City of God whose citizenship is claimed by faith and in hope.

b. Whose Destiny Is the New Jerusalem

As citizens of a heavenly city, Jesus' disciples must have their eyes focused on that which is above (Col. 3:1-3) and on that which is coming in the future (Phil. 2:20-21; Col. 3:4). While God's city is now above, it is destined to be revealed in the future, for "the city of my God, the new Jerusalem (will) come down out of heaven from my God"(Rev. 3:12). This city is the goal of the journey begun by Abraham and lasting until God's people live with him in his city in the renewed creation.

Abraham who began the journey continues to be an example for Jesus' disciples because they are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"(Gal. 3:29). Abraham was called to leave his father's home and land "even though he did not know where he was going"(Heb. 11:8). By faith he believed what God had promised and became a "wandering Aramean"(Deut. 26:5) living as a stranger in a foreign land. Throughout his life he lived by faith and in hope but he did not see the promised city. While through the Spirit Jesus' disciples have received more of what God had promised and are nearer to the goal than Abraham was (Rom. 13:11), still the promised city has not yet descended from heaven. So the pilgrimage continues.

The way to that city has been clearly mapped out. The pilgrim-disciples follow the ancient and narrow path described by the prophets and walked by Jesus. Disciples follow in Jesus' footsteps. Walking that path requires faith, hope, and obedience for it is the path of righteousness, holiness, and love. So in the present Jesus' disciples must live as citizens of God's city of righteousness, holiness, and peace. When they do, the contours of God's city begin to be seen in the midst of the cities and nations of the world. The life and the lifestyle of Jesus' disciples witness to the city that is to come.

c. Who Anticipate Eden Restored

The history of humanity began in a garden and ends in a city. God intends that humanity live in fellowship with him and with one another. Thus his plan of salvation creates a renewed human community symbolized by a city.

This symbol is described in great detail in the prophets. Isaiah reveals that this future city will possess the nations and will be a city of joy and gladness, of righteousness and holiness, of justice and peace (Isa. 51-55). This city will be like Eden, the garden of the Lord (Isa. 51:3). In Revelation that is the description of the New Jerusalem that will descend as a gift from God. For in that city there is a garden and a river flowing, and on its banks are the trees of life with leaves for the healing of the nations. It is a city in which there will be no longer any curse (Rev. 22:1-5). For that city Jesus' disciples live in eager expectation.

The New Jerusalem is the symbol of God's renewal of the heavens and the earth. While it is the appointed destiny of Jesus' disciples, it is also intended to be the destiny of the nations of the world (Rev. 21:24-26). Pilgrims on the way to that city are to invite all others to secure their citizenship in that city through faith in Jesus Christ. On earth there is no eternal city, but there is one to come. God and the Lamb dwell in that city and there "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"(Rev. 21:4). When it comes, the long pilgrimage of God's people will be over for God will dwell with his people, and they can settle down forever.