

# Make Disciples



## *On the Theory and Practice of Discipleship*

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Christ Teaching  
*(An etching by Rembrandt van Rijn)*



*(Rembrandt van Rijn)*



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## Author's Apology

Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...<sup>1</sup>



Nearly thirty years ago, as I was perusing some books in my library, I was strongly aware of the command "make disciples" in an intensely personal and urgent way. Whether it was our Lord 'speaking' to me or not, I cannot say for certain. "No one has disciplined me." I remonstrated (it was more like whining) in prayer. This was met with a very strong presentment; "What part of 'make disciples' don't you understand?"

I retrospect, I could have said: "all of it." But I was so ignorant; I didn't know that I didn't know. From that moment, I endeavored to do something that would both allow me to fulfill the command and encourage others to obey it as well. These notes are a step in that long obedience. I do hope that they will be a help to you, providing insight and guidance as you fulfill "The Great Commission" in your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:16 NIV



## Part I. The Theory of Discipleship

“Go...Make Disciples”<sup>2</sup>



Disciple, discipleship, and discipline are all English words that come down to us through Old English from the Latin *discere* - to learn and its nominative form *discipula* - a learner or student. In common usage, the verb “to discipline” is used differently than the noun “disciple”, even though the words share a common root. The verb “to discipline” often conveys thoughts of punishment for unacceptable behavior. The noun “disciple”, on the other hand, is often used as a verb form “to disciple” meaning “to teach” and not “to punish”. This strange anomaly does, in fact preserve a difference found in the Greek, which uses two words for disciple: μαθητης (pronounced math-ay-tes') meaning a learner or a disciple and παιδευω (pronounced pahee-dyoo'-o) meaning to train up a child, to educate, or, by implication, to discipline by punishment, to chastise. The first word, μαθητης, occurs 352 times in the New Testament and is consistently translated disciple. The second word, παιδευω, is used 13 times and is translated variously as chasten/chastise (8), learn (2), taught/teach (2), instruct (1). It seems to convey the overtone that the person being disciplined is really like a small child for whom the “rod of correction” is a necessary part of the learning process. The anomaly between the verbs “to discipline” and “to disciple” in English is pointless. Discipleship has to do with developing discipline by both positive and negative means, and discipline underlies all human relationships.

Learning is similar to discipleship, but discipleship goes much farther. Learning involves largely cognitive activity (with the exception of physical activities) whereas discipleship involves not only cognitive but volitional and affective changes in the person. Discipleship takes place in a certain kind of relationship, a relationship with an individual who has experientially mastered certain disciplines that the disciple seeks to master. Parenting, coaching, mentoring, and apprenticeship are similar in concept to discipleship. In each of these relationships the learner is under the direction of the master or teacher.

Discipleship has been happening throughout our whole lives and will continue to happen. To understand this better, let us we look at our life as a function of age.

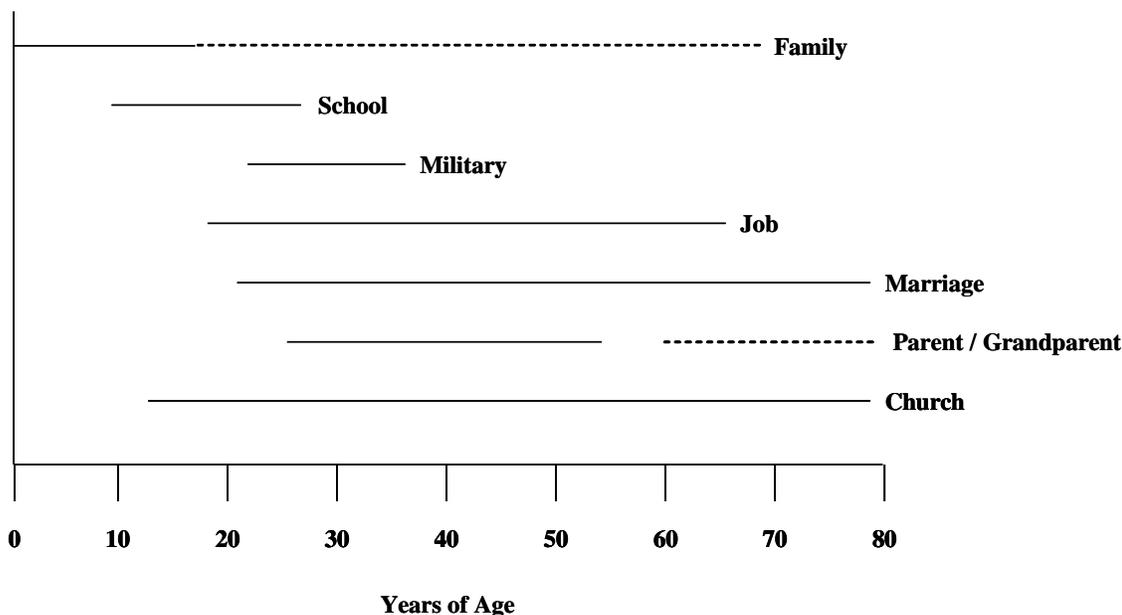
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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19a (NIV)



## Chapter 1 Discipleship in the World

If we were to plot our involvement in relational systems, as a function of our age, it might look something like this:



### 1. Family

When we were young, our family provided the relationships we grew up with. At each stage, we learned some necessary disciplines in order to function in our family. Parents, siblings, family relatives, family pets all combined in a more or less unconscious way to teach us how to get along, how to share, how to solve relational problems, how to control strong emotions like anger or impatience, how to exercise politeness, how not to fight or bite etc. Hopefully our parents taught us certain life skills: how to read with understanding, how to manage time and money, as well as relationships. The relational tone set by parental authority, we equated with “love”. If the family relationships were healthy, the notion we formed of love enabled us to replicate healthy relationships with others. If the family was dysfunctional, our notion of “love”, as well as dysfunctional coping skills we learned, will likely lead to a repetition of the dysfunctionality of our insular family. While we are less dependent on our insular family in later life, we take much this learning with us into later relationships in the form of communication and relational skills as well as “baggage” from dysfunctional family problem solving techniques that we learned early on.

### 2. School

School is a society of fellow students and teachers / administrators. It is a society in which we will live for 15 to 20 years. It is usually our first exposure to a society of developmental peers. This is a major learning experience in which peer values and behavior sometimes set us at variance with our older insular family (teen peer group vs. mom and dad). Academic learning provides us with knowledge that will be useful for a job or for higher education. But the discipleship process of school also develops life skills like critical thinking, time management, and the ability to learn on our own. Because it is a long discipleship process, we can observe an important part of

discipleship: internalization of discipline. We might say, simplistically, that learning is generally marked by three stages.

#### **a. Student**

In most undergraduate studies (Kindergarten through Senior High) the student does his lessons as he is told and when he is told. His rewards are external, good grades for lessons well done and on time. With college, if we go that far, we learn to speak of our “academic discipline” meaning such diverse areas as engineering, accounting, business management, teaching, psychology, medicine, etc. that look ahead to lifetime employment. Nevertheless the student still relies on the professor’s syllabus to guide study activity and meet deadlines. The syllabus (if one is given) at the start of the term is all the guidance they will get in many cases. They must plan out their own homework and when they will do it. At these later stages of schooling, life skills like time management and planning are essential to scholastic success. Slowly the student is being weaned from dependency on external discipline and is being encouraged in the internalization of academic disciplines that support independent learning.

#### **b. Scholar**

In graduate work the transformation from student to scholar continues. Greater academic freedom allows the individual to select studies because of internal interests which are driven by the individual’s need to know, not the professor’s directions or deadlines. The scholar’s rewards are largely internal, a sense of growing knowledge along lines of personal interest, a sense of personal accomplishment, and external recognition by the community of fellow scholars (in the form of degrees).

#### **c. Master**

As scholastic maturity is achieved, the scholar (who is probably still learning for the sheer pleasure of it) has become a “master” capable of guiding the formation of other scholars.

### **3. Job**

Job introduces us to the service / commercial / industrial community. Here we learn how to get along with the boss, our fellow workers, as well as (in some cases) the general (paying) public – the customer. With customers, anger management skills are critical. From the late Middle Ages until the early industrial revolution, a system of discipleship was practiced that was similar to education. It involved the same three stages of internalization of the discipline of physical skills rather than academic learning. It was the system of apprenticeship.

#### **a. Apprentice**

When an individual wanted to learn the “art and mysteries” of a particular craft, they were bound out by their parents in a kind of servitude, as an apprentice to a “master” who provided everything necessary to living for his apprentice: room, board, clothes, and even a little spending money. In return the apprentice worked in the master’s shop, quite possibly along with the master’s own children who might also be learning their father’s trade. In the best of situations (and many were not), the apprentice was like another member of the family, and the master was like a surrogate parent. Slowly the apprentice would be allowed to undertake more difficult parts of the trade, acquiring skills necessary to become a master himself. During that time he might contract with the local blacksmith to make (one by one) the tools that he would need for himself

when he went into business on his own. Eventually the apprentice reached the stage where he had mastered the trade. To demonstrate this, he would complete a work that would embody all the lessons he had learned. If he were a cabinet maker, for instance, it might be making a fine piece of furniture without the master's help. When finished, this would be tangible proof that he had succeeded in mastering the arts and mysteries of his trade. It would be his "master piece".

### **b. Journeyman**

Having achieved the status of 'master', he was now ready to leave his master's shop and go on a journey to other shops. He became a "journeyman". In other shops, he would use his own tools and skills for wages. As a journeyman, he might also learn the finer points of other masters that he had not learned in his apprenticeship. The goal here was to save enough that he might one day start his own shop.

### **c. Master**

After a while as a journeyman, which might last quite a few years, he settled down (probably marrying and starting a family) and opened his own shop. Now he was a master in every sense of the word. With time, he would take in apprentices and journeymen. The cycle would start all over again.

In our industrial society, with mass production and great division of labor, this paradigm of learning a trade and becoming journeyman and then an independent master has been largely lost to us. It is however a good paradigm in which to understand discipleship.

## **4. Military**

For those who enter the military community, a different aspect of discipleship is emphasized: discipline as a means for the acquisition of virtue. Discipline strengthens desirable character traits by means of repetition or habituation. Habits are a basic part of all our lives. They are learned behavioral patterns. Basically acting in a certain way, which seems strange and difficult at first, becomes easier with time and repetition. Behavior patterns, once established, become traits of our character. It is these character traits (together with the value system that emphasized them) that govern the behavior. Desirable character traits are called virtues. The word virtue comes from the Latin *virtus*, which means strength. Virtues are strengths of character. Military virtues include things like loyalty to service and country, courage in combat, resourcefulness, leadership, competence, integrity, and above all obedience to superiors ("If it moves salute it"). These are all learned responses. In reality all discipleship focuses on the strengthening valuable behavior patterns by habituation. Typically the habituation period for simple tasks like hanging up clothes, homework before television, or brushing teeth after meals takes about sixty days.

## **5. Marriage**

As maturity progresses, (and, ideally, as fiscal responsibilities are mastered) the special, one on one, relationship of marriage may be entered into. Here personal restraint and disciplined behavior become essential, especially in the areas of communication in order to understand each other and to negotiate acceptable terms and conditions for the endless issues that arise when two people endeavor to live a harmonious life together. In this relational system, discipline emphasizes the ability to deny yourself and to sacrifice your self for the good of the loved spouse. We see in marriage that love and sacrifice are profoundly linked (though it is present in all

relational systems that demand discipline). Discipleship in marriage involves learning not just to live but to love.

## **6. Parenting**

With marriage, children are often the next stage as we build our own family. By this time the individual both requires personal restraint and good communication skills (especially with teens) as well as the ability to impose discipline in order to keep the family operating in a harmonious way. With the growth of children, the empty nest may be followed by children's marriages and eventually grandchildren. Mentoring and wisdom / patience are real assets to the very young. The grand parents are now the "masters" for their young grand children / disciples. They fulfill an important support role for parents who want to encourage good habits and useful life skills in children.

## **7. Church**

Throughout these years, many participate in another relational system, the church, the synagogue, or the mosque. Here the congregant is most likely to encounter the support for learning the spiritual disciplines like prayer, reading holy books, acts of charity, etc.

## **8. General lessons from life**

All discipline has to do with action. For every action we take, we make a choice, whether we realize it or not. Each time we choose to act in a certain way, it becomes easier to act in the same way next time. Repetitive actions habituate; they become habits. Habits that represent the internalization of valued ("good") behavior are called virtues. "Bad" habits are vices. Repetitive good actions displace bad habits by creating good habits in their place. Discipline inculcates virtues by extirpating vices. Discipline also involves love. Without love, the sacrifices of discipline are bitter experiences, and habituation produces hatred.

Discipleship happens every day. If, I begin lifting weights my muscles will grow stronger and unnecessary tissues, like fat, will disappear. You might say that the good habit of weight lifting exercise has displaced the bad habit of inactivity. And because of the regular discipline of going to the gym and lifting weights, I developed greater strength.

Disciplines don't just focus on bodily activity. Discipleship can address the development of skills and latent abilities. If I take a course in painting; the instructor will train my mind to see details that I never saw before in the field of my eye's view. He does this so that I may represent them realistically in paint. My hand-eye coordination will also be developed as well as my ability to understand color and form and the nature of composition. This training also has consequences in my appreciation of the art of others. Discipleship has taught me to "love" art in a different way. Before when I went to the art museum and saw a picture and I liked it because it looked "nice". After being trained in the artist's studio, the painting may still "look nice" but the artist's message, his technique, his composition, his place in the history of art all enter into my enjoyment of the painting.

Discipline addresses behavioral issues. Perhaps I am naturally impatient which causes problems in communication. If I speak before giving others a chance to talk in business meetings, I will quickly be in trouble. As time goes on and nobody wants to work with me, because they have all been felt the brunt of my impatience, the boss, needing to have more of a team like atmosphere, may send me to an industrial training class focused on 'active listening'. There through a series of

exercises, I learn to listen more carefully and to ask more pointed questions. Slowly the 'bad' habit of speaking too quickly before others have a chance to speak (the vice of impatience) is replaced by the 'good' habit of patient and careful listening (the virtue of patience). Now I will be better able to function as a team member rather than as a 'lone wolf'.

In addressing behavioral issues, discipline also addresses relational issues. Relationships are like a dance involving two parties<sup>3</sup>. "It takes two to tango." The steady dynamics of a relationship, its 'set point', is a function of the habitual actions and reactions of both parties. By educating either one of the parties in a relationship about the nature of their participatory actions, where they arise from, and why they don't produce the desired results, the stage is set for that person to make a different decision about their action. With the change in action, the set point of the relationship begins to change. If that changed action is maintained by consistent repetition, a new discipline is put in place and the relationship is changed for ever.

All that has been said so far is discipline as the world knows it. This discipline is essential for living in relational systems whether in families, in educational, industrial, or military societies, in marriage, or in the church. But all of the above should prompt us to ask another important question. What is Christian discipleship and how is it different than the world's discipleship?

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<sup>3</sup> For a superb discussion of this relational mechanism and a host of other insights see [The Dance of Intimacy](#) by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., Harper Perennial ISBN 0-06-091646-X



## Chapter 2 Discipleship in the Spirit

And **be not conformed** to this world: but **be ye transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.<sup>4</sup>



Christian discipleship is a process of transformation in which the disciple's life increasingly resembles Jesus' life. While Christians are born of the Spirit,<sup>5</sup> disciples are made.<sup>6</sup> The transforming power is, in both cases, the grace of God ministered to the individual disciple in response to their faithful obedience. The power of spiritual transformation that marks the believer's walk (the process of discipleship) is no different than the power of spiritual transformation that marked their spiritual birth. The Apostle Paul writes, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."<sup>7</sup> The underlying principle of the entire spiritual life is "grace through faith".<sup>8</sup> But in discipleship, the obedience of the disciple which is the expression of their faith is governed by the spiritual direction of an older believer who has, himself, learned to live the life of grace. Why should this be? The commands of God are applicable to all of life. But obeying the commands of God in specific situations of life is an ability that requires discernment based on experience.<sup>9</sup> Many a believer has made painful and costly mistakes by misunderstanding what God wanted them to do in a given circumstance. In the Old Testament this failure was called "not asking counsel of God"<sup>10</sup> Leading is a ministry of God the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> That is why prayer is essential for a successful spiritual life.<sup>12</sup> But God chooses to involve older believers in that leading. Mature believers have learned to live their lives by God's grace. They understand how to observe the commands of God in different situations. They can discern how the Sin nature tries to deceive as it influences younger believers in every situation and at every moment of life to misunderstand what God requires of them. The flesh seeks to lead the disciple into spiritual traps and frustration. If God's grace is the transforming engine of discipleship, it is the constant spiritual direction of a godly saint helping the young disciple to lay hold of God's grace by faith in his daily spiritual struggles that is the central human element in discipleship.

The most fundamental difference, then, between discipleship as practiced by people in the world and discipleship as practiced by Christians is the grace of God! For the world, the process of

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:2 (KJV)

<sup>5</sup> John 3:3, 5-7 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, **Ye must be born again**.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:19a Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations... (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 2:6 -7

<sup>8</sup> Eph 2:8-10 For by **grace are ye saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; **not of works**, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus unto good works**, which God hath before ordained **that we should walk in them**.

<sup>9</sup> Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth **to them that are of full age**, even those **who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil**.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua 9:14 And the men took of their victuals, and **asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD**.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:14 For as many as are **led by the Spirit of God**, they are the sons of God.

<sup>12</sup> James 1:5-8 **If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

discipleship involves training the individual's unaided will for conformity to commonly accepted standards of behavior. For the Christian, the process of discipleship involves the transformation of the entire person by the grace of God! At best, worldly disciplines prepare the disciple to live a successful and harmonious life with other people in the world. Christian disciplines prepare the believer to live a life by the power of God's love<sup>13</sup> in harmony with God Himself! The former fits one for time, the latter for both time and eternity! The necessity for the operation of God's grace in the disciple's life has to do with our human condition.

## **1. Humanity and Identity**

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?<sup>14</sup>



Our Lord's question to His disciples presents us with two closely linked concepts central to our understanding of persons in general and discipleship in particular. That Jesus existed as a human being is taken for granted. He is perfectly human in the complete sense of the word. What humanity was meant to be, as God created humanity, is fully realized in Jesus' perfect humanity. The Divine revelation "I AM" describes Him perfectly. In His humanity Jesus becomes the ideal person that the disciple strives to become by God's grace.

But existence is not the primary focus of our Lord's question. Rather it is one of identity. His existence (I am) is taken for granted. The question is rather one of identity (who am I?) or rather one of perceived identity ("whom say ye that I am?"). That is the question of all questions and the center piece of all our hope. And Peter gets it right! "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."<sup>15</sup> In our lives, these twin issues of humanity and identity involve our awareness of self (our sense of shared humanity) and our sense of who we are in contradistinction to the rest of humanity (our sense of unique personhood). In order to comprehend the role of discipleship, we must start with these two related concepts and the ways in which they both influence our behavior, which ultimately should be in a willing conformity to God's purpose and plans for each of us.

### **a. Man as God Created him.**

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.<sup>16</sup>



The nature of the soul may better be understood by our Lord's simple and profound saying: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."<sup>17</sup> When Jesus says this, He gives us a picture of three aspects of the human soul. The words that He uses are: know, happy, and do. By use of the word "know", He makes reference to the rational or cognitive aspect of the soul. By the use of the word "do", He makes reference to the volitional aspect of the soul; while "happy" reminds us of the affective (or emotional) aspect of the soul.

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 5:5 ... the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 16:15

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 16:16b

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>17</sup> John 13:17



We were created with an affective (emotional) nature so that we might sense His presence, respond to Him and derive pleasure from Him. - We are capable of emotional response to both external stimuli and internal processes.

We were created with a nescient (reasonable) nature so that we might know God (and our self in relationship with God) - We are capable of reasoned thought with memory leading to understanding and awareness both of self and that which is outside of self. An important aspect of cognition is what we call conscience so that we might be morally responsible to Him. Conscience makes us capable evaluating thoughts (intents) and actions for consistency with internalized values and moral codes. The most profound moral code is that found in the scriptures: “Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and strength and thy neighbor as thy self.” We are also capable of self perception or self awareness including our strengths and weaknesses, our emotional state (happy, frightened, sad, etc.), our physical and spiritual needs, our position relative to others including God, and as mentioned before our moral awareness that holds us accountable for decisions that we make. We are capable of the perception of others, of the things outside of our self, of the memory of decisions made, of actions taken, and the consequences of those actions which may help us to become more aware of the outside world. And we are distinctly and uniquely capable of the awareness of God. The corollary here is that we are creatures that are capable of learning.

We were created with a volitional (willing) nature so that we might choose Him freely - In concert with our cognitive and affective abilities, we are enabled to make decisions (planning) and coupled with strength/power that enables us to take action (execute plans). The obedience central to discipleship requires that the will be exercised in rational obedience or “reasonable service”<sup>18</sup> Again, obedience acting by the grace of God is central to Christian discipleship. But why is God’s grace absolutely essential?

#### **b. Man as Sin Deformed Him.**

“Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves: for that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was due. And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife,

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<sup>18</sup> Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is **your reasonable service**.

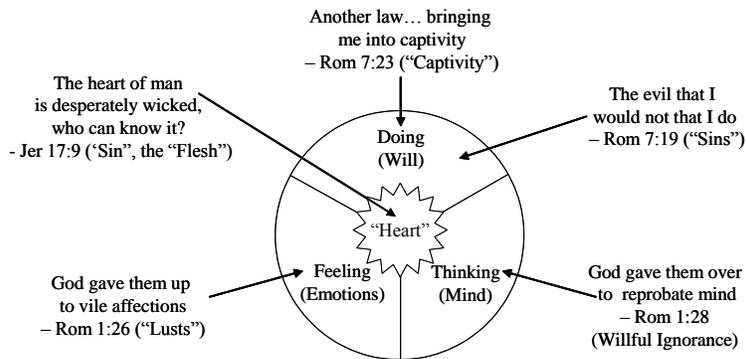
deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful: who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they that practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practice them.”<sup>19</sup>

“For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do. But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practice. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. I find then the law that, to me who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?”<sup>20</sup>

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”<sup>21</sup>



As might be expected, the entrance of sin through the disobedience of Adam corrupted the human nature. The extent of this corruption is described throughout the scriptures. Specifically we may say that sin enflamed the affections, darkened the mind, and enslaved the will. Finally, sin corrupted the very heart of man, making it desperately wicked and deceitful. This may be shown graphically as below:



These corruptions of the human nature render man fundamentally unfit and unable to fulfill the commands of God by himself. It is this painful conflict that draws forth such an agonizing cry: “O wretched man that I am” from the heart of the apostle Paul after a life time of trying to achieve righteousness as a Pharisee. Discipleship, as the world practices it, can never undo the effects of Sin in the human soul. Man cannot keep the commands of God!<sup>22</sup> But the grace of God addresses exactly this problem! The transformation of the person spoken above is not just the extirpation of vices (habituated sins), but the gradual removal of the underlying cause for such behavior (Sin).

<sup>19</sup> Romans 8:24-32

<sup>20</sup> Romans 7:15-21 (ASV)

<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 17:9

<sup>22</sup> John 15:5b ... without me ye can do nothing.

### c. Identity and Relationship

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”<sup>23</sup>



We tend to think of our identity as something static, but that is only partly true. We are mutable creatures. Which means, not only that our first parents could change from innocents to sinners, but that we can change as well. Were it not for that possibility, discipleship would be impossible. Relationships exert a pressure on our behavior. The relationship between the discipler and the disciple is a real human force in the process. This impacts not only how we behave, but who we finally become. In discipleship, our personal identity and what we perceive that identity to be is particularly dependant on our relationship with God!

While we learn something of our human identity in our relationships with people around us, any change in how we see ourselves, particularly as a result of God's grace, will change the tone of all our relationships. Years ago, as I reflected upon what was “new” as a result of God's creation going on inside of me,<sup>24</sup> I understood that how I related to others would certainly change. But just who did I relate to? Rather than make an exhaustive list of individuals, I thought about the types or classes of those to whom I related. I ‘walked the perimeter of my life’. As I did this, I noticed that on a human level there were only two types of people I dealt with: those who knew God and those who didn't. On a spiritual level there was God, Himself (through His Son Jesus Christ) and all that opposes God and His purposes – the devil and his horde. Still there remained one more person that was forgotten – myself. When my sense of who I am changed, I found that I related to myself differently. I further tried to reflect about what seemed to be the fundamental tone of each relational direction. Because Jesus is the light of the world, I too was to be both light and salt. My life before the unbelieving world was to be a **witness** for the truth (light<sup>25</sup>) and against error (salt<sup>26</sup>). My life before the community of believers was to be one of practical **works** that would benefit my brothers and sisters in Christ. My life with regard to that which “... opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped”<sup>27</sup> would be one of constant **warfare**. But that with regard to God my proper response was to be one of love and **worship**. Only as I related to those around me in these ways would I be enabled to continue my Christian **walk** as a stranger and pilgrim. I now realize that life is far from being so simple, but the egocentric mnemonic proved to be a useful frame of reference over the years like the four cardinal points of the compass ranged around the central pin that the needle swings on.

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-20

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 21:5a And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. ...

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 5:14-16 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid; neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:4

Concurrent with the process of answering the question “Who am I?” is discovering the basis on which that identity rests. For each of us there are many bases for identity. Most, if not all, are bound up with others to whom we relate on some common level, as individuals or as a group. We not only learn about who we are in relationship, but we are defined by those relationships. We can discover these bases for identity simply by answering the question basic question: “Who am I?”

Who am I?

I am a Man	-	Gender Base
I am an American	-	Geographic Base
I am a Citizen of these United States	-	National Base
I am an independent voter	-	Political base
I am 35 years old	-	Historical base
I am an economics student	-	Academic base
I am middle class	-	Socio-economic base
I am a lawyer	-	Professional base
I am a Christian	-	Religious base
I am a Caucasian	-	Ethnic base
Etc.		

These bases for identity are all extrinsic. That is they lie outside of us but in conjunction with other people. And that is a problem. In resting, in some way, on our fellow humans, who share our attributes of mutability, relativity, and a corrupted nature, they are fundamentally unstable. It is like building the ‘house’ of our identity on the ‘sand’ of human mutability and sin. The sin that produces dysfunctionality in human relations produces instability in our basis of identity.

God’s answer to Moses’ question “Who shall I say sent me” is given in the language of pure identity: “I AM THAT I AM”.<sup>28</sup> The words also convey the reality that God’s basis for identity lays within Himself. The basis of God’s Identity is Himself: intrinsic, immutable, absolute, unbounded, and holy. If we turn again to Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question we see something remarkable: Peter’s discovery of Jesus’ true identity, results in his identity being changed and his new identity recognized.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”<sup>29</sup>

The point to be observed here is that Peter’s experience of Jesus is not unique to him. It is rather to be the common experience of all believers. Jesus asks each of us the same question, in effect and when we “see” who Jesus really is (i.e. God reveals to us who Jesus is) then our identity is

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<sup>28</sup> Exodus 3:13-14 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 16:15-18 see also the earlier assertion about Peter’s identity: John 1:4-42 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said unto him, we have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jonas: thou shall be called Cephas (Peter), which is by interpretation, A stone.

changed, in relation to Jesus. With the awareness of who Jesus Christ is, we suddenly become aware of whom we are in Christ. With that realization of a new and actual identity (with Jesus as the basis), there is a possibility for a transformation of our actions in any future circumstance. We are a “new creation”.<sup>30</sup> A careful consideration of several verses will suffice to illustrate.

<u>When we see that Jesus is:</u>	<u>Then we are:</u>	<u>Reference</u>
Shepherd	Sheep	John 10:11
Way	Pilgrims	John 14:6, I Peter 2:11
Light / Truth	Disciples	I John 1:5, John 14:6
Word	Believer	John 1:1, Galatians 6:10
Life	Child of God	John 14:6
Older brother	Brothers	Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:1
Heir	Joint heirs	Romans 8:7
Holy	Saints	I Peter 1:16
Great Physician	Patients	Luke 5:31
Captain of our salvation	Soldiers	Hebrews 2:10
Bride groom	Bride	John 3:29
Vine	Branches	John 15:1-10
Master	Stewards	Luke 12:42-48
High Priest / Prince	Royal priesthood	Hebrews 8:1
Chief Corner stone	Living stones	I Peter 2:4-8
	Etc.	

A word of caution is in order here! It is easy to grasp what is being said here intellectually and yet still not have a real possession of these aspects of our identity in Christ, because we do not know Him fully in our experience. In just such a way we can learn about discipleship and yet not be disciplined (i.e. subject to Christian transformative disciplines)! Unfortunately, there are too many who call themselves Christians who are strangers to the transforming grace of God. They may have a great deal of accurate knowledge of biblical truths, but not know God at all. Such head knowledge is not theology! The real measure of theology lies in our love.<sup>31</sup> The real progress in the Christian life lies in our ability to love God and one another because we “see” Jesus Christ and who we all are in Him. Discipleship is learning to love as God wanted us to love when He created us. Discipleship certainly involves the outward norms of self denial and self sacrifice<sup>32</sup>, but this is all meaningless without love<sup>33</sup>. We can only love that way when we come to love the One experientially!

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (NIV)

<sup>31</sup> 1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

<sup>32</sup> Luke 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

<sup>33</sup> John 14:15 If you love me, keep my commandments.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

#### **d. Identity and Action**

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.<sup>34</sup>

... But who say ye that I am?<sup>35</sup>



In the first text above, what God does (Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you) is determined by who He is (I AM THAT I AM). That is the way God, Who is immutable, is. What He does comes forth from Whom He is! But with mutable man, actions help shape our identity; just as identity drives our actions. Taking action is like pushing a large bolder on the ice. We push it so it moves (action) but the bolder pushes back (reaction). And that reaction moves us because we are not immutable.

We shape our actions, but our actions shape us but only for the worse! I work for Mr. X a director of the ABC Company. But Mr. X is an “empire builder” who sets the extension of his territorial power, his ‘turf,’ above the needs of the ABC Company. Since I work for him, if I want to succeed I must fall in line with his wrong headed plans. If I do not, when layoffs come because of Mr X’s selfish plans have hurt the ABC Company, I will suffer an identity crisis when I suddenly work for no one (an identity crises as a result of the instability of my basis of identity – I am the sub-director of the ABC Company). But if I want to stay, I must become complicit in his schemes. I become an ‘empire builder’ just like him.

Jesus reminds us that “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”<sup>36</sup> The people to whom Jesus spoke insisted “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man.” But even their Abrahamic pedigree could not prevent them from becoming slaves of sin, the minute they sinned.

Discipleship has to do with our actions, particularly with our not sinning! That is why immediately before this exchange Jesus tells them “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”<sup>37</sup> We behave, in part, in accordance with whom we see ourselves to be, as well as how we want others to see us. Our actions rest in part upon our perception of outward circumstances. There is also our sense of needs, goals, abilities which are all part of our interior awareness of self. Our sense of right and wrong (which we call conscience - prominent in Paul’s thought in Romans 7 under the rubric “the law”) is also critical. Clearly Paul’s experience as recounted in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans should warn us that a moral code of right and wrong is not enough to determine our actions. The Law, though God-given, holy, and just simply cannot cause correct behavior.<sup>38</sup> Christian discipleship is not self reformation in accordance with our conscience. But

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<sup>34</sup> Exodus 3:14

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 16:15b

<sup>36</sup> John 8:34b

<sup>37</sup> John 8:31b-32

<sup>38</sup> Romans 7:14 -24 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells

conscience does play a role and goes much further than God's righteous standard. It also includes our sense of social right and wrong that we learned in our worldly discipleship. It preserves the record of learned social experiences gained as we grow up. It is a kind of internal "Emily Post" of acceptable social behavior for our particular culture. Conformity to such rules of civility or courtesy is quite important to our social function. There is also a process of assessment of circumstances that involves our interior value system, those things that we consider most important and least important.

But in the end, it is our sense of who we are, our perceived identity that strongly influences our actions. We may illustrate the role that our sense of identity plays in determining our actions by conducting a little thought experiment. Assume that two men are walking down a street together. As they turn a corner, they behold a major apartment building fire. There is a crowd of people behind a police barricade and beyond them a small fire company doing their best to extinguish the blaze. The firemen are clearly in trouble. There is plenty of equipment, but too few firemen. In an instant one of the two men jumps over the police barricade and offers his services to the fire chief. The other takes up his position behind the barricade and watches the conflagration. They have taken different courses of action, while the circumstances in which they find themselves are exactly the same. While there are many possible explanations for their different behavior, it is reasonable to assume that the one who jumped over the police barrier was a volunteer fireman while the other who stayed behind it was not. In this simple case, each person's sense of their identity helped determine their respective course of action. Simply put, what we do comes in part from who we perceive ourselves to be. This also works in reverse. Who we perceive ourselves to be is learned through our experiences with others. In a sense we are all asking the same question of others that Jesus asks of us, "Who do you say I am?" The people we grow up with and those whom we meet help us answer that question. Each person is a kind of psychological mirror for us. We tend to see ourselves through their eyes. When we conform to their accepted values, expectations, and behavioral norms, we have the happy experience of their acceptance and love. When we do not, we feel the pain of their censure or even rejection.<sup>39</sup> This process lies at the heart of discipline as the world practices it. It is the process of conformity. This is not entirely bad. It is by these means that we learn essential life skills like managing time, energy, money, health, and above all relationships. If those to whom we relate generally conform to society's best standards, we will grow up reasonably able to function in our society. If those to whom we relate are dysfunctional, we will learn dysfunctional coping skills that expose us to repeating the dysfunctionality of our insular families. Children of alcoholics will tend to marry chemically dependent mates. Abused children will tend to marry abusive mates, and so on. While not an inevitable consequence, the odds are not in the individual's favor. Dysfunctional cycles of behavior tend to repeat across generations. Besides all this, personal learning and emotional disabilities hinder learning effectual social skills and predispose the individual to painful trials all of which continue to point to the individual's need for God's grace and mercy. While a detailed discussion of these aspects of life is beyond the scope of these notes, we should be aware of their existence.

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in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

<sup>39</sup> The emotional aspect of our person is critical in establishing our self identity. People who truncate their emotional responses to life experiences ("stuff" their emotions) will have problems answering this most fundamental of life's questions.

Our perception of identity may or may not be accurate. Often we gain a truer perspective of our personal identity through the consequences of our actions. Notice that in Paul's repeated failure to keep the law, that he believes is "holy, and just, and good,"<sup>40</sup> he learns something about his identity. He is, a "wretched man." This sense of wretchedness also describes the experience of the Apostle Peter. Throughout the gospel narrative, his character is deeply flawed. But he sees himself in a very different light. He feels that he is courageous when in fact his behavior is cowardly braggadocio<sup>41</sup>. This character flaw is finally exposed to him in his traumatic denial of his Lord, a trial that will confirm Jesus' supremely accurate assessment of Peter's character. But this confrontation is painful in the extreme. There is hope, however. Jesus has prayed for Peter<sup>42</sup> and a true assessment of his character is absolutely essential to the transformation ("conversion") of that character that will be demonstrated on Pentecost.<sup>43</sup> The Grace of God which alone can transform the life requires the honest (and painful) acknowledgement that we are sinners unable to change ourselves.

So we see that there are really two aspects to our self identity, what we perceive ourselves to be, and what we actually are. If these align well, then we tend not to think of ourselves "more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"<sup>44</sup> If these do not align well (i.e. we are self deceived about who we really are), then when we choose a course of action based on our erroneous perceptions and the unfortunate consequences will certainly be self revelatory as was the case with Peter and Paul. Trials, in their outworking, trend to disabuse us of our self deceptions (remove the "dross"<sup>45</sup>) and suit us for the reception of the grace of God by revealing our need of it. This process lies at the heart of Christian discipleship, the process of transformation of character because of God's grace.

## **2. Holiness and Discipleship**

"Be ye holy; for I am holy"<sup>46</sup>



Believers should be profoundly motivated by the awesome realization that they serve a transcendently holy God whose His command to His people was ever thus. In His infinite grace He has declared us holy by paying the terrible price for our salvation, but that in no way justifies a continued indifference on our part to sin in our lives! The awareness of the holiness of God

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<sup>40</sup> Romans 7:12b

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 26:33-35a, 73-75; Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. ... And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, and immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 2:1,4,14 "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place....And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ... But Peter, standing ... lifted up his voice, and said unto them, ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem ...hearken to my words..."

<sup>44</sup> Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

<sup>46</sup> 1 Peter 1:16 Because it is written, "Be ye holy; for I am holy". See also Leviticus 20:7 Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. And again in 1 Peter 1:15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

creates a real problem for us. The perennial question for the disciple is “What am I to do?” We sense that the holiness of God requires some response from us. Let us consider what that is.

### a. Holiness

... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.<sup>47</sup>



For the Christian, holiness is both an event (imputed righteousness, declared to be holy, juridical or forensic holiness)<sup>48</sup> and a process (growth in holiness)<sup>49</sup>. Sanctification as an event is part of justification in the sense that the believer is now forgiven and set aside for service to God. It is positional. The process of sanctification, however, is separate from justification. Justification, (including the event of sanctification) is the result of the work of Jesus on the Cross, the benefits of which accrue to the believer by grace through faith in Jesus. Being brought into right relation to God (justified) of necessity implies a forensic sanctification in which sins are declared forgiven and righteousness is imputed. In short, we are declared to be holy so that God, Who is holy, can deal with us as dear children.

But we all know that we, as children of God, still sin! Sanctification as a process addresses this second problem. The process of sanctification is the work of God the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer and slowly transforms them into the image of Christ. Sanctification as a process is experiential and is the central issue of discipleship. Practical or experiential holiness (in the sense of holiness being our practice) involves purity of life. Purity of life may be seen through three points of view: God, God’s law, and mankind.

Purity of life in relation to God is referred to as holiness. It entails regular cleansing from sin (purification)<sup>50</sup> and maintenance of a life style of separation from uncleanness<sup>51</sup> and separation unto God.<sup>52</sup> Separation unto God means being devoted exclusively to God’s service. The term “devotion” implies not only purpose but motivation i.e. love.

Purity of life in relation to the Law of God is styled righteousness.<sup>53</sup> It entails obedience to the character of the law. This is not conformity to the letter of the law by strenuous self effort, but obedience to the essential spirit of the law by the grace of God.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:1

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (NIV)

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (NIV)

<sup>50</sup> Jeremiah 33:8 And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.

<sup>51</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

<sup>52</sup> Exodus 13:2 Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine. De 10:12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

<sup>53</sup> Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:3-8 “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our

Purity of life in the world of men is styled blamelessness.<sup>55</sup> Sanctification includes all three aspects of purity: holiness before God, justice before the law, and blamelessness before the eyes of men. In the verse above addresses this latter process of sanctification by means of two commands: to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and to perfect holiness. There is also an attitude to be maintained in both: namely “the fear of God”.

### i. Cleansing

Cleansing has to do with sanctification. That the second command has to do with holiness is manifest, but the reason “cleansing” has also to do with sanctification is that sinful man, if he would be holy before God, must be cleansed or purified from those pollutions both of the flesh and the spirit that make him unsuitable for divine service. Sanctification then has to do with two operations: cleansing and separation as the scriptures make clear.<sup>56</sup> The cleansing referenced is understood as a regular (daily) affair.<sup>57</sup> So if we are daily constrained to confess our sins, will we ever become perfectly holy? The answer lies with the understanding of the next command.

### ii. Perfecting

The term “perfecting holiness” has occasioned some to speculate whether men can ever reach sinless perfection in this life. Clearly the verb translated “perfecting” does not encourage such a view. The word is *επιτελεω* *epiteleo*, which derives from *epi*, a primary preposition; meaning superimposition of time, place, or order, and *teleo* meaning to complete, to fulfill further and, by implication, to terminate or finish. Hence *epiteleo* means to superimpose upon all of your time the completing, finishing, or the outworking of the holiness imputed to you on the merits of the death of Jesus Christ. That is to bring holiness as an operative principle to maturity while you live. Even the Apostle Paul suggests that the process is a lifelong pursuit.<sup>58</sup>

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sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?”

Paul here compares {the first giving of the Decalogue or Law of God on tables of stone (ministered by Moses) that brought death by its penalties for infractions} to {the second giving of the Gospel (or epistle) of Jesus Christ (ministered by Paul) graven on the hearts of believers (i.e. their faith) and accompanied by the entrance of the Holy Spirit of God into the believer bringing life}. While the ministration of death by the Law in the hand of Moses was glorious (the moral glory of the Law) the ministration of life by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as testified by Paul is even more glorious (the glory of the Mercy and Grace of God)

<sup>55</sup> Thessalonians 2:10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.

<sup>56</sup> Speaking of Christ’s dealings with the church, the Apostle writes in Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So too 2 Corinthians 6:17- 7:1 “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 6:11-12 Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>58</sup> Philippians 3:8-15 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do,

These twin operations (cleansing and perfecting) are linked. One cannot be “perfecting holiness” without concurrently “cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit”. The five rhetorical questions of the Apostle that precede the command to ‘perfect holiness in the fear of God’ make this truth abundantly clear.<sup>59</sup>

What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?  
What communion hath light with darkness?  
What concord hath Christ with Belial?  
What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?  
What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?

Let us now look at these two aspects of the process of sanctification, cleansing (a negative operation) and perfecting (a positive operation) as dealt with in the New Testament.

### **b. Putting off the old man and putting on the new man**

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man<sup>60</sup>, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.<sup>61</sup>



What is not obvious from what has been said so far, but should be obvious from our experience as Christians is that, although we have a wonderful new identity in Jesus Christ, the old corrupted human nature is still with us. We are, in a very real sense two persons, an old man and a new man, as noted in the passage above. The old corrupted nature continues to incline us to acts contrary to the will of God which we call sins. The new man is “created in righteousness and true holiness”. The passage above tells us that we have a twofold responsibility to “put off” the “old man” and to “put on” the “new man”. This two fold responsibility of putting off the old

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forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, **as many as be perfect** be thus minded: ...”

Paul clearly uses the term “perfect” twice. The first use suggests sinless perfection which he says he has not attained, but the second use implies Christian maturity. In other words mature (perfect) believers should make the pursuit of (perfect) holiness a lifelong pursuit.

<sup>59</sup> II Corinthians 6:14b – 16a

<sup>60</sup> The term “the old man” is only one of several terms used in the Bible to describe our human nature as corrupted by sin. It is important to recognize these terms so that when they occur in our reading we will recognize that they are all talking about the same problem nature.

The Old Man – The term is used twice by Paul in Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9.

Sin - The term is used 90 times in the New Testament both to signify a single act of transgression and to signify the underlying principle that has corrupted human nature and prompts people to commit specific sins. Paul uses the word Sin 37 times in Romans alone, and 59 times in all his epistles. In every case in Romans and almost every case in the epistles, it is used to signify the sin principle.

Body of Sin – Used once by Paul in Romans 6:6 in conjunction with the term “the old man”

The Flesh –Used 128 times primarily by Paul. The word flesh (σὰρξ sarx) refers to our common humanity (or familial relations) and to the presence in all humanity of the corrupt nature that tends to cause sin.

Carnal –Used ten times mostly by Paul. Carnal (σαρκικός sarkikos) is has the same semantic range as flesh (σὰρξ sarx).

Corruption –Used five times exclusively by the Apostle Paul to signify the effect of sin, a rotting of the body attendant upon death. φθορά (phthora), is translated “corruption” four times and “perish” once.

The Body of this Death – Used only once by the Apostle Paul but certainly one of the most dramatic descriptions of the effect of Sin. It refers to a cruel practice of binding the murdered body hand and foot to his murderer. As the dead body putrefies, the cadaver’s corruption infects the body of his murderer eventually resulting in his death. The application is obvious: sin is destroying the apostle’s whole relationship with God in a kind of slow putrefying death.

<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 4:22-24

man and putting on the new man lies at the heart of discipleship. Putting off the old man corresponds to “cleansing” and putting on the new man corresponds to “perfecting” as these two terms were mentioned above. Regarding the negative operation of putting off we have our Lord Jesus’ saying in connection with discipleship. “And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”<sup>62</sup>

The twofold process of self denial (deny himself) and self sacrifice (take up your cross) together constitute “losing” your life. It is clearly a “daily” process undertaken for the love of Jesus (“for my sake”) with the promised benefit that those who are thus engaged will “save” their life. When we realize that we have an old man to be put off and a new man to be put on, the paradoxical tension: ‘lose your life to save your life’ is resolved. It is the old man whose life is lost and the new man whose life is saved. Self denial and self sacrifice, which are not possible for the old man because they run counter to all sin, are the rule of life for the new man which “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”. The new man is the very image of the person of Jesus Christ, and is the only nature able to follow Him as a disciple. The emerging life of the new man is the *defacto* dying of the old man. The two processes are linked as Jesus tells us.

Regarding the positive operation of putting on the new man we have our Lord Jesus’ saying commonly called the ‘Great Commission’. “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ “<sup>63</sup> From this passage we may observe that discipleship involves the following.

It is open to all people The hallmark of the gospel call is “whosoever will”<sup>64</sup> This ran counter to the narrow view of the religious people of his day that saw their covenant privileges as something that was exclusive. For them the court of the gentiles in the temple complex was a place of trade for the exchange of temple coins and the purchase of ritually correct sacrificial animals. Our Savior reminded them with whip and word that “My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer but ye have made it a den of thieves.”<sup>65</sup>

It involves a baptism that acknowledges the power and activity of God “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. Baptism is a ceremonial practice that marks the beginning of a new life as a covenant people (as circumcision did for the Jew) and that echoes the call of Jesus to come and die with Him. “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”<sup>66</sup>

In entering the water of baptism, the individual believer acknowledges that they have lost their old life with Jesus in his crucifixion. In exiting the water of baptism, the individual believer

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<sup>62</sup> Luke 9:23-24

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

<sup>64</sup> John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Mt 16:25 For **whosoever will** save his life shall lose it: and **whosoever will** lose his life for my sake shall find it. Mark 8:34-35 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will** come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For **whosoever will** save his life shall lose it; but **whosoever** shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.

<sup>65</sup> Mark 11:17

<sup>66</sup> Colossians 2:11-12

acknowledges that they have found their new life with Jesus in his resurrection.<sup>67</sup> The first corresponds to the process of ‘putting off the old man’ and the later corresponds to the process of ‘putting on the new man’. Whereas these will be lifelong processes, they are rooted respectively in Jesus’ death on the cross and in His resurrection from the dead. The Christian life has a beginning to which baptism bears witness, as the end of an old life without Jesus Christ and the beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ. This beginning relates to the preaching of the Gospel (evangelism) and human response to that preaching (conversion). As already mentioned Christians are born (of the Spirit<sup>68</sup>) but disciples are made. The baptismal formula, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” bears further witness that while the ritual of baptism has no efficacy in an of itself to convey saving grace<sup>69</sup> it speaks volumes of how that grace was conveyed to us in the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The actual work of salvation of which baptism is a figure involves the operations of all the persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Simply put: God the Father planned it. God the Son executed it. And God the Holy Spirit applies it. But we will deal with this hereafter.

It involves learning obedience to Jesus’ commands. The central issue of the spiritual life has always been obedience to the commands of God. It is the central issue of discipleship. Obedience to Jesus’ commands involves two aspects of the spiritual life: faith and love. Faith is the operative principle to which God responds with His saving Grace. Without the grace of God, the Christian life is not possible, either its inception<sup>70</sup> or its continuance.<sup>71</sup> And we know that faith is much more than intellectual assent. It is manifest in our actions, actions which conform to Jesus’ commands.<sup>72</sup> Living faith produces living works!

Just as faith is the operative principle of the spiritual life, so too love is the motivating principle for the spiritual life. “If ye love me, keep my commandments,” says Jesus to His disciples.<sup>73</sup> If you would follow me as my disciples, you must lose your life “for my sake” – so Jesus tells us above. In this sense, discipleship is really a process of learning to love Jesus as God, which stands at the heart of all the commandments of God.<sup>74</sup> It is only love for God (Jesus in his divinity) and

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<sup>67</sup> Romans 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

<sup>68</sup> John 3:5-7 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

<sup>69</sup> Herein is a great error of many who call themselves Christian, that baptism is an actual means of conveying saving grace as a sacrament. But the apostle Peter styles baptism a figure not a sacrament. 1 Peter 3:21 The like figure (i.e. Noah’s ark mentioned in 3:20) whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Peter’s meaning here is that just as Noah’s ark was a figure of Christ in that it ‘saved’ the faithful by delivering them from the flood of God’s judgment so baptism is a “figure” of Christ which testifies that we are saved by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

<sup>70</sup> Ephesians 2:8 For **by grace are ye saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

<sup>71</sup> Colossians 2:6-7 **As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord\*, so walk ye in him**: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (\*i.e. by grace through faith)

<sup>72</sup> James 2:14,17-20 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? ... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

<sup>73</sup> John 14:15

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 22:36-40 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the

neighbor (Jesus in his humanity) that can motivate us to live lives of self denial and self sacrifice. It is only love for God and neighbor that can enable us to fulfill the commands of God. And that love (which is God's love) is shed abroad in every believing heart by God the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup>

It has the benefit of an age-long fellowship with Jesus Christ. Discipleship above all implies the fellowship of disciple with their master. As there are no geographical limitations on discipleship, so there are no time constraints on it either. The same Jesus is available to all who would lay down their lives to follow him regardless of which century they live in. The word translated age is αἰών from which we get our word eon. Properly it refers to the age of the church or the age of grace as opposed the age of the law for instance. What Jesus is saying is that discipleship throughout the entire age of God's grace will involve his presence with us to guide, guard, and instruct. It is a most precious promise of success. This later promise is the answer to the assertion that "without me ye can do nothing."<sup>76</sup> If he is with us throughout the age, then we need not fear our powerlessness for each of us can say "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."<sup>77</sup> Yes, I can go to all people and evangelize. Yes, I can baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Yes, I can make disciples of new believers and teach them to observe whatever He has commanded. But this is the most important principle of the spiritual life – only by the power of Jesus Christ through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit!

### **c. Mutually exclusive processes**

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.<sup>78</sup>



"Putting on" the new man without "putting off" the old man is impossible. They are mutually exclusive processes. Counterfeit mortification presupposes counterfeit sanctification. And both counterfeits are the work of the flesh trying to deceive the unwary including oneself! It is like Cain wearing Abel's religious robes! There is too much of this in the "Christian world" toady. Dietrich Bonhoeffer coins the phrase "cheap grace" to describe it.

Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness which frees us from the toils of sin....Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate."<sup>79</sup>

Putting off the old man (mortification) and putting on the new man (sanctification) are really two parts of a single choice and, in reality, two intertwined parts of a coherent process. We turn now to the first of these two intertwined processes styled "mortification" by the Apostle Paul, a term that is misunderstood by many. Some misapply it, while others shun the very mention of it.<sup>80</sup>

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second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

<sup>75</sup> Romans 5:5b ...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

<sup>76</sup> John 15:5b

<sup>77</sup> Philippians 4:13

<sup>78</sup> Colossians 3:9

<sup>79</sup> Page 47 The Cost of Discipleship Dietrich Bonhoeffer Collier Books 1963 ISBN 0-02-083850-6

<sup>80</sup> I am greatly indebted for what follows to the great English theologian John Owen. The Works of John Owen, published by The Banner of Truth Trust ISBN 0-85151-126-0. {Vol. 3 Chapter VIII *Mortification of Sin, the Nature and Causes of It* and

### **3. Mortification: "Putting off the old man"**

... if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.<sup>81</sup>



There are four aspects of this verse that we will look at.

A duty prescribed: "Mortify the deeds of the body",  
A duty is addressed: "Ye",  
The necessary means: "through the Spirit", and  
A conditional promise: "If ye... mortify... Ye shall live"

#### **a. A Duty Prescribed**

...Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.<sup>82</sup>

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.<sup>83</sup>



The mortification of sin in the believer has been accomplished in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Most believers understand that Jesus died to expiate their guilt for sins, but few understand that He suffered because He was identified with our sin nature. Crucified with Christ (*Christōi sunestaurōmai*) is one of Paul's greatest mystical sayings. This is the perfect passive indicative of *sustaurōō* with the associative instrumental case (*Christōi*). Paul uses the same word in Romans 6:6 for the same idea.<sup>84</sup> The sense is that of an event completed in the past. Paul clearly does not refer to his physical death, but rather a mystical reality in the divine economy in which the individual believer (as well as Paul) as a sin corrupted person is identified with Jesus' actual death, the result of which is the basis for the efficacy of the ongoing process of mortification.

#### **b. A Duty Addressed**

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.<sup>85</sup>



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Volume 6, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*) That there are few today who are interested in this most important aspect of discipleship is borne mute witness by the dearth of texts wholly devoted to the subject. Owen's texts on the subject were written around the middle of the seventeenth century. I know of few later texts. A quick perusal of any Christian book store should confirm this sad reality.

<sup>81</sup> Romans 8:13 b

<sup>82</sup> Romans 6:6

<sup>83</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>84</sup> Robertson's Word Pictures

<sup>85</sup> Galatians 5:19-24

“They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh” – Let not any believer assume that they are exempted from this work! For each of us, the old man has been crucified with Christ. So it is incumbent on all of us to build upon that firm foundation. It is a terrible thing to neglect so great salvation in this way, as not to root out and extirpate the works of the flesh<sup>86</sup>. Believers who have been assuredly freed from the condemnation of sin need to make it their chief work to be delivered from the power of sin by mortifying it. The results of this mortification (the “crucifixion of the flesh with the affections and lusts”) are one of the surest signs that the individual really does have a saving interest in the death of Jesus on the cross. Note that it is not the body that is spoken of as being mortified<sup>87</sup> but the body of sin and the works of that body, as given in the list above, styled the “works of the flesh”. This is not the destruction of our bodily frame (our flesh) but the sin principle entwined in that body (the flesh – the old man - sin as a principle or root of all sins).

### **c. The necessary means**

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.<sup>88</sup>



The Holy Spirit only is sufficient for this work of mortification. Ways and means without Him are ineffectual. And He works as He pleases. It is interesting that Paul makes mentions God the Holy Spirit only once in the first seven chapters of his letter to the Romans. But, after he raises the anguished question “O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death,”<sup>89</sup> he mentions the Holy Spirit fifteen times in the eighth chapter. And for the rest of the

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<sup>86</sup> Hebrews 2:3a How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; ...

<sup>87</sup> An error of self righteous individuals who confuse the body of flesh with the body of sin and inflict many painful excesses such as hair shirts, chains, self flagellation, fasting, tiresome vigils and many other sorts of will worship as a substitute for the interior grace of mortification produced as a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit in applying the death of Christ in a real and effectual way to the interior principle of sin weakening and destroying it. While God may be pleased to use some of these means in a believer's life; if a man has not the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in him, no operation will have any value whatever to the mortification of sin. “Without me ye can do nothing” John 15:5b.

<sup>88</sup> Romans 8:1-13

<sup>89</sup> Romans 7:24

book, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned again until the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter where the He is mentioned twice. In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter the presence and the power of the sin is discovered. The entire 8<sup>th</sup> chapter has to do with being set free from sin and points directly to the Holy Spirit's role in mortification ("through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body").

#### **d. A Conditional Promise**

Our spiritual life depends certainly on our mortification of sin. How great is the promised benefit: "Ye shall live." The most fundamental desire of human kind is the continuance of their own life. But here we see a life lived in the presence of God. And how full must that life be? Do we not hear the words of the Apostle Paul who reminds us that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."<sup>90</sup> Who would not hazard all to secure such a life if its certainty were in question? But the promise is certain: "If ye... mortify...Ye shall live".

Well, you ask, how may I know wherein this life consists? The apostle in the very same passage assures us that it is the self-same Holy Spirit who enables our mortification that will reveal them to us.<sup>91</sup> So it is not only the dark side of mortification that is experienced but the exceedingly bright side of our hope in the present work of Jesus Christ that is revealed. He has gone before to prepare a place for us that where He is, we may be and there behold His Glory.<sup>92</sup> And as sin grows less, He grows more, a process that must of necessity excite the believer to ever greater fulfillment of this duty.

#### **e. Counterfeit Mortification**

...That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;<sup>93</sup>



It is important to note that the old man is characterized by the term "deceit" and, (while much care must be taken in mortification to correctly discern the difference between good and evil<sup>94</sup>) that deceit can extend to falsifying the actual process of mortification itself. As noted above, there are those are gravely mistaken about the nature of mortification and those who (consequently) reject the doctrine altogether. Here are some fallacies entertained by the unwary about mortification.

Fallacy: Mortification means to utterly kill and root out sin so that it does not present any spiritual danger to us. The Apostle Paul could state that he had not "already attained, either were

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<sup>90</sup> I Corinthians 2:9

<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10-12 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

<sup>92</sup> John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you.** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; **that where I am, there ye may be also.**

John 17:24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; **that they may behold my glory**, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

<sup>93</sup> Ephesians 4:22

<sup>94</sup> Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have **their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

already perfect”<sup>95</sup> The Apostle Peter would refer to himself in his later epistles as Simon Peter, knowing full well that the old Christ denying Simon was still present in the Christ confessing Peter.<sup>96</sup> The apostle John could say: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”<sup>97</sup> As with any warfare, there may be lulls in the battle, but we should not be lulled thereby!

Fallacy: Mortification is dissimulation. It may be that by force of will a man may forsake a particular sin and thereby be judged a changed man. “God knows that to his former iniquity he has added cursed hypocrisy, and is gotten on a safer path to hell than he was in before. He has gotten another heart than he had, that is more cunning; but not a new heart, that is more holy.”<sup>98</sup>

Fallacy: Mortification is the improvement of a quiet and sedate nature. Men may, by worldly discipline, improve their nature so that sins like wrath or passion are less manifest. But let them be examined for subtler sins of selfishness, envy, unbelief, or pride and their heart will tell another story. Again such men may have “moral” lives and still be strangers to the grace of God and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

Fallacy: The diversion of one or more sins is the total of mortification. Sin is like a fire in a ruined building. The fireman who plays his hose on one part of the ashes but not all will only see the fire break out somewhere else. So it is with sin. Individual shoots may stand for individual sins, but like any plant, the life is in the root. For a man to attenuate a particular sin or vice by concentrating on it and not on the actual root principle, is to allow sin to flourish else where. Real mortification attacks sin both in its root and all its branches. With changing constitution or age, a man may trade one sin for another as youthful lusts for aged worldliness. What matter? In neither case is he ever freed, having exchanged only one ungodly master for another.

Fallacy: Mortification is the conquest of a particular sin, without a changed heart. This was the case of Israel.

...  
For all this they sinned still, and  
Believed not for his wondrous works  
Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and  
Their years in trouble  
When he slew them, then they sought him: and  
They returned and enquired early after God  
And they remembered that God was their rock, and  
The high God their redeemer  
Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and  
They lied unto him with their tongues  
For their heart was not right with him,  
Neither were they steadfast in his covenant<sup>99</sup>

“These and many other ways there are whereby poor souls deceive themselves, and suppose they have mortified their lusts, when they (those lusts) live and are mighty, and on every occasion break forth, to their (the deceived one’s) disturbance and disquietude.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Philippians 3:12

<sup>96</sup> 2 Peter 1:1

<sup>97</sup> 1 John 1:8

<sup>98</sup> John Owen - Volume 6 page 25; *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Psalm 78:32-37

#### **4. Sanctification: “Putting on the new man”**

Let us now look at the second of these two aspects of sanctification, perfecting holiness which is a positive operation, that of being conformed to the image of God’s dear Son.<sup>101</sup> But first we must understand how the ‘image of Jesus’ comes down to us, and that involves understanding the role of God’s law.

##### **a. Law and Grace**

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?<sup>102</sup>



The Law announced in the Old Testament plays an important part in all of discipleship. But its role must be understood clearly. The words of Paul “ye are not under the law, but under grace” have become a kind of watch word for evangelical Christianity, so that any proposal for a serious study of the law of Moses is greeted with a kind of skepticism as if the person were trying to re-establish first century Jewish religious practice like that of the sect of the Pharisees, against which Paul spoke with such eloquence.<sup>103</sup>

In the Old Testament, the saints esteemed the law quite highly. It was their delight<sup>104</sup>. They meditated in it day and night.<sup>105</sup> It was a lamp unto their feet.<sup>106</sup> It was the object of their love.<sup>107</sup> It was venerated as truth.<sup>108</sup> It was seen as a way to obtain great peace.<sup>109</sup> It was a treasure to be esteemed more than gold or silver.<sup>110</sup> Today, to proceed further, we must come to grips with Paul’s meaning in the verse in hand.

Paul, like David before him, could say: “... I delight in the law of God after the inward man;<sup>111</sup> the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good;<sup>112</sup> and the law is spiritual.”<sup>113</sup> So

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<sup>100</sup> John Owen Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

<sup>102</sup> Romans 6:12-16

<sup>103</sup> Galatians 5:1-6 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

<sup>104</sup> Psalm 119:92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

<sup>105</sup> Psalm 1:2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

<sup>106</sup> Psalm 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

<sup>107</sup> Psalm 119:97 O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

<sup>108</sup> Psalm 119:142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

<sup>109</sup> Psalm 119:165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

<sup>110</sup> Psalm 119:72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

<sup>111</sup> Romans 7:22

Paul seems ambivalent about the law. If the Law of God is delightful and good and just and holy and spiritual why should we not become practitioners of it?

The answer to this question lies not so much in what the Law of Moses is, but in what the Law of Moses does and does not do for us. For Paul, as for us, the Law is a teacher. The term for Law in Hebrew also means Teaching.<sup>114</sup> Thus the “Law of Moses” also means the “Teaching of Moses” or the Torah, referring to the first five books of Moses.

The law teaches us something about ourselves, namely that we are sinners before God. “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”<sup>115</sup>

The law further teaches us that we are held in a very real bondage. It is bondage to an operative principle at work in us because of our first parents’ sin in Eden. The operative principle that regularly causes us to sin is called “Sin”.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”<sup>116</sup>

The law points us toward Jesus Christ because we need a Deliverer, a Savior. The work of the law brought forth Paul’s impassioned cry “who shall deliver me from this body of death?” “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”<sup>117</sup> The reason for this last office lies in what the Law of God by Moses cannot do for us. The law cannot deliver us from the bondage of the operating principle of Sin. Nor can the law justify the individual sinner to God. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”<sup>118</sup>

In short, the law can neither liberate from the bondage of sin nor justify the sinner with God. What we find in Jesus Christ, by faith, is not only Truth but Grace.<sup>119</sup> And it is the grace of God ministered through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that justifies us with God and delivers us

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<sup>112</sup> Romans 7:12

<sup>113</sup> Romans 7:14

<sup>114</sup> תּוֹרָה towrah, (pronounced to-raw' or torah {to-raw'}) a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue or Pentateuch:--law.

<sup>115</sup> This is the tenth commandment quoted in Romans 7:7.

<sup>116</sup> Romans 7:18-24

<sup>117</sup> Galatians 3:24. The word for schoolmaster is παιδαγωγος {pronounced pahee-dag-o-gos'} literally a boy-leader or a servant whose office it was to take the children to school. From this we get the English word pedagogue or a teacher: one who (figuratively) guards the steps of the children on the pathway to knowledge.

<sup>118</sup> Galatians 2:16

<sup>119</sup> John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

from the bondage of Sin (i.e. sets us free) to serve God. In short, we are saved by grace through faith.<sup>120</sup>

So then, after grace has come in response to faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work for us, we have no further need of the “schoolmaster.” We are no longer “under a schoolmaster.”<sup>121</sup> That is we are no longer “under the Law but under Grace.”

Does all this mean that we are through with the law? Certainly not! Apart from what the law can or cannot do, it is something else besides a schoolteacher. Since the law leads us to Jesus Christ, it stands to reason that it says something about Jesus; what He is like and what He does. The law is an image of the Son of God.

### **b. *Imagio Dei***

...Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. <sup>122</sup>



The term “image” doubtless refers to both the physical and spiritual nature of man (their humanity, not their sin nature). This does not mean that the physical nature of human kind is part of God’s essential nature, (for God is a spirit<sup>123</sup>) anymore than your photograph is part of your essential nature. But the term “image” connotes something that is uniquely compatible with and descriptive of God. Man was created as a rational, emotional, and volitional creature.<sup>124</sup> On this basis, we are also moral creatures. Because of the universal attribute of finitude for all created things, we are also peccible creatures. That is we can sin. This last raises the necessity of the Law, as a guide to holy living for God is holy. So we may conclude that the law also constitutes the written and therefore perceptual image of God given to man. Simply put, the Law tells us what God is like, so that we can understand Him and choose to live like Him. In doing this, we live out our God-likeness. Obedience to the law which reveals the character of God then becomes the way of expressing our likeness to God (in holiness) and of having fellowship with God (which is to say we live with God).

The act of creating man in the image of God lays the groundwork for the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God as one who is truly human without ceasing to be truly God. But the act of giving the law also lays the groundwork for the incarnation. Wherever we encounter law we encounter relationship, because law is needful to regulate relational interactions, so that individuals may live peaceably and securely with their fellow humans. The law sets forth both individual (and corporate) privileges and responsibilities to the larger body of people with whom there is a relationship. In that sense the law is covenantal, regulating relationships that we may enter into for whatever reason. So then, the law was given by God as an image of how God would interact with himself if He were human. In short the Law is the image of Jesus Christ. That is why it can lead us to Christ, because it describes His humanity perfectly.

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<sup>120</sup> Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

<sup>121</sup> Galatians 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

<sup>122</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

<sup>123</sup> John 4:24 **God is a Spirit**: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

<sup>124</sup> See “Man as God Created him” above

Another way to understand the concept of the law as an image of God lies in the basis of the law itself. Normally we think of the basis of the law as “do this because I told you so.” That is to say that the basis of the rule of law lies in authority. But God does not relate to Himself as an authoritarian. He relates to himself on the basis of who He is in Himself. The basis for His law then is not ‘do this because I told you to do this and I’m stronger than you are’ but do this because “I am the LORD your God.”<sup>125</sup> The Law does not bring bondage but shows us the way to freedom in conformity to God’s original intent in creating us. It is in this sense that the Law is called “the law of liberty”.<sup>126</sup> Over and over again, when promulgating law, God says you must do this or that because I AM that I AM.

“Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”<sup>127</sup>

“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”<sup>128</sup>

The law is given to us as a behavioral model so that we will know how to live as God would live in the world and thus fulfill our status as an image of God. That is why our first parents, Adam and Eve, placed in Eden, are given the law in their state of innocence:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die<sup>129</sup>

This was given to regulate Adam’s behavior with his creator God, and enable him to fulfill his ‘image of God’ character, to be truly and authentically human.

All this was before sin entered. The sad entrance of sin only multiplied the work of the law as a basis for penal judgment, but from the first it was not intended to be that. The entrance of sin that marred the image of God in man did not mar the image of God in the Law. The Law continued to be “holy, and just, and good.” It continued to be the description of how God would interact with Himself were He human. It continued to describe Jesus Christ.

### c. Seeing Jesus

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.<sup>130</sup>



The simple request of these Greek proselytes to Judaism has echoed in the hearts of countless believers of all ages. It reflects a common desire of men everywhere to find and have fellowship with God. Mankind was created with a hunger for fellowship with God. Those who seem to be close to him (whether called a holy man, a ‘guru’, a ‘prophet’, a ‘staretz’, or a ‘geron’) will

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<sup>125</sup> Leviticus 19: 3, 4, 10,14, 16, 18, 30, 36, 37

<sup>126</sup> James 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

<sup>127</sup> Leviticus 19: 2

<sup>128</sup> I Peter 1:14 -16, see also Leviticus 20:7 Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.

<sup>129</sup> Genesis 2:16 - 17

<sup>130</sup> John 12: 20 - 21

inevitably develop a following of sincere (and sometimes misled) individuals. That is how what is popularly known as cults develop.

Since God has created us with a hunger for Him and given us Jesus that we might know Him<sup>131</sup>, surely He has provided Old Testament pictures of Jesus. Jesus encourages us in this hope. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”<sup>132</sup>

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus instructs the sorrowing disciples: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”<sup>133</sup>

Somewhat later with the other disciples he explains the necessity of His death and resurrection as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”<sup>134</sup>

“Ye are witnesses.” So we might say we are “eye-witnesses” if indeed we have seen Jesus as God has revealed him in the Bible.<sup>135</sup>

#### **d. The Hierarchy of the Law**

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.<sup>136</sup>



The law as we encounter it in the Old Testament is not a monolithic code. “Instead of a code in the modern sense, O.T. laws present a select sample of illustrative cases or topics whose legal principles were to guide Israelite individuals, the larger community, and lawmakers in making decisions and in living out Israel’s worldview. Their purpose was to teach the Israelite

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<sup>131</sup> John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. John 8:19 Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.

<sup>132</sup> John 5:39

<sup>133</sup> Luke 24:25-27

<sup>134</sup> Luke 24:44 - 48

<sup>135</sup> We must not forget that our Lord addressed himself to, the prophets and the psalms as well as the Law of Moses. In the Prophets specific prophecies about Jesus are called “Messianic Prophecies”. In the Psalms, we find “Messianic Psalms”. And there are many individuals who by the nature of their experiences foreshadow Jesus. Job, Abraham, Melchisedec, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Boaz, David, and Solomon are some but not all. The subject cannot be exhausted. As John concluded in his gospel: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” What a joy to realize that we can never get to the end of what the Bible tells us about Jesus. There is always going to be some new and precious insight to thrill our souls, some new discovery that we can make!

<sup>136</sup> Galatians 5:14

fundamental values – what it means to live all of life in the presence of God – not to provide them with a handy legal reference tool.”<sup>137</sup>

The law as we encounter it in the Old Testament is of two types: Apodictic (or “absolute law”) and Casuistic (or “case law”). The Ten Commandments (also known as the Decalogue) are the most familiar of the latter, taking the form of unconditional, categorical directives such as commands and prohibitions. Instead of finely tuned case descriptions, they issue absolute orders about right and wrong in direct personal address without any exceptions. There are also other instances of apodictic laws particularly with regard to capital crimes. Casuistic laws, on the other hand take the form of “if...then” statements in the third person and are easily recognizable.<sup>138</sup> Scholars recognize four major collections of laws: the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22-23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26), the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) and the Priestly Code (Exodus 25-31; 34:29; Leviticus 16; and parts of Numbers).<sup>139</sup>

But the law as a system must be coherent because the God who speaks it and of whom it speaks is one.<sup>140</sup> The Decalogue, given to Moses on Mount Sinai and through him to Israel,<sup>141</sup> constituted a moral “Constitution” for ancient Israel. Resting upon the Ten Commandments the casuistic laws addressed civil, moral and religious issues in specific cases. This coherent legal unity is manifest in a little noticed but important aspect of the legal code of the Bible, that of relatedness. The Decalogue presents a central and overarching moral directive that finds its implementation in other pieces of Apodictic and Casuistic law. But the specific situations these other laws also shed light back on unnoticed but important aspects of the outplaying of the Decalogue’s general guidance. To use the words of one author they represent the “trajectory” of the commandments.<sup>142</sup> The civil laws regulated the relations between the individual Israelite and his neighbors whether fellow Israelites or foreigners. They included laws relating to personal property, marriage, ownership etc. The moral laws regulated personal Israelite behavior in the sight of God. The religious laws regulated the relations of God’s covenant people with himself. They provided for the need to worship God via the priesthood, the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and above all the sacrifices which addressed problem of sin and satisfaction of the Holiness of God with a sinful people. And all of this legal code rested upon two contiguous and profound principles. Jesus explains these two at the conclusion of a disputation with the Sadducees about the resurrection, after which a Pharisee, who was a lawyer: “asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Page 345, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr. , published by Thomas Nelson (2004) ISBN 978-0-7852-5225-2. This quotation and the paragraph which follows makes use of the excellent discussion on interpreting the legal forms in the Bible (pages 341 to 350) to which the student is commended.

<sup>138</sup> Exodus 21:18-19 (Condition) And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed: If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, (Penalty) then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid* P.341

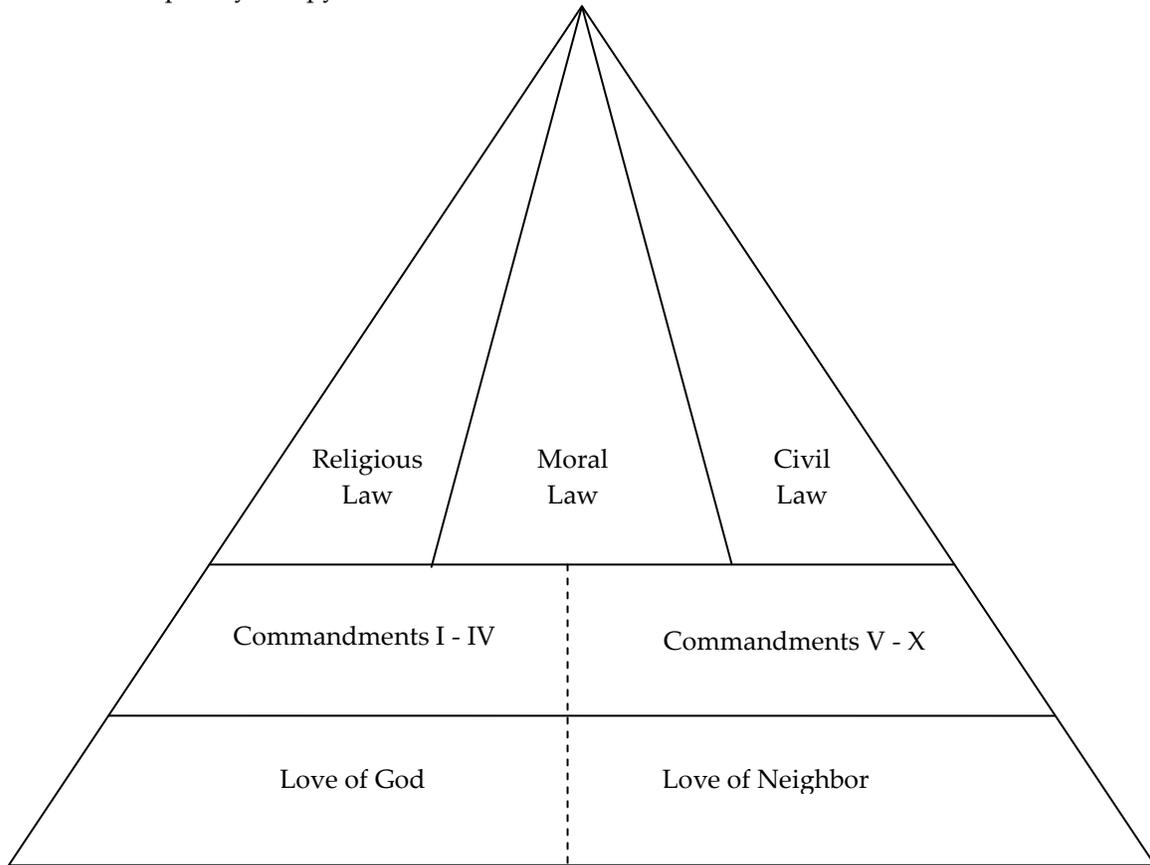
<sup>140</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

<sup>141</sup> Exodus 31:18

<sup>142</sup> The Ten Commandments by Patrick D. Miller: The Interpretation Series of Westminster –John Knox Press 2009, ISBN 978-0-664-23055-5. The reader is commended to this excellent and in-depth text. The key to its powerful and insightful analysis of each commandment owes much to the use of the ‘Trajectory in other Biblical laws’ concept.

<sup>143</sup> Matthew 22:35 - 40

When we look at the Decalogue we find the same duality with respect to God and our neighbor. The first four commands govern the nature of man's relationship with God, while the remaining six govern the nature of man's relationship with his neighbor. So we might see the structure of the law conceptually as a pyramid.



The key point that Jesus makes is that He must fulfill the law<sup>144</sup>.

#### **e. Christ Fulfills the Law**

The Law as a norm then has been completely satisfied in Christ.<sup>145</sup> In order to understand how the law applies in discipleship, it is absolutely necessary to understand how Jesus fulfilled the law. Christ fulfills the law in three ways: morally<sup>146</sup>, typically<sup>147</sup> and in its penalties<sup>148</sup>. He fulfills it morally or behaviorally in the whole character and course of His sinless life. He fulfills it

<sup>144</sup> Luke 24:44 ... These are the words which I spake unto you,... **that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.**

<sup>145</sup> Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: **I am** not **come to** destroy, but to **fulfill**.

<sup>146</sup> 1 Peter 2:21-22 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

<sup>147</sup> Hebrews 8:1, 2, 5, 8, 13 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man .... They (The Jewish priesthood) serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. ...But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.... By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

<sup>148</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him

typically. All the Old Testament religious practices (cleansings, sacrifices, holidays, priestly ministrations, etc.) find their typical fulfillment in Jesus whose person and work those ordinances adumbrate. He fulfills its just penalties. He suffers the full consequences of the judgment of our guilt in His death on the Cross. Because of this it is not reasonable that the Law should continue to have authority over us in its penal or typical forms.<sup>149</sup> And this is part of Paul's point that we are no longer under the law. We neither sacrifice sheep and goats nor do we seek God in a temple made with hands. To do that would be to deny the identity of our Lord and the efficacy of His spotless life, sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. We may and should study these aspects of the law but with an eye to better understand the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. How can we possibly hope to thoroughly "behold the Lamb of God"<sup>150</sup>, until we understand somewhat of the role of the lambs on Jewish alters slain? How are we to understand Christ our Passover<sup>151</sup>, if we are ignorant of the commands relative to the first Pascal lamb<sup>152</sup>? What does the title a "Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec"<sup>153</sup> going to mean to us if we do not understand those laws that pertained to those priests "who did not continue by reason of death"<sup>154</sup>? But we are no longer obligated to observe these parts of the law: Christ has fulfilled them!

Jesus also fulfilled the law morally and ethically in perfection. He is without sin because in Him is no sin. And His spotless righteousness is imputed to us. So the other part of Paul's assertion is that we are not under the law as means of seeking righteousness anymore by conformity to it.<sup>155</sup> We have been declared righteous in Christ.

But Jesus' life is also an exemplar of Christian behavior. As a descriptor of the character of our Lord's life and His behavior, the Law, then, is still normative. The moral and behavioral norms of the law have not changed and the fulfillment of the law in our lives by God's grace is ongoing.<sup>156</sup> As we grow in grace, we are to become more like Jesus in character, appropriating His righteousness in our experience.<sup>157</sup> As we become more like Jesus in character, it is inevitable that the law will describe the character of our lives just as it did His. It is for this reason that the moral and ethical norms of the law as a code of behavior continue to be cited in the New Testament. It is still wrong for the Christian to steal, to lie, to covet, to murder, or to dishonor your parents by sin. The law that describes Jesus' manner of life should also describe ours as we grow in grace. That is the place of the law in discipleship: it measures our spiritual progress!

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<sup>149</sup> Regarding the penalty of the law we have Romans 8:1 **There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Regarding the types of the law we have 1 Corinthians 13:10 **But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**

<sup>150</sup> John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

<sup>151</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us:

<sup>152</sup> Exodus 12:3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house ...etc.

<sup>153</sup> Hebrews 5:6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

<sup>154</sup> Hebrews 7:23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

<sup>155</sup> Romans 8:3,4 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

<sup>156</sup> Matthew 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

<sup>157</sup> Philippians 2:12,13 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

## 5. The Process of Discipleship

### a. The Disciple

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>158</sup>

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”<sup>159</sup>

“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, ‘Hear and understand ...’”<sup>160</sup>

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”<sup>161</sup>

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>162</sup>

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”<sup>163</sup>

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed (does not disappoint us – NIV); because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”<sup>164</sup>

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”<sup>165</sup>



At first glance these several passages seem to be very diverse. But each verse relates several important concepts of the spiritual life. And these relationships overlap from passage to passage. Because of this, I believe we are looking at the constituent parts of a spiritual process in which each event is preceded by certain events and is succeeded by others. As we look at the several relations that these verses suggest a pattern emerges that allows us to hold their several parts in a common model.

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<sup>158</sup> Romans 10:13-17

<sup>159</sup> Hebrews 4:2

<sup>160</sup> Matthew 15:10

<sup>161</sup> Acts 18:8

<sup>162</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>163</sup> Galatians 5:6 in other words, it is not a self righteous conformity to the dictates of the law that has meaning for the Christian but faith in Jesus that has resulted in the Love of God shed abroad in our hearts that prompts us to work.

<sup>164</sup> Romans 5:1-5

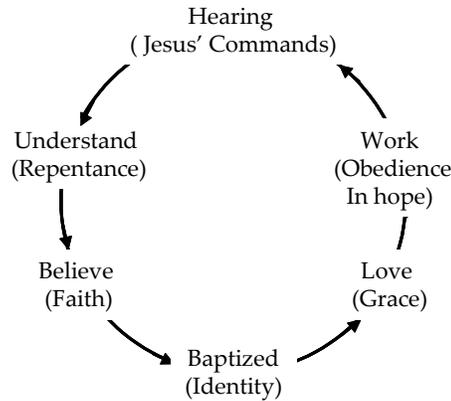
<sup>165</sup> John 14:15

Interrelation

Scriptural phrase

The Word of God and Hearing  
Hearing and Understanding  
Faith and Hearing  
Repentance and Baptism  
Hearing, Faith & Baptism  
Love and Faith  
Love and works (obedience)  
We might make a diagram that relates these several parts thus:

“hearing [cometh] by the word of God”  
“he ... said unto them, hear and understand”  
“faith cometh by hearing”  
“repent and be baptized”  
“many...hearing, believed, and were baptized.”  
“faith which works by love”  
“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”



**b. The Holy Spirit**

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.”<sup>166</sup>



As we have said, discipleship is really the activity of the Holy Spirit. How then are we to understand His role? It is He who reproves “the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”<sup>167</sup> It is by God’s truth that we are convicted and by God’s grace that we are saved. It is God the Holy Spirit who sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts.

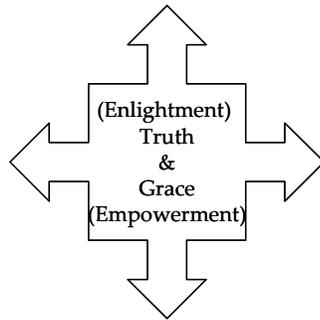
As the Son reveals the Father to us, so the Holy Spirit “takes of the Son and shows it to us.” This relationship helps explain the principle ministries of the Spirit in discipleship. A simple chart may help us here.

<u>God the Father is</u>	<u>God the Son is</u>	<u>God the Holy Spirit</u>
Light	Full of Truth	Enlightens
Love	Full of Grace	Empowers

<sup>166</sup> John 16:13 -15

<sup>167</sup> John 16:8

The ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer is twofold. He enlightens (by truth) and empowers (by love). We can show this in a simple graphic as well.

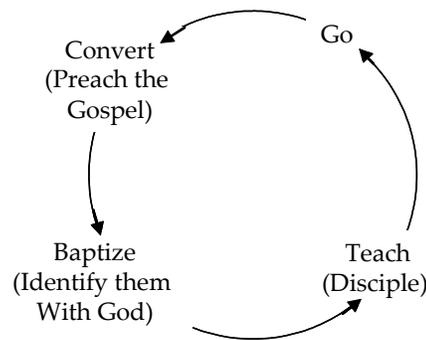


### c. The One Making Disciples

“Jesus came near, and said to them, All authority is given to me in heaven and upon the earth; go, convert all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all the things which I have commanded you: and behold, I am with you always, even to the conclusion of this state.”<sup>168</sup>



While discipleship is the work of God the Holy Spirit, people are also involved. The core passage of this series of notes, the great commission, is given to each of us. We are all to go and make disciples. If we look at the verbs in Jesus’ command, we recognize that there is a process wholly contained within the commandment: Go, Convert (i.e. preach the Gospel – evangelize), Immerse (i.e. baptize), and Teach (i.e. make disciples). We may show that process as we did above.



### 6. Integrating the Process of Discipleship

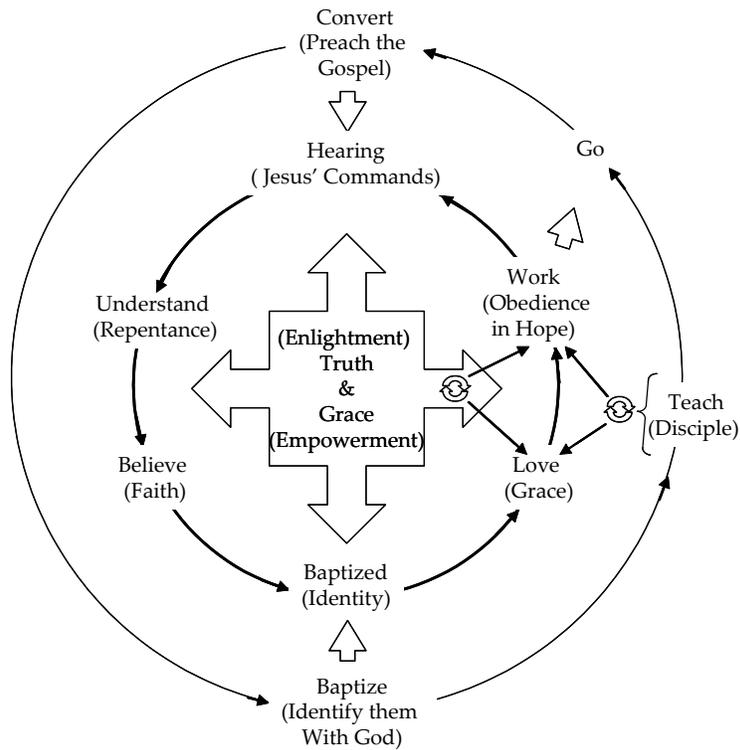
“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. ... We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”<sup>169</sup>



The human disciplinarian, and the disciple are “workers together” with God the Holy Spirit and because of this, these three processes may be shown as linked.

<sup>168</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 (Living Oracles New Testament)

<sup>169</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20, 6:1



What lies within the first circle is the work of the Holy Spirit. What lies on the innermost circle is the responsibility of the disciple. Lying on the outer circle are the responsibilities of the one called to make disciples. This simple model lets us focus on the various parts of the process in a more systematic and coherent way.

### a. Go

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”<sup>170</sup>

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”<sup>171</sup>



Humanly speaking the whole process of discipleship begins with someone else’s obedience. They respond to the impetus of the Holy Spirit and are “sent”. And so they go. The focus of the great commission is both corporate (addressed to all believers) and global (directed to all people).

<sup>170</sup> Romans 10:13-17

<sup>171</sup> Acts 1:8

There is also a sense in the New Testament that the message will be spread in ever widening circles, “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” But the corporate command is fulfilled by individuals acting on their own or in concert with other believers. The global nature on the individual basis certainly can mean the individual’s relational “world” in contradistinction to the geographical world. True, missionaries have gone into many far lands to preach the gospel, but that does not mean that everyone must make themselves an expatriate. The spirit advocated here is that everyone that any of us comes in contact with is a valid person to whom the gospel call should be directed. Our immediate family members are then seen as our “Jerusalem.” And it is here that some of the most difficult trials will come for the new believer. Jesus assures us that “a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”<sup>172</sup> “Judea” can certainly include our schoolmates, our fellow workers, and our next door neighbor. Samaria was the land of people for whom the first Christian converts from Judaism had held a traditional antipathy. And the feeling was mutual. The Samaritans hated the Jews. Are there people in our relational worlds that we would rather avoid, people we just don’t like? How well do we relate to people who are differently ethnically, socially, economically, or in value system? Only the love of God can send us to the “unlovely” and “unwanted.” Finally where is the “the uttermost part of our relational earth?” The limits leave no one in our world out. But going to hostile, troublesome, or uninterested people requires prayer for grace and growth in love. Such an expansion takes time. It doesn’t happen overnight. So that going which begins the discipleship cycle for someone, also continues the cycle as the disciple now begins to disciple and the cycle repeats itself over again.

### **b. Preach Christ**

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”<sup>173</sup>



The whole process of discipleship starts with encountering Jesus Christ. Jesus can only be encountered by faith. And faith comes only by hearing the Word of God about His Son. And hearing the Word of God comes only by telling the Word of God. Not all telling is preaching and not all people come to faith in Jesus Christ by preaching. While preaching may be God’s preferred method of reaching people with the good news of salvation,<sup>174</sup> it is not the only way. People must be told something of Jesus by someone, and that someone is expected to be you. We are saved because we have discovered that He is our Savior. And we discovered He is our Savior because someone told us. And someone told us because they cared for the wellbeing of our eternity. They told us because they loved us. But there is a mystery about all this. While we can tell people, we can’t make them believe. While we can offer the freely given gift of salvation, we cannot save people. Salvation is the exclusive work of God. So there is a dynamic that runs under everything that we will see about how discipleship works and it starts right at the beginning. There is our part and there is God’s part. And if we will do our part, however limited, we may

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<sup>172</sup> Matthew 10:36

<sup>173</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

<sup>174</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

patiently wait for and validly hope that God will do His part sooner or later. This is why faith and hope are linked. Both faith and hope reflect belief. But faith is the work I do because I believe, and hope is the work that I trust God will do because I have done what I could. The pattern occurs over and over in scripture. I cannot raise Lazarus from the dead, but I can roll away the stone from his grave.<sup>175</sup> I cannot stop the Jordan in flood stage, but I can advance into the river and get my feet wet while bearing the Ark.<sup>176</sup> I cannot feed the five thousand but I can make them sit down on the ground in orderly groups of fifty and surrender my bag lunch to Jesus.<sup>177</sup> If we will but open our mouths, God will give us the words.<sup>178</sup> We may feel like Paul that we are speaking “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” And our speech and our preaching may not be “with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” But when we do our part, as God directs us, we may validly hope with patient expectation to see God’s working as well. We may find that our speech though weak and trembling turns out to be “a demonstration of the Spirit and of power;” so that the new believer’s faith “should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” The witness of even the youngest believer may, under God, be confirmed by the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And such conviction often directly precedes salvation.

Or we may find that our gospel is hidden from our listener because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”<sup>179</sup> Whether people listen to you and believe in Jesus or not, it is important to remember what God has said, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”<sup>180</sup> But there is a third class of people who are neither blind to nor immediately accepting of the Gospel. The possibility of this third class has to do with the next aspect that our discipleship model addresses.

### **c. Hear, Understand, and Believe**

“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, ‘Hear and understand ...’”<sup>181</sup>

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>182</sup>

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”<sup>183</sup>



Sometimes hearing, understanding and faith occur simultaneously, faith being an inevitable response when we truly hear and understand the Word of God. Sometimes there is a gap in time between preaching and the desired response of faith in Jesus Christ. This may be because the individual has difficulty comprehending the truth as we present it. We may feel like Jesus when

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<sup>175</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>176</sup> Joshua 3:1-17

<sup>177</sup> Matthew 15:30-39

<sup>178</sup> Luke 21:14 -15 Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

<sup>179</sup> 2 Corinthian 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

<sup>180</sup> Isaiah 55:11

<sup>181</sup> Matthew 15:10

<sup>182</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>183</sup> Hebrews 4:2

He said, "Why do ye not understand my speech, even because ye cannot hear my word."<sup>184</sup> But there are many reasons why individuals do not immediately respond God's offer of salvation. But suffice it to say, that it is sometimes very difficult for people to apprehend the truth.

This is so because spiritual truth has the remarkable characteristic of changing how we see things conceptually because it changes our mind. This change of mind is related to the biblical concept of repentance. Greek word μετανοια (metanoia), which is consistently translated as repentance, is derived from another Greek word μετανοεω (metanoeeo) which means to think differently or to think afterwards, to reconsider, morally to feel compunction, to repent. In the Old Testament the psalmist says: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."<sup>185</sup> As John assures us above, the manifestation of the Life of God is in the Light of His life among us. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." And nowhere is Jesus' life more manifest to us than in His words. "...The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life."<sup>186</sup>

Spiritual truth can only be apprehended or received by faith. But if the receipt of truth by faith results in repentance, then repentance and faith are linked. We see this in Jesus' preaching. "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'"<sup>187</sup> But repentance also involves the will! And sometimes people don't understand because they don't want to. They realize that on some level if they accept what you say as true, then they will have to change their ways and they don't want to. It is not that they cannot believe but that they will not believe. When the chief priests and the scribes came together, to condemn Jesus they asked "Art thou the Christ? ... And he said unto them, 'if I tell you, ye will not believe.'"<sup>188</sup> Does that mean that there is no hope? Certainly not. This is why trials come into people's lives. That was Paul's experience,<sup>189</sup> and what a great servant he turned out to be. It may be others' experience as well. Don't be discouraged.

#### **d. Baptize**

"... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost..."<sup>190</sup>

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."<sup>191</sup>

"... he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire..."<sup>192</sup>

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> John 8:43

<sup>185</sup> Psalm 119:130

<sup>186</sup> John 6:63 b

<sup>187</sup> Mark 1:14,15 (NIV)

<sup>188</sup> Luke 22:66-67

<sup>189</sup> Acts 9:1-6

<sup>190</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>191</sup> Mark 16:16

<sup>192</sup> Matthew 3:11b

<sup>193</sup> Romans 6:3

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”<sup>194</sup>

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>195</sup>



When we mention the term “baptize”, most will think of a ceremony but little else. But as the verses above suggest whatever baptism is, its importance is hard to overstate. Clearly as with the other parts of this model, baptism involves both the activities of the Holy Spirit and the human disciplinarian. The disciple is baptized with water by his disciplinarian (or discipler) but this is symbolic of a two fold “baptism”<sup>196</sup> in reality: his spiritual identification with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection and afterwards the disciple’s baptism by the Holy Spirit in response to his repentance and faith in (or acceptance of) Jesus Christ and His saving work. It is these two latter aspects of baptism, the first: soteriological and the second: ecclesiological, to which the outward act of immersion by a human agent bears witness. While the water ceremony is not held to be sacramental (making holy), it does have great psychological value both to the individual and to the congregation of believers that they thus join. It marks a real conversion (repentance and faith) by a distinct event in the life of the individual. The believer now has a highly significant event which can serve as a memory on which to reckon himself “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Discipleship with its twofold emphasis on mortification and sanctification has now symbolically begun. The ascent down into the water of baptism marks the first “putting off” of the old man, the experience of the death of the cross, mortification while the ascent up from the waters of baptism marks the first “putting on” of the new man, the experience of the resurrection from the dead, sanctification.

Baptism also serves as a witness to the local body of believers that this individual believer is now in fellowship with them and under church discipline. Should the new convert “be overtaken in a fault” during the discipleship process, the “spiritual” ones in the church have a responsibility to “restore such a one in the spirit of meekness”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13

<sup>195</sup> Romans 6:3-13

<sup>196</sup> The term “baptism” is really a figure of speech used to describe what would be otherwise impossible to comprehend. As such it is rather like the use of an anthropomorphism to “understand” God. The verb baptize is a verb in common use in the dying trade. A piece of goods was dipped or “baptized” in a vat of dye. It went in one color and came out another. It experienced a transformation. It is this later concept that lies, I believe, at the root of the use of the term. The work of Jesus who (identified with us) died on the cross with the result of our being raised from the dead with Him; as well as the subsequent work of God the Holy Spirit in applying that work to the individual on their repentance and faith all involve this matter of transformation. And transformation is the admittedly the mysterious but profoundly real work that none but God can effect.

<sup>197</sup> Galatians 6:1

But baptism, like sanctification, also has a process quality as well as an event quality. The process quality lies in its association with the nature of identification. Baptism bears witness that in a real and efficacious way we have been identified with Jesus in His death burial and resurrection. Hence forth our identity rests upon His identity (as we discussed earlier). But Jesus' identity is transcendently multifaceted. To this reality His various "I am" statements bear ample witness. Experience tells us that we are always discovering something new about His identity as we endeavor to answer the eternally recurring question, "But whom say ye that I am?"<sup>198</sup> Each time we experience a new revelation of who He is we also discover something new about who we are in Him. And this goes on and on, a process to which baptism bears a continuing witness. And in that sense the whole cycle: hear, understand (repent), believe (faith), be baptized (new identity), receive grace (love) and patient obedience (commands) is a repetitive cycle. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."<sup>199</sup>

#### **e. Learning to love by learning to obey**

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..."<sup>200</sup>

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."<sup>201</sup>

"... we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."<sup>202</sup>

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."<sup>203</sup>



Discipleship proper focuses on motivation and behavior. It has to do with the choices that we make and why we make them. The central motivation which empowers the disciple to regularly accomplish "good works" is the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit. These are works that humanly would never been possible for any of us to do by ourselves "Without me ye can do nothing."<sup>204</sup> It is the love that comes from God (agape) that empowers behavior in conformity to Jesus' commands. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." But there is a great difference between having the love that comes from God in our hearts and loving people the way God does. It's rather like the difference between having a grand piano in our living room and being able to play it! We have to learn to love the way we learn to play the piano. Discipleship is all about learning to love. We learn to love by obeying Jesus' commands as a step of faith. We learn to love by learning to obey. Love is like healing, the church is like the hospital, and Jesus is like the doctor. The hospital does not heal, the body heals, but the hospital creates a disciplined environment (through diet, exercise, medications, prosthetics, bed rest, etc.) under the doctor's direction in which healing is allowed to proceed unimpeded by its "enemies" like disease, or poor health practices. So too the love that comes from God is allowed to progress forward in motivating the life in the disciplinary environment of a community of believers under the direction of the great "physician of souls" Jesus Christ. In this analogy, the human, tasked with making disciples, is like the nurse who must help the patient recover. The nurse carries out the

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<sup>198</sup> Mark 8:29b

<sup>199</sup> Colossians 2:6

<sup>200</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>201</sup> John 14:15

<sup>202</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>203</sup> Colossians 2:6

<sup>204</sup> John 15:5b

implementation of the doctor's orders (commands). But what are the enemies? They are many, and among them are those habituated sins (vices) that so easily beset us,<sup>205</sup> erroneous thoughts and self deceptions, corrupting associations, and the allure of this present world which "lieth in wickedness,"<sup>206</sup> under the prince of this world who controls it!<sup>207</sup> All such enemies of the progress of the love of God in us flourish in our deceitful and desperately wicked hearts.<sup>208</sup> Delusions about our spiritual progress are a particular danger that could delay spiritual progress if not frustrate it for a lifetime! That is why trials sometimes become necessary. Before you or I ever were, God had ordained good works "that we should walk in them." In His mercy He often does not permit them to be frustrated by the interior blindness of our problem denial. He who opened the eyes of the blind in his earthly ministry may still do so spiritually today for you and me as He once did for Peter.

Seeing that discipleship is fraught with such spiritual dangers, there is a real need to have a mature and experienced believer involved in the young disciple's growing process.

To see how this can work, let us consider a simple illustration. Consider two men who are involved in the practice of fasting. The one fasts because he believes that the practice will bring him closer to God. He feels that his body must be under strict discipline or his carnal nature will get the upper hand. He emphasizes verses like Paul's statements: "...I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."<sup>209</sup> He even takes a certain pleasure when he thinks that he has progressed somewhat and secretly looks askance at over weight people he meets.

The other person is fasting by saving their lunch money allowance and giving it to an African mission for small children. He emphasizes verses like: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"<sup>210</sup> They are both involved in the same activity, but their motivations are entirely different. The first is centered on achieving his own sanctification, and fears that he will not progress. The other sees the needs of others that he is able to meet by self sacrifice. His heart is deeply moved by the plight of small children starving for want of the food that he has in abundance. It is the motivation not the specifics of the activity that makes the difference in the spiritual life. The one is driven by concern for self (and fear), the other by love for the less fortunate.

A vigilant and discerning disciplinarian could easily see the difference between these two modes of discipline. If the disciple were willing to be guided by the reasonable constraints imposed by the disciplinarian, he could save a possible lifetime of wasted effort with some simple correctives to his delusion.

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<sup>205</sup> Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

<sup>206</sup> 1 John 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

<sup>207</sup> John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

<sup>208</sup> Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

<sup>209</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:27

<sup>210</sup> Isaiah 58:6,7

Jesus faced the same dilemma in His age. He spoke of discipline under three headings: fasting, prayer, and alms.<sup>211</sup> But so did the Pharisees.<sup>212</sup> They were advocating the same practices, but Jesus saw that motivation was paramount. The Pharisees sought the praise of men for their disciplines. But Jesus imposed the constraint of secrecy on such practices so that “thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are.” “...thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. ... .. pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.... appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” In these instructions, Jesus is not saying to live undisciplined lives. He is saying not to be like the hypocrites who practice discipline for self glorification rather than love of God and neighbor. It is the absence of love not the lack of secrecy mentioned in Matthew 6:4 that invalidates discipline and brings no reward. That is because secrecy and love are linked. When men show off their acts of charity, it not out of desire for the well being of the one who is being helped, but it is for the aggrandizement of themselves in the sight of others less fortunate. That is cruel in the extreme! Though lack of secrecy and lack of love seem unrelated, they really are. Put more simply pride and love are incompatible. The apostle Paul reminds us that “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, ... and have not love, it profits me nothing.”<sup>213</sup> The motivation of self glorification rendered the disciplines of the Pharisees worthless in God’s sight. “They have their reward” but clearly not from God.

Having love as a motivation for disciplinary practices affects the way the activity is perceived. Love has a remarkable property that of identification or uniting in one. It turns our prayers from “I” and “they” to “us” (as in the case of the plural “us”, “we,” “our” of the Lord’s Prayer). It unites diverse disciplinary practices (fasting – alms). It is not I don’t need food but he does, but I have our food. It unites the processes of mortification and sanctification. It was love that caused Jesus to be identified with us in our sin and guilt on the cross and transfer His righteousness to us.

## **7. Discipleship as Relationship**

“And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and

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<sup>211</sup> Matthew 6:1-18

<sup>212</sup> Luke 18:11 -12 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

<sup>213</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:3

slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.”<sup>214</sup>

“And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master<sup>215</sup> from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and

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<sup>214</sup> 1 Kings 19:15 - 21

<sup>215</sup> On the use of the term “Master” in the process of discipleship: In the world of Elijah, when slavery and absolute potentates were commonplace, the term master was a common expression. We still preserve the term today in relation to the person of our Lord Jesus, as our Lord and Master. But it seems very foreign to use the term “Master” in any other relational context. The admonition of Matthew 23:10 “Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” certainly tends to make the term objectionable from a Christian point of view. The individual Christian has one and only one master – Jesus Christ. Add to this theology two thousand years of progress in corporate self or democratic governance and the term “master” becomes in the minds of many totally unacceptable in any context. Yet the New Testament continues to use the term relationally as in Matthew 10:24 “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.” How are we to resolve this apparent dichotomy in order to have a convenient word to describe the lead person in the process of discipleship and avoid transgressing our Lord’s saying? There are good English words like disciplinarian (disciplinarian – disciple) but the connotation of this word in the common mind is immensely negative, conjuring up a picture of a stern Spartan personality that is as far from loving as a rock is from water! Terms like “discipler” which create a noun from a verb (to disciple) have been used. But inventing a new word to describe a master simply obviates the conceptual problem. A non Biblical term like “mentor” seems better adapted to describe the person who provides guidance and discipline for the disciple and finds acceptance. But then we are left with inventing another term (“ment-ee”) to fill out the relational polarity. It seems sad to me to abandon the Biblical use of the term “master” with all its rich imagery (as well as negative connotations). I believed that we are helped to a more accurate understanding of the term “master” by its usage today in that form of learning in which specific trades are “mastered” - apprenticeship. Apprenticeship is much nearer to us in time. Some modern day craft unions (like printers) still describe the young person entering the trade as an apprentice under a master. The term “master” as used here does not describe one who has absolute domination of the human will (as in the master – slave relationship) but rather one who has mastered the skill which he is now imparting to the apprentice. He is the apprentice’s master but not his Lord. So where the term master is used in this survey, it is to be understood that the mentor, discipler, disciplinarian, or master does not hold absolute sway over the disciple’s individual will but rather has mastered the fine art of living a Christian life of love, and his observations, cautions, and guidance are not absolute but held out to the disciple as possible acts of prudent obedience founded upon the disciple’s enlightened self interest in progressing in his spiritual life.

the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, where is the LORD God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets who were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.”<sup>216</sup>



Before we consider the details of the Christian discipleship process, it is important to note that disciplines are learned within a relationship of the master and the disciple. Like all relationships, it has some general features that are observable in those disciplinary relationships recorded in scripture.

### **a. The Disciple**

God calls individuals into the master - disciple relationship. It is part of God’s plan for the individual’s salvation. As noted, the task of propagating the gospel is given alike to all believers. It is reasonable to infer that the task of making disciples is also given to each of us. God chooses the older and younger believer and puts them together. It was God who told Elijah to anoint Elisha to be a prophet in his place. It was God who chose Elisha to succeed Elijah. Elisha was to be Elijah’s disciple by God’s design, not Elijah’s. While we may not discover who is to discipline us or who we are to discipline, we need to be prayerfully alert and prepared to accept the responsibility for a relationship of this kind.

Ideally, the disciple should have taken care to have a right relationship with their parents. Before responding to Elijah’s invitation Elisha requested “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.” Discipline builds on discipline. The discipline of the insular home can be the foundation for all subsequent spiritual training. The discipleship of the world, if done well, is valuable to Christian discipleship. Besides being a person with a heart for the needy, a steward should also be a good manager of money – the “mammon of unrighteousness” with which he is to make to himself friends that when he fails, they may receive him into everlasting habitations. Remember, Paul’s training under Gamaliel<sup>217</sup> was not lost when he became the human author of most of the New Testament!

Conversely, the inability to abide the discipline of our natural parents does not bode well for the disciple to eventually master spiritual disciplines under an older believer. If we do not know what it is to follow, how will we ever learn to lead? Elisha’s relationship with his parents was a loving one. Not all of us come from functionally sound homes. Not all of us learn what it means to truly love as God would have us experience it in our insular home. But as much as possible, the young believer should have tried to “honor his mother and father”

We should not judge the character of the master - disciple relationship by its opening stages. The prophet’s office was marked by the prophet’s mantle. It was emblematic of the work that God had given Elijah to do. Elijah was told to anoint Elisha, but when Elijah passed by Elisha all he

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<sup>216</sup> 2 Kings 2:1-15

<sup>217</sup> Acts 22:3

did was “cast his mantle upon him.” The mantle was treated as a common piece of clothing, a mundane thing, and perhaps as a burden that he was glad to be rid of. Elisha was bidden to the lowly task of carrying that despised mantle not as its owner but as the servant of the prophet for whom he would carry it. This was hardly the kind of “call to follow me” that was calculated to win respect. The mantle of the Lord’s prophet is precious and not to be thrown about lightly. But we must remember that Elijah had gone through a period of profound exertion in defeating the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-46), was threatened with death by Jezebel, and had to flee for his life (1 Kings 19). The whole experience left him tired, lonely, and badly depressed. Elijah needed help, and Elisha was sent to help him as well as to eventually carry on the work. To Elisha’s great credit, he saw through Elijah’s depressed and possibly hostile action in flinging the prophet’s mantle on himself as though it was a common and burdensome thing. Sometimes the greatest gifts come as “ill-wrapped presents”.

Elisha wanted the relationship! Elijah cast the mantle on Elisha and kept walking. It was more of an angry abandonment of his office than a gracious invitation for Elisha to follow him. Not only did Elisha recognize who he was dealing with, despite Elijah’s human failures, but he wanted the relationship with the prophet so he “left the oxen, and ran after Elijah”. Elisha was gifted with the ability to make an unhesitating choice between the familiar and secure world of a successful farmer (there were twelve yoke of oxen plowing that day in his father’s field) and the danger filled life of a prophet in Israel. Sometimes the choice to follow a spiritual elder happens quickly and we must choose by faith immediately. It was so with Jesus’ disciples as with Elisha. It may be so with you.

The relationship between disciple and master is always voluntary and open handed. Obedience is the result of enlightened self interest on the part of the disciple not manipulation on the part of the master. When Elisha told Elijah of his willingness to follow him, he begged only that he be allowed to let his parents know what had happened and where he was going. “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.” To this request Elijah answers “Go back again: for what have I done to thee?” In other words, Elijah is saying in effect: What have I done to you; chained you to me and made you a slave to me? Go back, do what is right and then let’s be going.

There is irreversibility and joy in discipleship. No sooner had Elisha decided to follow Elijah than he “took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat.” His part in the life of the family farm was over. The irreversible experience of death and the fire stood between him and his family, his livelihood, his past life. But it was not a sad exchange. Elisha wanted the farm hands to rejoice with him in his new found good fortune so he made a feast for them from that that had formerly been his livelihood. “When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>218</sup>

Discipleship involves service. “Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him. Elijah needed Elisha! The work had become too much for him and had led to a terrible sense of isolation and depression. But Elisha needed Elijah as one to whom he could minister. Elisha became a constant reminder to Elijah that he was not alone. Elisha was a great encouragement to Elijah, even as Elijah was a great source of inspiration to Elisha. It was for his service to Elijah that Elisha was known. When Jehoshaphat asks “Is there no prophet of the LORD here that we may

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<sup>218</sup> “Discipleship and the Cross” in The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

inquire of the LORD through him?" An officer of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah."<sup>219</sup>

The master must go for the disciple to grow. Elijah and Elisha spent the next ten years together. But the day came when "the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." Discipleship is not forever. In a touching display of concern, Elijah asks Elisha three times to "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to ..." first Bethel, then Jericho, finally Jordan. The way between these places is a constant descent. But in each case Elisha refuses to leave his master even though things are 'going downhill'. To each request to tarry here, Elisha answers "As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Discipleship involves not only obedience but dedication to the master. But the human master is only an under shepherd, a servant of the true Master: Jesus Christ, the great shepherd. Perhaps Elijah sought to spare Elisha the pain of seeing his departure. But the only pain devotion cannot bear is separation. Elisha will go with Elijah to the very end.

The ultimate role of the disciple is determined by God not man. After crossing Jordan, Elijah asks Elisha "... what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

"This is in reference to the law,<sup>220</sup> He shall acknowledge the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath-the right of the first-born is his. Elisha considered himself the only child or first-born of Elijah, as the disciples of eminent teachers were called their children; so here he claims a double portion of his spiritual influence, any other disciples coming in for a single share only. The original words פִּי שְׁנַיִם pi shenayim, mean rather two parts, than double the quantity."

-Adam Clark's Commentary

Elisha, resting his foot upon this law<sup>221</sup>, requested of Elijah as a first-born son the double portion of his spirit for his inheritance. Elisha looked upon himself as the first-born son of Elijah in relation to the other "sons of the prophets," inasmuch as Elijah by the command of God had called him to be his successor and to carry on his work. The answer of Elijah agrees with this: "Thou hast asked a hard thing," he said, because the granting of this request was not in *his* power, but in the power of God. He therefore made its fulfillment dependent upon a condition, which did not rest with himself, but was under the control of God: "if thou shalt see me taken from thee, let it be so to thee; but if not, it will not be so." From his own personal inclination Elijah did not wish to have Elisha, who was so closely related to him, as an eye-witness of his translation from the earth; but from his persistent refusal to leave him he could already see that he would not be able to send him away. He therefore left the matter to the Lord, and made the guidance of God the sign for Elisha whether the Lord would fulfill his request or not.

- Keil & Delitzsch Commentary

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<sup>219</sup> 2 Kings 3:11

<sup>220</sup> Deuteronomy 21: 15-17 "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

<sup>221</sup> Deuteronomy 21: 15-17

The disciple is not a clone of his master. Eventually the moment of parting arrives to Elisha's grief. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces."

But Elisha's request is granted. He sees Elijah ascend to heaven but the prophet's mantle falls to earth. "He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, where is the LORD God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets who were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

The recorded ministry of Elijah lasted 13 years, Elisha's was 26 years. Elijah performed 7 recorded miracles including one resurrection from the dead. Elisha performed 14 recorded miracles including two resurrections from the dead. Yet for all this Elisha was not the clone of his mentor. Elisha's ministry rested upon and completes the works started by Elijah, It is Elisha who anoints of Jehu and Hazael, which Elijah was charged to do. It is Elisha who receives and fosters those schools of the prophets which Elijah had already founded.

#### **b. The Master**

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."<sup>222</sup>



As we consider the relationship between master and disciple, the character and actions of the master become very important. The passage above which speaks to the elders of the local assembly describes some of these character traits: availability, willingness, accountability, and exemplary behavior.

#### **i. Availability**

"Feed the flock of God which is among you" The master must be available to their spiritual charges as much as any parent of children. Guidance in the spiritual life requires constant availability. The key operative word in discipleship or discipline is maturation of the young believer.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which

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<sup>222</sup> 1 Peter 5:1-3

every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”<sup>223</sup>

## **ii. Willingness**

“Taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind...” As we have already discussed, discipleship may be seen as a kind of spiritual apprenticeship in which the young believer learns the “arts and mysteries” of living Biblically in this world from one who has already mastered them. All relationships require some form of discipline to work harmoniously. The disciplines being learned in the disciple - master relationship are the normal Christian disciplines. The Christian disciplines of the master are experientially learned by the apprentice in the relationship itself.

The existence of any relationship requires a certain degree of freedom to choose. That is why discipline is so essential to relationship. Discipline involves choices, saying “yes” to one thing and “no” to others. If I wish to enter into a relationship with you, I must ‘say’ yes to relating to you. If I do so, I have given you an opportunity to choose as well. Should you say “yes” to me, then we have the start of a relationship. If you say “no” then there can be no relationship. The most common and perhaps most profound human relationships, marriage, begins formally in just this way. The bride and groom must both say yes to the question ‘will you have this person to have and to hold in marriage?’ Their mutual assent, before God and human witnesses (wedding guests) constitutes a mutual contract that establishes what should be a life long relationship that is unique to them.

Jesus makes the reestablishment of relationship with God possible by his sacrificial death on the cross. Individuals are made aware of His willingness to enter into a saving relationship with them (the good news or gospel) but each individual must in turn choose (i.e. accept) Jesus in order for that relationship (like marriage) to be established.

This is also true with the disciple – master relationship. It requires mutual assent between both parties. Our Lord’s command to make disciples in one sense means that we must be willing to say yes to someone who approaches us and be willing to start a relationship that will take a lot of time and energy, in which they experientially grasp our way of life and possess our virtues for themselves.

## **iii. Accountability**

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage...” A lord–slave (master–slave) relationship involves no accountability whatever. But a master of the art of Christian living must be accountable to his disciples who are learning to live that life, because their obedience must be reasonable.<sup>224</sup> As they experience various trials, young disciples need to know why things are the way they are. This requires an intelligent answer from the one who has already experienced and mastered such trials. It requires honest accountability.

## **iv. Exemplary behavior**

“...but being ensamples to the flock.” Discipleship is not static. Any person in a parent-child relationship knows this experientially. The nature of the relationship will change with the growth of either one or both parties related. In the relationship between God (who is immutable) and

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<sup>223</sup> Ephesians 4:14-16

<sup>224</sup> Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

man (who is mutable), the relationship can only change (and should change) because the human party grows and changes. This transformation of the person (sanctification) is the primary intent of discipline. Of course when people are transformed in this human – divine relation, it is obvious that all human relationships involving that individual are similarly affected. Sometimes there are painful consequences for such changes. Disciples learn by doing. Their disciplines are governed by the experience of those who train them. The master can only transmit what they have learned by their experience. But there are three virtues developed by disciplined use that are both exemplary and highly necessary to support spiritual growth: vigilance, discernment, and diligence.

Vigilance requires that the life of the disciple be watched carefully. This usually requires lengthy and regular communication with the disciple and real honesty on the disciple's part. You will remember Jesus' dealing with His disciples in Capernaum.

“And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”<sup>225</sup>

Jesus was not asking because of a need to know. He was testing them to see if they would be open with him. His answer reveals that he knows what is going on in their lives, but he has given them a chance to be honest with him about their desires, and they do not take it. Honest communication about the disciple's real concerns, fears, or desires takes time. In an age that involves such frenzied activity on the part of so many, people who are willing to take the time to listen intelligently are few and far between.

Discernment is the ability to see what's really going on. “But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”<sup>226</sup> Discernment is probably the single most necessary virtue of mature saints. The difference between being in the way of God and out of it can be the difference between spiritual life and death.<sup>227</sup>

Diligence has two aspects to it: attention to detail and quickness of response. In the life of a young believer, vigilance watches for the little details that discernment pays attention to. It is these little details that signal that sin has entered the life, particularly the thought life. Diligence moves quickly once the tiny detail has been observed and diagnosed. The master knows what the detail means and where, in the long run, the disciple is headed. The celerity of diligence allows little time for evil to work its poison in the soul. It is quick to pull the thought barb of the wicked one and administer the antivenin of God's word. The mature believer has such knowledge of spiritual medicine as is needed of a soldier. One might say he is a spiritual soldier-physician as well as a shepherd.

Eventually the young believer learns to internalize the disciplines and particularly acquire the virtues of vigilance, discernment, and diligence both in his own life and for the lives of other younger believers that he will begin to help. This observation leads us to a related question: when are disciples ready to disciple?

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<sup>225</sup> Mark 9:33-35

<sup>226</sup> Hebrews 5:14

<sup>227</sup> John Cassian - Conference 2

## **8. When to disciple?**

“Go...Make Disciples”



If the process of discipleship is seen as monolithic, proceeding in discrete steps, then the answer to when a person should disciple others is “when they have finished being disciplined.” After all, doctors begin to practice medicine only after they have been educated, completed their residency, and been licensed. But such is not the case in the spiritual life. Discipleship is not monolithic. The most mature saint cannot say ‘I have arrived’ nor can the least mature saint say ‘I am not ready’. In his sixth century classic The Ladder, John Climacus devotes an entire treatise (running in translation to over forty thousand words) to the subject of the qualifications of a shepherd. Yet even he concludes that, in some cases, a person who is not quite ready may still rise to the occasion and become an excellent shepherd by being entrusted with the responsibility. Perhaps there will be those who object to young believers engaging in discipleship of still younger disciples, because they are not qualified. There are several issues that concern me with an undue emphasis on “qualifications.”

Jesus command “make disciples” says nothing about making them when you are ready or qualified.

The command is to everyone. It is general and without qualifying limitations. It does not rest on our having a gift to ‘pastor’ or ‘evangelize’.

Over-emphasis on qualifications can be a plausible excuse of the carnal nature to continue in disobedience because “I’m not really qualified”.

When are we ever fully qualified? If the Apostle Paul could say “I count not myself to have apprehended”, when are any of us going to say “I’m ready?” Yet having not arrived, does Paul say, until I have arrived, I am going to wait to preach the gospel, and disciple the saints? No! He maintained “...this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>228</sup>

Given that disciplines of self denial will never really work spiritually apart from disciplines of self sacrifice, and that self sacrifice implies that we have someone for whom we are willing to sacrifice, it seems reasonable to me that every believer should have some one to disciple as soon as possible, no excuses! How quickly those of us who are parents grew up because we suddenly had children to sacrifice for. Remember the familiar question: “How did Grandma do it with ten children?” Well she didn’t! Typically the older children took responsibility for their younger siblings. They became grandma’s surrogates. Were they ready to be parents at 10 or 12? Absolutely not! Did they take their responsibility seriously and grow because of the requirements of their situation. Sure they did! And they became better parents when their time came to marry and have children of their own. So then, ideally, a fully mature believer is desirable for discipleship, but that is no excuse for any one of us failing to endeavor to fulfill the Master’s great command! What a joy it is to me to see those that I am discipling, come to me with problems that their disciples are having! I think to my self, “Now we’re getting somewhere!” God grant us grace to do our part as best we can with reverent prayer and earnest supplication!

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<sup>228</sup> Philippians 3:13-14



## Part II. The Practice of Discipleship

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, . . .<sup>229</sup>



We turn now from a theoretical consideration of the nature of discipleship (hopefully based soundly on the scriptures) to the actual practice of it. Our Lord's command has two aspects for each one of us: that we should be disciplined in the spiritual life and that we should disciple others. Jesus' command leaves no one out. It is manifest that His expectation is that every one of His followers should, in their turn, "make disciples" not for themselves but for Him. We have seen that discipleship is dependant on the Holy Spirit who alone exercises true transformative power in the life yielded to His influence. Practically, however, the disciple is also dependant on the experiential knowledge of his human mentor because the command to disciple is also given him.

In the section before last a six point cycle was developed that involved the terms "hearing, understanding, believing, baptism (identification), Love (Grace), teach (disciple), and work (obedience). These are all sound Biblical words that involve basic scriptural concepts. The problem that presents itself to me is in the nature of the words themselves. They are more focused on spiritual concepts rather than on process. And discipleship is above all a process of growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ<sup>230</sup>. So I am introducing six words (analysis, synthesis, assent, encounter, empowerment, and fulfillment) that I believe contain the concepts of the Biblical words above but adapt more easily in our present age to describe the process of discipleship.<sup>231</sup> To understand how each word maps to the Biblical concepts in discipleship, I describe their parallels below.

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<sup>229</sup> Matthew 28:19a

<sup>230</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

<sup>231</sup> ***Caveat Emptor***: Discipleship should conform to Biblical principles and practices. Often that involves the use of Biblical terms. But discipleship also involves the personal experience of the discipler or disciplinarian. In my case, that means that I am using terms not all of which are found in the scripture. In my experience, the use of non-scriptural terms has always been a warning flag. When unbiblical notions are going to be introduced into the spiritual life, they are often marked by the use of unbiblical words, like the terms "clergy and laity" which while they have distinct meaning, are not found in the scriptures and reflect a very un-biblical notion about the nature of the spiritual body of Christ – the church. The young disciple should be warned about this danger! But the use of non-biblical terms does not mean a *defacto* introduction of unbiblical thought. The term "Sunday School", for instance, is not mentioned in scripture. But the history of the Sunday School movement (as reflected in the spiritual lives of many people) has been richly blessed of God. The term Sunday School is doubtless closer to discipleship of the young than most would consider. So the disciple is warned about the use of non-biblical terms. They should prayerfully consider of the use of any non-biblical terms, but with the realization that God does speak to each generation in terms that they can relate to. Here, as in all of the spiritual life, prayerful discernment is needful. Then too, the six words I am using may describe some of the spiritual processes in discipleship but when placed in order around a circle fall they doubtless fall far short of describing the mystery of how the spiritual life proceeds. They do, however, provide the young disciple with a frame of reference by means of which they may gain some understanding of the experience through which they are passing, as well as focus the activities associated with their regular pursuit of God. But experience has shown me that these processes need not, and indeed often do not follow in such a 'neat' order. Sometimes synthesis may initiate analyses. Empowerment may bring the illumination which analysis and synthesis seek. Fulfillment (obedience) may raise more questions of a difficult nature than you ever experienced when meditating on God's word. And a single, life changing, encounter with God may simultaneously produce more results than all of the other processes put together and in a split second! Do not, therefore, become the slave of a model of the spiritual life, however attractive. Never forget that you are the servant of the Living God, not some dead abstraction, however useful.

Analysis – Hearing: The entire process of discipleship centers on effectively hearing the word of God. Jesus says, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”<sup>232</sup> But it is terribly possible to hear the word of God and not respond, to harden the heart.<sup>233</sup> The systematic analysis of that which is heard, often called meditation, is the best way that I know of to avoid the spiritual error of hardening the heart. The psalmist would agree. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”<sup>234</sup> What a terrible spiritual pathway is avoided by the regular practice of meditation on the word of God.

Synthesis – Understanding (or repentance): Experience has shown many that any line of truth in the Bible rests upon many passages. “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”<sup>235</sup> There is a parallel application of this in regards to the scriptures. Beware of doctrines that are based on the narrowest of texts, usually a single verse of scripture that has been wrested from its context (text without context is pretext). Such doctrines are often false! Sound, biblical truth will often have more than one ‘witness’ and the more clear doctrinal passages that provide a coherent picture, the more likely the disciple will be safeguarded from spiritually destructive errors. Synthesis, as I am using it, describes that process of “comparing spiritual things with spiritual”, by which means the teaching of God the Holy Spirit is marked.<sup>236</sup> When we begin to see how various verses fit together to describe a truth of scripture, our earlier notions will begin to change. We will, almost inevitably have a change of mind (the Greek word for which is metanoia translated repentance). And it is this new found understanding of truth that prepares the heart for assent.

Assent – Faith or belief: To understand the truth is one thing. But understanding is not faith. Faith, by its very nature is active. It involves the will as well as the mind. James is quite clear on this point. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”<sup>237</sup> The term assent, in our current usage seems to come very close to this point. For one to assent to the truth implies that they intend to live by that truth, to acquiesce to, to submit their will to, or to have their actions governed by the truth as understood. Assent, then, seems to refer unambiguously to both the mind and the will, whereas faith is often equated falsely (today as in James’ day) with mere intellectual agreement with truth that does not involve the will. Of all the terms here introduced, assent and faith (properly understood) are the closest synonyms. In the process of discipleship, understanding (repentance) is integrally related to faith (belief). Taken together they describe conversion: turning from error (repentance) to truth (faith). The coupling of synthesis with assent describes much the same process.

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<sup>232</sup> John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

<sup>233</sup> Psalm 95:7d -8a “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart...”

<sup>234</sup> Psalm 1:1-2

<sup>235</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:1 “This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” Paul’s dictum here reflects the requirement under Mosaic law for capital judgments to be based on the coherent testimony of two or three witnesses about the guilt of one accused of murder. Deuteronomy 17:6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

<sup>236</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

<sup>237</sup> James 2:19-20

Encounter - Baptism (Identification): The encounter with Jesus Christ is the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life. Baptism typically is seen as a discrete event that serves as a testimony to the believer's encounter with Jesus Christ as Savior and their identification with Him in his death, burial, and resurrection. As noted above, Paul tells us, "... that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."<sup>238</sup> But baptism also implies the discovery of our identity with Christ. And if we can be said to have an identity with Christ, then it stands to reason that we have spiritually encountered Him in reality, of which our baptism speaks in type. While our identity in Christ may be said to be complete in itself as a matter of state, our awareness of that identity is progressive. The scriptures and experience show us that we grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ as a process<sup>239</sup>. As in the gospels, so with each of us, we encounter Jesus Christ in daily life and the consequences of that encounter are reflected in our deepening apprehension of Jesus' identity as well as our own in Him.

Empowerment – Love (Grace): Jesus, himself, describes our inability to live the Christian life apart from Him. "... without me ye can do nothing."<sup>240</sup> But Paul states the inverse truth. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."<sup>241</sup> Without Christ we are powerless, but with Him we can do all things. The instrumentality of empowerment lies with the Holy Spirit. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: ..." <sup>242</sup> The power, of course, to live the sacrificial life of the disciple lies in the 'love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.'<sup>243</sup> It is this same love that is the great principle underlying God's commandments.<sup>244</sup> The grace of God, manifest as His love, is what empowers the disciple to live the Christian life.

Fulfillment – Work (Obedience): Fulfillment inevitably follows the love of God. While the love of God speaks of inward motivation, the inevitable consequence of love is obedience. Jesus says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."<sup>245</sup> Obedience is the measure *par excellence* of the spiritual life. Jesus' whole earthly life was described in terms of two concepts: humility and obedience.<sup>246</sup> But obedience is more than just outward conformity to a moral or legal code. Having been made in the image of God, obedience to God is what we have been created for. So that obedience represents the fulfillment of all that we were intended to become. While the word fulfillment does not occur in scripture, the verb to fulfill does. It is referred to in relation to righteousness or the word of God. Jesus says to John the Baptist, "... it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness"<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Romans 6:3,4

<sup>239</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 **But grow** in grace, and **in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

<sup>240</sup> John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: ... without me ye can do nothing.

<sup>241</sup> Philippians 4:13

<sup>242</sup> Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

<sup>243</sup> Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

<sup>244</sup> Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

<sup>245</sup> John 14:15

<sup>246</sup> Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man (i.e. in Bethlehem), he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (i.e. at Calvary).

<sup>247</sup> Matthew 3:13-15 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

The value of this term as a descriptor of the process of discipleship lies in its great witness to the present age. We live in an age which emphasizes personal fulfillment (and its oft associated concept: happiness) a great deal. But the error of the age lies in seeking fulfillment apart from the will of God. Fulfillment (and happiness) is a concept central to this age as well to discipleship. But the difference between the two uses lies the presence or absence of obedience to God's will empowered by God' love. Disciples can be profoundly attractive to humanity because they achieve a deep and abiding happiness through loving sacrifice that brings inward fulfillment as a witness to a world that seeks both in vain without God.

With the first three of the sections that follow, assignments will be given<sup>248</sup>. Whereas normal homework gives the student opportunity to master certain concepts and procedures of problem solving, assignments for disciples aim at developing good spiritual habits. Habits typically take four to six weeks to be established. Habits are established so they will be practiced for the rest of the life. If this seems considerably a longer time than a series of homework problems take; the answer lies in the reasons given: education seeks to impart knowledge (and skills) while discipleship seeks to change the life – irreversibly, forever. It is to be hoped, that those reading this work are committed to the latter, not the former.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> The reason that I give no assignments for the last three sections is that, beginning with the encounter with God, they are really His response to us according to His gracious plan for us. I do not believe homework from there on is possible. One might object that the discipline of a specific obedience (prayer, alms, fasting) which follows after empowerment is very much within our ability and exercises should be given. But the type of obedience envisioned in these later states is altogether different in character than that which is normally associated with human effort as the section on empowerment following encounter hopefully makes clear.

<sup>249</sup> This hope is not without scriptural precedence: Luke 14:25-33 "And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

## Chapter 1. Analysis

“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”<sup>250</sup>



Years ago I spoke to an artist who was a well known portraitist. He was giving lessons at a well known Art School in Connecticut. On a particular night students of the Art school and several accomplished artist-instructors were interviewing and being interviewed in a kind of artistic courtship between the students and masters to establish whether a mutually acceptable learning relationship could be established. My daughter was enrolled as a student in the school and I had come down with her to see if she had any interest in doing further work in oil painting – possibly portraiture. I watched him at work on a superb portrait (his finished portraits were worth many thousands of dollars and his patrons were wealthy and often famous). He was painting an eye. As I watched, he began to talk over his shoulder. He asked me if I thought people who saw the human eye every day really understood how to paint one so that it looked believable. My older brother, a painter for over seventy years, had taught me well enough to be able to answer correctly – no, I did not. He stopped and turned to me, pallet and brushes in hand, and launched into a little discussion on how he painted the eye so that the casual observer would recognize its reality even though the observer did not understand why it looked real. At the end of a most enlightening discussion, he summarized simply what I have found to be generally true, not only in representational art but in life itself. “Most people”, he said, “Look but they don’t see.”

This observation brings us to exactly the point of this discussion. Spiritually most people read their Bibles, but they do not hear what God is saying to them. They listen to preachers but they do not hear the message. So it is that much of Bible reading today does little for peoples’ spiritual life. Even a cursory examination of the text above will reveal that people’s blindness is self-imposed because “their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes....” Therefore “this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing ... ”

The disciplinary exercises that we will be considering are designed to give the individual disciple the space to open their eyes when reading the Bible; to open their ear when God is speaking to them. Not only to look but to see, not only to listen but to hear! But what is required to cross this vast divide requires us to systematically engage our will to hear not just read; to see not just look. That takes work! Consider this text: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”<sup>251</sup>

All of you read it, but did any of you really make a point to see exactly what it said. Probably not! You read over the words in perhaps less than 10 seconds. Let us begin again. Words, phrases and

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<sup>250</sup> Matthew 13:12-16

<sup>251</sup> James 1:5

lengthy sentences all have meaning. In order to explore those meanings, we must analyze what we have read very carefully.<sup>252</sup>

### **1. Really looking**

Let us first isolate the constituent parts of this complex sentence, so that we may focus our attention on each part individually. If we do this certain words may begin to stand out. In the passage we may find the following:

1. If any of you lack wisdom,
2. let him ask of God,
3. (God) that giveth to all men liberally and,
4. (God, who) upbraideth not;
5. (ask ...God) and it shall be given him.
6. But let him ask in faith,
7. nothing wavering.

Now as we look intently at each passage, each phrase, each word with the intent to understand, to hear, they will begin to “speak” to us. Each will have their own message, but they will all form a community of dialogue, a dialogue with our very soul. They will talk to us and we will reflect about the specifics of what is being said. It will start to sound like a dialogue with the verse rather like the following:

**If any of you lack wisdom...**

This passage raises lots of tough questions for me. Do I have wisdom? Do I need wisdom? What is wisdom anyway? Why do I need it? Where does it come from? – Clearly from God, but how does He give it? If I don’t have any understanding of what wisdom is or why I need it, am I ever going to ask for it? Probably not! But maybe that would get me in trouble? Why would God put this passage here if I didn’t need wisdom? Am I missing something? I don’t know! I haven’t a clue! What am I going to do?

Let him ask of God, ...

“Ask...God”: that’s prayer. Is prayer then a pathway to wisdom? I’ll try it. But wait! Perhaps He won’t answer my prayer. If I don’t even understand if I need wisdom, why would He give it to me? Should I tell him about all my questions that I can’t answer? Maybe He’ll get angry with me? After all He’s already told me about lacking wisdom here and I should know what it is and if I need it and if I lack it, shouldn’t I? He’ll get angry and not answer me.

(God) upbraideth not (doesn’t get angry) and

(God) gives to all ... liberally...

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<sup>252</sup> *Caveat Emptor* The method that we will be using in this section is primarily intended to focus the mind on the various concepts and commands that a particular Bible verse or phrase may present. It is intended to support devotional meditation but is not recommended as a basis for establishing doctrine which would require far more rigor and broader consideration of several clear doctrinal passages. The point being that the disciple should be intent on hearing God, not instructing others at this point. Developing sound doctrine is a real labor in the word as many systematic theologians have pointed out.

Aha! OK. Let me try praying.

(Here the disciple may begin to pray according to their own lights and to ask God on the basis of what he is struggling with. Is it the “right form”? Who knows? Does it matter? Perhaps. Will it limit God’s answer? Not according to this passage? (Here begins the dialogue of a soul in need with God who delights to meet human needs. But in this somewhat contrived scenario –when you first read this passage did you pray then as our fictional person is praying now? If the answer is no than perhaps you were just reading and not seeing! Let’s continue.)

**ask** of **God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; **and it shall be given** him.

Prayer is not part of the spiritual life; it is the spiritual life! Think on that for a while. Again there are many questions. What kind of prayer is meant here? There are prayers of thanksgiving and intercession and worship and praise and petition and ... .What is prayer really? Not all prayer is just asking. Or is there something about all prayer that deep down is really the same? Maybe these differences are just superficial? Maybe not! I heard once that we should praise God first and be thankful. You know: “Ps 100:4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise...” But what if I didn’t do that? What if I didn’t get it right? Will He answer my prayer then? Is there anything that is absolutely necessary to having God answer my prayers? Is order important or is there something else?

But let him **ask in faith**, nothing wavering (**don’t waver**)

Lord I came asking for wisdom, but now I’m not even sure I know what it is to ask in faith? Does my uncertainty about what is faith somehow disqualify me from getting answers on wisdom? I mean how can I have faith if I don’t even know what faith really is? And is all this questioning wavering? Are you angry with me because I don’t know whether I’m asking for wisdom or for faith? I’m not sure of what I’m asking because I’m not sure that I understand either wisdom or faith. Are you angry with me because I’m confused? If you are, please don’t be angry with me, because one thing that I do know is that I need you very much!

My experience has shown me countless times that God hears and answers prayers like this! And the person who reads and prays in this way has started on the pathway of discipleship!

## **2. Finding an Essential Truth:**

...the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all **they that heard it wondered** at those things which were told them by the shepherds. **But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.**<sup>253</sup>



It is important for the disciple to understand that from the very moment that they decide to really try and hear what God is saying to them and not just listen, a dialogue begins between themselves and God, a dialogue that may continue on and off for hours, days, weeks, and even years! What has been suggested in the sample dialogue above is intended to give the disciple a

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<sup>253</sup> Luke 2:15b - 19

sense of just what it means to “ponder in their heart” what they have read or been told. Pondering or reflection is necessarily a slow process (like human digestion) and requires patience and perseverance. But its fruit is an ample reward for the time spent. Among other things the thoughtful disciple will begin to see words in the passages in a different way. Certain words will begin to stand out while others take a lesser position. For example in the first passage from James, the core passage begins to stand out.

**If** any of **you lack** wisdom, let him **ask** of **God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask **in faith**, nothing wavering.

Notice the highlighted words. They form a completely comprehensive sentence within the given one: “If...you lack...ask...God...in faith.” Some exegetes might object to this approach as being that which our Lord warned against, a taking away from the “words of this book.”<sup>254</sup> But the intent warned against there was a deliberate attempt to distort (by adding man’s words or subtracting God’s words or both) and therefore mislead the reader. Here the intent is to better understand exactly what God is saying to us. Reason dictates that when what is being said is true of the whole sentence, than the core or essential sentence must also be true. For example, if it is true that “the cat in the window is black”, then it is also true that “the cat is black”, since the definite article “the” refers to a cat sitting in a particular window even though the window is not mentioned in the core sentence. But if I say “the cat in the window is black” (true) and then pretend that the core sentence is “all cats are black” (false) I have actually altered two words in the core sentence, “the cat” becoming “all cats”. It is this specious handling of the word of God against which we are warned!

How then may we be sure that our understanding of an essential meaning of the total passage in hand does not go awry as we seek for the meaning of what we are trying to hear?

First the reduced core meaning must not do any harm to the wider meaning of the full passage. This is the principle of context in hermeneutics. The book is the context of the passage. The passage is the context of the paragraph. The paragraph is the context of the sentence. The sentence is the context of the words and phrases in the sentence. In just such a way, the full passage is the context of the core message. The words that we assign a lesser place in our thinking about the passage should still comport well with the core meaning as modifiers and specifics. In one sense the core or basic message is the essential truth, while the full passage may be recognized as a specific instance of that general truth. So in our handling of the passage above the terms not included can be clearly seen to modify the core truth. Sentence diagramming is one way of systematically uncovering the essential meaning of any sentence. So as we consider the passage in hand we find the following where key words are bold and modifiers and conditional words and phrases are not.

**If** any of **you lack** wisdom, let him **ask** of **God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask **in faith**, nothing wavering.

The terms “any of” only implies the universality of who **you** refers to as an encouragement to all who read the passage. But if the reader has already applied the personal pronoun to himself (as the dialogue above sought to make clear), then such a promise of universality is not strictly necessary.

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<sup>254</sup> Revelation 22:19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The term “wisdom” is a specific lack, but there are many things that we can and do lack: courage, patience, gentleness, grace, even faith itself.<sup>255</sup> Are we not to ask God for these needs?

The phrase “that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not” certainly makes the character of the God to whom we are to petition much more clear. He is patient and non judgmental. Therefore we should feel safe in asking him for our needs. He is also gracious, “giving to all men liberally.” And the promise “it shall be given him” is a precious one full of encouragement to pray. But here again their omission does not change the fundamental direction of the passage to ask God when we have a lack.

The second sentence, “but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” could be omitted entirely, but the larger context of the book of James reveals that that faith as a governing motivation is intimately linked to prayer in James’ thought.<sup>256</sup> So it was included in the core concept because prayer without faith is not prayer at all! But the phrase “without wavering” only qualifies the nature of the faith required. It also provides a conceptual bridge to the discussion of double mindedness.<sup>257</sup> “

But there is much more to be gained by this approach! As we really begin to look at this passage, we see that there are many thoughts clustering in what appears at first to be a single sentence.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of **God**, that **giveth to all men liberally**, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”

Surly the half has not been told of the liberality of God’s grace. We might do well at this point to consider just the ubiquity of His prevenient grace!

If any of you lack wisdom, let him **ask of God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; **and it shall be given** him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

What is this saying but what our Lord Jesus has already told us. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”<sup>258</sup>

If any of **you lack wisdom**, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

Who among us will dare to say that we are wise or have no lack of wisdom? Indeed the very core of wisdom is to recognize that we are not wise in ourselves. We need “Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”<sup>259</sup>

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of **God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and **upbraideth not**; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

God is supremely kind to us all. What a noble example for each of us to follow and to avoid being harsh or judgmental, for God has not been so with any of us!

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<sup>255</sup> Mark 9:24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

<sup>256</sup> James 5:15 And the **prayer of faith** shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

<sup>257</sup> See the intervening reasoning that culminates in the important principle “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” - James 1:8

<sup>258</sup> Matthew 7:7

<sup>259</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

As already observed prayer without faith is not prayer at all! Yet even small faith can serve as a basis of prayer for faith. It is worthwhile to observe that all of these essential truths and many more are present in this verse. Each of these treatments reveals something hidden in the full passage, while none of them countervenes the truth of the total passage.

So what does this mean for us? The exercise of considering all the facets of truth that a passage presents is important because it allows us to link these precepts to those found in other passages in a coherent understanding of what the scriptures are saying about a particular truth without violating the specifics of any passage so analyzed. It is also helpful in determining the core message or the essential truth so that we may be guided by it. Since there may be many other truths in the same passage, every word of the full passage could be of profound importance in other settings.

In this approach, the Word of God, like white light, is made of a spectrum of different 'colors' of thought; or like any complex sound wave, which may be reduced to a series of simple basic tones that make up the complex signal. And, like light or sound, the basic colors or tones of thought may be extracted from the very words of the complex passage, without doing violence to it, as long as the process of analysis of what is read is done with sympathy to all that is communicated, including the several contexts in which the passage was written as well as the core truth presented.

Of particular interest is that message which addresses itself to our behavior. We should never forget that truth discovered must govern our actions (obedience). In this case the core commandment is simply "If you lack, ask God in faith." The detailed passage is a specific instance of that general understanding. It tells us about a specific lack: wisdom. It tells us about why we should ask God: (1) because He doesn't get angry so don't be afraid and (2) He answers prayers liberally. It tells us further that God is "no respecter of persons" because the command and promise is given to "all men". It also tells us the very important feature of God's commands, that very often they contain a promise: if you ask God, in faith, it shall be given to you. Most of all, the core sentence tells you to do something: "ask". It is a command and therefore a way of expressing our love for God in obedience to it.

### **3. Assignment**

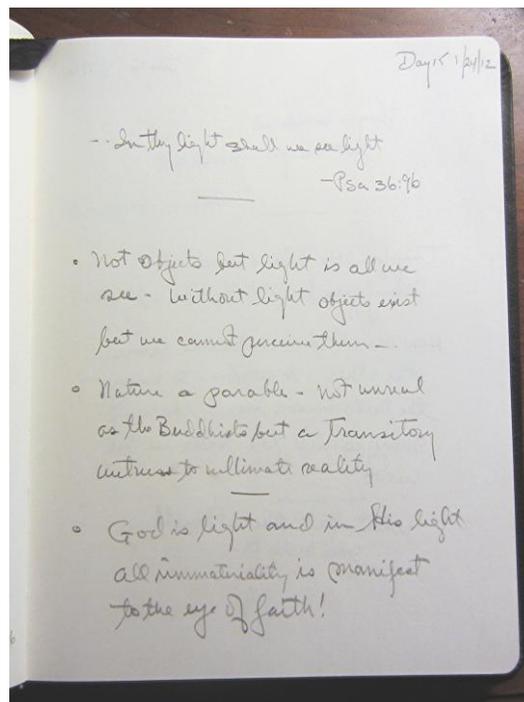
The purpose of this assignment is to begin the good habit of carefully analyzing God's word. Because the process takes time (I have been considering "make disciples" for the last thirty years.), you should not work with long passages. Two or three words in a profoundly revealing passage may be more than you can handle. The assignment should continue unbroken for at least six weeks. You should keep your results in a note book or journal.<sup>260</sup>

Proceed as follows:

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<sup>260</sup> I would recommend using a basic note book, in which to start. The reason I say this is that if after six weeks, the habit is ingrained, so that you continue, then in twenty years you will have many note books. But you will still be able to obtain similar blank books and the collection of your thoughts will be housed in a consistent looking set of books that is aesthetically more pleasing.

1. Pray
2. Read the verse slowly – several times.
3. Divide the passage as we did above into shorter passages or phrases.
4. Allow your mind to engage the verse or passage by these parts until you begin to see various thoughts emerge.
5. Pay attention to the presence of a command or a verb in the imperative. This includes words like: seek, ask, remember, pray, ask, give, withhold not, etc.
6. If possible look for the core meaning of the passage, particularly if there is an imperative in it.
7. Your reflections on a particular passage, a part of a passage, or even a word should be allowed to progress for at least 15 to 30 minutes. As you gain experience, you will be able to sustain longer periods of concentration. Do allow other verses to be suggested by your memory, but do not go after them yet. Stay focused on the words in hand.
8. As your reflections gather focus, they will present themselves in words that reflect you growing insight. Let this process go on during the day.
9. At the end of the day, try to recapture what you have seen succinctly in your note book. Here is a sample page to help you understand. Note the date and the consecutive day number.



10. You may select your own verses (keep them short) or one of the following to get you started.

Ephesians 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;...

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

Consider the following partition:

God, ... quickened us together with Christ  
By grace ye are saved"

God, ... hath raised us up together...

God ...hath ... made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus

Eph 2:7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Consider the following partition:

That in the ages to come  
He might show  
The exceeding riches of his grace  
In his kindness toward us  
Through Christ Jesus

1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Consider the following partition

God is faithful,...  
God ... by whom ye were called ...  
...the fellowship of his Son  
... ye were called unto the fellowship ...  
...his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Any one of these deserves much time to reflect. Give a day to each!

Acts 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

1 Corinthians 7:35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Matthew 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

## Chapter 2 Synthesis

"Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts, for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing." Yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."<sup>261</sup>



New England is known for its stone walls. Having built a very few of them myself, I really appreciate this verse. The act of carefully piling one stone upon another so that each rests well in its place and participates with the aggregate weight of the stones lock them all together in a uniform wall pleasing to the eye and useful in landscaping is most satisfying. I suppose because of this experience, the line "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little..." has been a favorite verse of mine for many years. There is no other Bible passage that uses the image of building a stone wall (which people have done for millennia) to describe how God teaches His word to His people.

But this passage contains a sober warning. Even though God has taught with great care, "yet they would not hear." Reading the Bible can be very dangerous spiritually when we harden our hearts. "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, "It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest."<sup>262</sup> God is not to be trifled with! "...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word."<sup>263</sup>

Having advanced these warnings, however, I am persuaded of better things concerning you, the reader.

The description "precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" admirably describes the next part of our practice - synthesis. Typically when we are deeply reflecting on God's word (spoken but especially written) the experiences of our life will begin to enter the picture. Understanding does draw upon our array of life experiences. Many times, especially for young people, those experiences can be confusing. We do not see clearly what we have done (well or ill) or what has happened to us (good or bad) and why. But as our heart begins to understand some facet of spiritual reality found in the Bible, those experiences may begin to seem related to, may help to explain what we are reading, and may even be explained by them. God's word and the analysis of it, has much to do with the business of living because God has everything to do with living. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Isaiah 28:9-13

<sup>262</sup> Psalm 95:7d - 11

<sup>263</sup> Isaiah 66:2

<sup>264</sup> Acts 17:28

But it is inevitable as we continue the practice of analyzing God's word in order to appropriate it into our lives, that the various passages should begin to "talk to one another" as a kind of corporate witness to our soul. If "precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line" then sooner or later (probably much sooner than later) the precepts will begin to touch one another and the lines will begin to rest upon one another. And the aggregate weight of truth will secure these in our minds and hearts as an integrated and stable whole. They will communicate with one another and their corporate witness will be most robust and illuminating.

Perhaps in your starting exercises, you have noticed that other verses seem to come to mind along with your attempts to understand a particular verse, phrase, or word in relation to your life experience. In the earlier section, I advised you to "allow other verses to be suggested by your memory, but do not go after them yet. Stay focused on the words in hand."<sup>265</sup>

In this section we need to practice this skill, to allow other verses to clarify difficult points in the primary passage in hand. But this must be done without allowing the mind to be drawn off from the central point under consideration; without losing focus on what God is saying to our hearts. For the inexperienced, the danger of losing focus in this stage takes them down a 'rabbit trail' that wanders everywhere and gets nowhere. We can prevent this from happening by being careful and thorough in the first stage of analysis. And that requires a good understanding of what the appearance of each step is: analysis and synthesis.

We may gain an understanding of what analysis looks like by considering and worthy devotional text that has stood the test of time. There are many;

Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles Cowman,  
My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers,  
Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon,  
Daily Strength for Daily Needs by Mary W. Tileston  
Joy and Strength for the Pilgrim Day by Mary W. Tileston  
My King and His Service by Frances R. Havergal,  
The Continual Burnt Offering by Harry Ironside  
The Daily Sacrifice both by Harry Ironside.

All have similar formats. A short Bible verse or phrase is presented and then a brief one page meditation on the passage as we may be expected to experience it in life or as it illuminates those experiences (particularly suffering) that are part and parcel of all living. Often the authors make use of the insights of other great spiritual Christians as part of their valuable ruminations.

A great devotional like Daily Light on the Daily Path by Louis Klopsch presents a principal verse followed by 10 to 15 other related verses from various places in the Bible that all relate in some spiritual way to the verse in hand. The reflective reader is thus challenged, without the aid of a commentator to eke out the meaning of some central threads of truth on his own – a blessed exercise, and one that approximates what we have been saying about synthesis.

Ideally, after years of reflection on the Scriptures, the disciple's mind will be full of many such parallel or related verses so that in any given analysis those verses will suggest themselves each in their turn for a part of an ongoing dialogue within us that relates to Him who is Truth!

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<sup>265</sup> Step 7 of the previous assignment.

However for the beginning disciple, a good reference or topical Bible also has the apparatus to support such synthesis of various Scriptural references. Center column references, marginal topical references (typical of Bibles like the NIV Study Bible, the Thompson Chain Reference Bible, and the Schofield Reference Bible) as well as a good concordance like Strong's or Young's greatly facilitate this process. Let us take an example.

“And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”<sup>266</sup>

In this verse, many different passages and sentences present themselves for our attention. Let us say that in the course of over a month of reflection (it could support much more), we come at last to the sentence: “I am with you always...”.

Our analysis of this could center on the reciprocity of the term “with”. If He is with us, then certainly we are with Him. This might also encourage us to consider the nature of our relationship “with” God. It might lead us to consider His presence with more than just the individual believer, the two or three gathered in His name of which Jesus spoke.<sup>267</sup> Or it might remind us of His birth.<sup>268</sup> But in the Thompson Chain reference Bible, we read a cyclopedia reference in the margin: “1271 Divine presence”. Referring to this we find: 1271 – (c) The Divine Presence

#### In the pilgrimage of Life

Genesis 28:15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

#### Affords Rest

Exodus 33:14 And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

#### Gives Courage in Life's Battles

Deuteronomy 20:1 When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

#### A Comfort in Trial

Isaiah 43:2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

#### Assured to the Smallest Assembly of Believers

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<sup>266</sup> Matthew 28:18 – 20

<sup>267</sup> Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

<sup>268</sup> Matthew 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Unto the End

Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

In order to understand how synthesis grows out of analysis, let us look at the notes of my daily meditations during the same days that you have been working.

**Day 1:** 2/10/12 (Friday) ...you were dead... Ephesians 2:1



"I walked the path of life and one drew near, dark, cold, but not unfriendly. As we walked, I wished to be rid of my fearsome and increasingly unwelcome companion. Yet the more I withdrew, the more he spoke in kindly terms. Finally he put his robed arm around my shoulders as if to say "fear not." I fell asleep.

How long I slept I could not tell. But I remember hearing my name spoken softly, gently, as if from far away, but as close as a whisper.

"Joseph, Joseph, wake up". I blinked my eyes. It was morning. And my companion of the previous day was nowhere to be found. Instead one of infinite gentleness was kneeling beside me, gently brushing the hair from my sleepy eyes.

"I must have fallen asleep", I said as I gazed at my new found companion. His white robe seemed to glow with radiance from within, like none I had ever seen before. His gentle face smiled.

"No" he said. "You were dead."

"Dead" I thought. How could that be?

"Tell me" he continued. "What have you learned from death?"

"All fear it. Its memorials are all around us: graves and ruins and nations gone far out of mind, dead languages and dead trees, Ozimandius' proud stumps in the desert bearing witness to the folly of human pride.<sup>269</sup> We all die, from the farthest galaxy to the nearest microbe. We cannot escape. It is unavoidable, irreversible. Humpty Dumpty falls to his death and all the king's horse and all the king's men cannot put Humpty together again. Unfeeling, unfunctioning, unthinking, we know nothing, no one. It is oblivion!"

<sup>269</sup>

I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

- Percy Blithe Shelly (1792-1822)

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.-- Proverbs 16:18

"Well said, Joseph. You have learned much about death. But there is one thing you missed.

"And what is that?

"It is past. You were dead.

"How can this be?

"With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."<sup>270</sup>

**Day 2:** 2/11/12 (Saturday) ... Dead in trespasses and sins... - Ephesians 2:1



Trespass – going past a boundary

Sin – self in place of God

Both are plural! One could have brought death but many assured we were dead. Cut off from God – Without hope – plural events harden the heart – a callous disrespect and disobedience.

**Day 3:** 2/12/12 (Sunday)

Hearken unto me ye that follow after righteousness... ye that seek the Lord ...

Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation...

Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; ...

Isaiah 51:1a, 51:4a, 51:7a



Who does God address? Who does He ask to listen? Seek and ye shall find. But that which is sought without shall be found within – in the heart.

**Day 4:** 2/13/12 (Monday) ...*Et moi? Je suis avec vous... Confiance (Joseph) c'est moi! ...*



Go ye, sayest thou Lord? I will, but what will you do?

Askest thou this of me? I will tell you! *Et moi* (you ask of me?) - *Je suis avec vous!* (We will go together!)<sup>271</sup> The light is ever with us but not always seen. Jesus surprises us with His continual presence. Are we confused, upset, or frightened? *Pour quas?* He is with us and we "knew it not" until:

Trespass... To cross a boundary, to use as our own that which is another's. To appropriate wrongly, to steal, to cheat, ...

To steal His glory

To take His vengeance

To manipulate His will

To usurp His judgment

To sit upon His throne.

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<sup>270</sup> Mark 10:27

<sup>271</sup> I was struck by the nuance of the French that the English seems to miss. The English says "and lo I am with you..." But the French allows Our Lord to articulate our deepest fear of being alone in His reflexive question "Et moi?" As if He asks for us the very question that we are afraid to ask of Him. Are we going to have to go alone? Where will you go, Lord? So we feel the great comfort. I am going with you. We are going into this together. Hence the next phrase from an earlier experience of God's grace in France: "Confiance (Joseph) c'est moi! ..."

Not geography, but person, these are the acts that betray a relationship; that bring alienation, separation, death! Trespass: to trod under foot that which is another's. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Deliver us from evil: that of others against us and that of us against you!

**Day 5:** 2/14/12 (Tuesday) ... Rejoice in the Lord always... - Phil 4:4



To rejoice in the Lord, we must keep Him in view at all times – in sad times, in trying times, in good or joyous times. Our joy is not in that which is not God but in Him. And why rejoice always? *Et moi? Je suis avec vous* –always!

**Day 6:** 2/15/12 (Wednesday)...In many things we all offend ... - James 3:2



Offend whom? One another – of course! But what of God? Trespasses and sins are offensive. People who bear with our offenses as we theirs show a sign of a strong relationship. But is that an excuse for continued offenses? God forbid! O Lord that I may never offend again!

**Day 7:** 2/16/12 (Thursday) ...Rejoice always ... fret not ... fear not



Two sides of the same coin: to fear or fret is to take your eyes off God; to rejoice is to take your eyes off circumstances. "With you always" Help me always to see You always, not the circumstances present or (possibly) future.

**Day 8:** 2/17/12 (Friday)...Moses my servant is dead...now arise - (Joshua 1:2a)



God buries the servant but the work goes on. Grief must not be allowed to paralyze. The living must go on, must arise. Soon enough the dead will arise after those who go on. Moses ... was faithful ... as a servant (Hebrews 3:5a selected) Faithful unto death. May I be faithful as he.

**Day 9:** 2/18/12 (Saturday)... great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. - Mark 13:2b



The impermanence and therefore the ultimate unreality of material things: not that their existence is evil and therefore must be destroyed, but deceptive of human hearts – wooing them away from faith in God who alone is reality.

**Day 10:** 2/19/12 (Sunday)...every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. - John 15:2b



Purgation! Not only negative – taking away but positive enabling fruitfulness. Here in the land of Coffee Bushes<sup>272</sup> all are pruned for more fruit and for size and shape. Knowledge of “what” is not as valuable as knowledge of “How” and “Why.” This later pertains to our life. Why does He prune: to make fruitful boughs more so. How does He prune: adversity, affliction: the death of energy sapping growth.

**Day 11:** 2/20/12 (Monday)... nothing shall be impossible unto you. - Matthew 17:20b



Impossible? With God all things are possible – consistent with His perfection and person. Such is the transcendence of our limitations when linked with God. Humanly impossible good becomes possible in response to our act of faith. But even this is a mystery. How? God continues to work the impossible in mysterious ways past finding out! The *Mysterium Tremendum!*

**Day 12:** 2/21/12 (Tuesday)...Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. - Psalm 37:7



God will do the impossible – but in His time!  
Faith acts quickly – but love waits patiently.

As the love of Money (or power)  
Is the root of all Evil,  
So the love of Neighbor  
Is the root of all Righteousness.

Sin brings suffering but  
Love will not let the neighbor go.

The sufferings of **Love**  
Try the patience of **Faith**,  
Until there remains only  
The rest of **Hope** – in God

**Day 13:** 2/22/12 (Wednesday)... all things are possible to him that believeth. - Mark 9:23b.



We labor to enter into the rest of God – the labor of Faith. This is possible with God because faith makes us fellow laborers with God.

**Day 14:** 2/23/12 (Thursday) ...Every place your foot shall tread...I have given...you - Joshua 1:3



Not trespass, but treading! “Tread” not “claim”; work not talk. Faith is action: the foot moved, the hand outstretched, not the tongue repeating promises! To merely say “I claim the promise” does not make you its possessor. The Canaanite feared not the tongue that claimed the land but

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<sup>272</sup> Notes of day 9 to day 19 were written while on vacation in Costa Rica.

the sword that that slew its previous owner! Only what you do puts you in possession. They made no noise in the many circuits around Jericho only the sound of their feet! Until the walls fell at their shout!

**Day 15:** 2/24/12 (Friday) Paul ...had...dissent. - Acts 15:2 selected



How distressing this world is! Satan may be defeated, but he will fight to the end! We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us<sup>273</sup>, but for all that there is still struggle! We still wrestle with spiritual wickedness in high places.<sup>274</sup>

**Day 16:** 2/25/12 (Saturday) My grace is sufficient... - 2 Corinthians 12:9



Not “my grace and your abilities”! To discover this is to discover the enormity of our need and to walk perilously close to the abyss of despair. I can do nothing! – It is impossible! “Grace through faith” changes all that, as it did for my ‘impossible’ salvation.

**Day 17:** 2/26/12 (Sunday)... Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. – Matthew 4:4b



(The Word) Why does God insist upon such a polarization?

Bread vs. the Word of God!	(the Power of the word)
Expedience vs. the Will of God!	(the Authority of the kingdom)
Wealth vs. the Worth(ship) of God	(the Glory of the King)

It is right that the wilderness should highlight the antithesis of these which are not normally seen as antithetical! Here is the acid test of any who would serve God. The power of His word, not mine to get bread; The rule of His kingdom, not mine to do as I will; Sacrifice for the glory of His worth, not what gaining wealth that comes my way! This is the mindset of any who will do the impossible!

**Day 18:** 2/27/12 (Monday) ... Left alone...there wrestled a man with him...Genesis 32:24



(The Will) How often do we war against our own salvation? The night of trial teaches the painful lesson of submission. Alone? Never alone! At Bethel<sup>275</sup> was blessing promised, at Peniel<sup>276</sup> was blessing received!

**Day 19:** 2/28/12 (Tuesday) ...Offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually - Heb 13:15b



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<sup>273</sup> Romans 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

<sup>274</sup> Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

<sup>275</sup> Genesis 28:11-22

<sup>276</sup> Genesis 32:24-32

(The Worth) Praise!? – So easy for the lips. But sacrifice? Sacrifice costs! Sacrifice puts from us forever that which was pleasant, valuable, desired. Why? He is worthy of the sacrifice! Once? Twice? No only continually will do. Living a life of sacrifice that God should be praised! – Not an easy thing.

**Day 20:** 2/29/12 (Wednesday) ...Unto the praise of His Glory... Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14



The end of all my life – the grand design! I will result in some who praise His glory. But who and when? I know not. It shall be made plain one day, in His good time.

Having reviewed these last simple analyses of bits of scripture, it may appear hap hazard with no order at all. And so it seems! Did I not believe that God was reaching out saying “hearken”, there would be no sense! But if we look back, there are several leitmotifs that can be discerned. The process of pondering a particular aspect of God’s word inevitably stretches over many days, even years. This is manifest by the recurrence of thoughts or leitmotifs in the several days’ entries:

Trespass - Reflections on trespass begin on Day 2 but reoccur on Day 4, 6, and 14. Initially there is a geographic assertion “trespass is going past a boundary (Day 2) but by Day 4 this concept has widened the to using property not our own, to steal the use of. But the instances of theft cited (of glory, vengeance, will, judgment and finally throne) are not geographic at all! They are personal. They belong to God! Day 6 has now centered not on the definition but the effect of trespass – offense! But here the strength of the relationship is tried by offenses, (we all offend) but not the death of relationship that attended trespass on Day 2. Finally treading (the means of claiming the Promised Land) is defined in contradistinction to trespass on Day 14.

Death - Reflections on death begin with an interesting mini drama on Day 1. The resurrection is nascent in the plot. Day 2 continues the theme, linking death to trespass. Death is seen as a termination of relationship with God, which is a far more accurate description of death than the cessation of breath. Day 8 revisits death in the case of Moses. The servant dies but the work goes on. Grief for loss must not paralyze service. We arise now and the hope of the resurrection supports our advance. After all is done the dead will arise as well. Day 9 deals with the concept of the death of the temple and the associated observation that all materiality is marked by death of some sort and is ultimately unreal because impermanent. Only God is real in His Eternal and Immutable Person. Day 10 treats the death of the branch that has been lopped off. So it is that materialities may not only deceive but they may result in less fruitfulness because they waste our spiritual energies, deceive our hearts, and draw off our attention from God, which brings us to the next leitmotif.

Jesus’ presence, our awareness of it, and expression of that awareness – joy & rejoicing - Day 1 clearly introduces the thought of Jesus’ presence in the dialogue with “one of infinite gentleness was kneeling beside me” Day 4 introduces the reality of God’s presence via a happy experience of it several months back in France, hence the French: “Confiance (Joseph) c’est moi!”. Day 5 introduces the central criterion that confirms our awareness of God’s presence: joy and our expression of joy – rejoicing. But in order to rejoice in the Lord, we must keep our eyes on Him, not circumstances. This theme of rejoicing because the Lord is present resurfaces on Day 7 with the realization that rejoicing involves a choice of the direction of our spiritual gaze, on the Lord Jesus or on the circumstances. Fretting and fearing are the antithesis of rejoicing. Finally Day 19 emphasizes the need for a continual sacrifice of praise to God. Praise involves the sacrifice (or

taking the spiritual eyes off) of the self life in order to keep the awareness of the reality of our Lord Jesus' presence ever before our spiritual eyes. Day 20 concludes the theme (for the present) with the discovery that it is not just our sacrifice of praise that is at issue, but our whole being. It is we who will be to the praise of His glory!

Day 17 and 18 offered a different aspect of God's presence: His apparent absence. Day 17 centered on Jesus' trials in the wilderness when the help of God seemed far away. He was alone. Yet his priorities never wavered under the fierce attacks of the adversary in a moment of human weakness and dependency on God, even though God seemed far away. Day 18 looked at Jacob left alone but certainly with God present and of all things wrestling! While Jesus struggles with Satan – and wins, Jacob struggles with God – and loses. But the mystery is this: that in his failure, he finally finds the blessing that he unsuccessfully sought for all his life in his own self willed way!

Doing the impossible - This is perhaps the most obvious and persistent leitmotif of all. The concept surfaces on Day 1 resurfaces on Days 11, 12, 13, 16 and 17. Day 1 presents us the resurrection as the ultimate impossibility that is possible with God. Ten days later the very quote ending Day 1 becomes the central thought on Day 11 and continues on Day 12 and 13. But on these days it is not the reality of the resurrection as evidenced in our spiritual lives but rather our answer to the world's terrible sufferings. On Day 11, we realize that God does the impossible in the most mysterious of ways. But Day 12 discovers that faith gives us our part in working with God and therefore our part in doing the impossible; love must wait on God's timing and wait patiently for Him to finish the impossible task. Meanwhile the sufferings of our neighbor whom we love and whose afflictions we are willing to bear try the patience of our faith leaving us only the rest of hope in God. Day 13 reiterates the reason for our ability to do the impossible, because it is not we who are ultimately doing it, but God. Faith makes us fellow laborers with God. Day 16 ultimately summarizes the whole matter. For our part we can do nothing! But God's grace in response to our active faith is indeed sufficient! Day 17 deals not so much with doing the impossible, but the characteristics of the person who will be used of God to do the impossible. The servant must be the one who sets God's word, will, and worthiness above himself, as Jesus manifestly did in His temptation in the wilderness!

What this little review has attempted to show is the complexity of how thoughts may begin to be worked out in our hearts and minds as God's word is absorbed "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

For the next practice as you continue the development of your habit of reading and meditating on God's word, I would ask that you go back over your daily notes and see if you can observe a theme or related themes that seem to be repeating on different days and in which in the repetition is being developed into a more robust and stable understanding. It is very likely that it is here that God is saying to your heart "Hearken unto me." You should develop the habit of looking back over you notes at least once a week for such patterns.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> A final word of caution: Jesus did not use notebooks and pencils with his disciples. True their minds were better trained to hear and remember word for word than yours, but in the end the spiritual life is just that: spiritual. Note books, pencils and methods are helpful to get started, but the real goal, intellectually, at least, is to condition your minds (and your hearts) to faithfully serve the Master on the basis of extended personal 'dialogues' with Him on the subjects of His choosing just as He did so long ago in Galilee by the sea and on the dusty roads of old Judea.

## Chapter 3 Assent

“But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.”<sup>278</sup>



Belief, faith, giving an assent to the truth is central to the spiritual life. It would be hard to overstate its importance to the spiritual life. Faith is listed among the three permanent graces of the spiritual life. “...now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”<sup>279</sup> Without faith it is impossible to please God “for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”<sup>280</sup> Even our salvation requires the exercise of faith. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...”<sup>281</sup> Our Lord Jesus affirms “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”<sup>282</sup> Clearly faith is critical to both the beginning and the continuation of the spiritual life.

But exactly what is faith? The term is used many times in a day, by believers and non believers, usually in connection with some truth or other. It is this belief in truth that ideally governs action rightly. For example, if I believe that April 15th is the last day that I can file my federal tax return and that later filings result in a fine, then it stands to reason, I will make every effort to file on or before April 15th. Such belief is usually connected with a set of assertions that are held to be true. When these assertions are theological in nature, they are often called a “creed” taken from the Latin *credo* meaning “I believe”. Creedal statements occur regularly on the back of church bulletins under some rubric like “This is what we believe” followed by several statements of faith that are listed to define the most fundamental beliefs of that particular group. Doubtless these are advanced to inform prospective congregants of the theological persuasion of the group they are meeting with for the first time. They may also further distinguish one church group from another; the differences may be quite subtle and often hotly contested between groups. But this is not generally what Jesus or the New Testament mean when referring to belief. Faith can either focus on abstract concepts as being true or on Him who is the Truth!<sup>283</sup>

### 1. Not What but Who

It is understanding this difference in faith’s focus that moves the hymn writer to write:

“My faith has found a resting place  
Not in device or creed:  
I Trust the Ever-living One  
His wounds for me shall plead.”<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Luke 8:50

<sup>279</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13

<sup>280</sup> Hebrews 11:6b

<sup>281</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>282</sup> John 3:17,18

<sup>283</sup> John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

<sup>284</sup> My Faith has found a Resting Place by Lidie H. Edmunds (Hymn 405 The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration Word Music, Waco Texas, 1986.)

The English Poet, John Oxenham, draws a similar sharp difference in his poem:

Credo

Not what, but Whom, I do believe'  
That in my darkest hour of need,  
Hath comfort that no mortal creed  
To mortal man may give; -  
Not what but whom!  
For Christ is more than all the creeds,  
And His full life of gentle deeds  
Shall all the creeds outlive.  
Not what I do believe, but whom!  
Who walks beside me in the gloom?  
Who shares the burden wearisome?  
Who all the dim way doth illumine,  
And bids me look beyond the tomb  
The larger life to live?  
Not what I do believe,  
But Whom!  
Not what,  
But Whom!

Paul shares this view. He says, "... for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."<sup>285</sup>

This is not to say that belief in true statements is fundamentally wrong, just inadequate for the spiritual life. We may better understand this by examining the exchange between Martha and Jesus on the occasion of her brother Lazarus' death.

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."<sup>286</sup>

Martha was looking for a healing at Jesus' hands so that Lazarus would be spared the experience of death. Jesus did not comply. Yet, she believes that Jesus' prayer for the resurrection of the dead will be answered. To Martha's assertion of her faith in the resurrection, Jesus replies: "Your brother shall rise again." Martha clearly believes in the resurrection of the dead as an event in the future, because she answers, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Her belief at this point is in an abstract eschatological truth. But this is not what Jesus is talking about. The focus of Martha's faith is still credal, still in a disconnected truth. The kind of truth we would find on the back of a church bulletin: "We believe in the resurrection of the just on the last day." It is not that her faith is wrong, but mis-focused. Her faith beholds the abstract truth **of**

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<sup>285</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12b

<sup>286</sup> John 11:21-27

the resurrection but not the person of Jesus Christ who is the resurrection! So Jesus challenges her to refocus her belief by saying "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Notice the focus here is "I am the resurrection" and "he that believeth in me"! And then He asks of her, "Believest thou this?" That is do you believe in me? To which her answer is "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." As we would say today, Martha finally gets it: Not what but Whom!

Now it is reasonable to ask why this difference is significant. The answer is simple. While truth may be said to exist in the abstract, we cannot have a relationship with abstract concepts. We can have a relationship with a person, however. As we look at human relationships in general, they usually involve the human will. Let me illustrate.

For many years, I have been researching my family genealogy and history. In the course of those investigations I have learned of living relatives which were heretofore unknown to me. Their relation to me was an accident of birth. The day we were each born in our particular branch of a common family tree, we became relatives: known or unknown; like it or not. But a relation is not necessarily a family member, because being a family member implies relationship not just being related. On some level, I now understand that the motivation of my researches was a desire to have a family to whom I could relate. Accordingly I approached each relative and introduced myself. I did not identify myself merely as a relation but in the hope of beginning a relationship that subsists between members of a family. Relation is an accident of birth. Relationship is a mutual choice of the will. To my delight, many if not most of my new found relatives have said "yes" in welcoming me into their lives so that I can visit them and we can share our mutual life experiences (as well as our mutual interest in family history) together. As an act of my free will, I offered each a relationship with me. As an act of their free will they agreed; they assented. Assent to a new understanding of a person who offers us a relationship with them establishes or extends a relationship between us and that person. In simple terms: placing our faith in Jesus Christ as He offers Himself relationally to us in the Scriptures establishes our relationship with Him. If we already have such a relationship, then the continued commitment of faith in Jesus Christ as we grow in our understanding of Him deepens and enlarges our relationship with Him. Since discipleship is, at its core, relationship; faith in Jesus is a critical step in the process of discipleship.

## **2. Consequences of Faith in Christ**

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."<sup>287</sup>



The exercise of faith has inevitable consequences regardless of its focus. But there is a real difference between faith focused on abstract truth and faith focused on the person of Jesus Christ. The focus on truth as an abstract concept leaves us in possession of guidance relative to our actions so that they can be aligned with how things are and consequently result, in so far as our actions determine outcomes in any situation, desirable results. Returning to the simple example of federal income tax, the result of filing by the proper date at least avoids penalties for late payment of taxes. There can be, of course situations in which our actions do not totally determine the expected outcome. For example, we may recognize the true efficacy of certain medical tests for detecting cancer and be guided by that knowledge in regularly having those tests performed.

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<sup>287</sup> Acts 16:31b

But heredity, environmental exposure, a past history of unhealthy life style choices (like smoking, over eating, lack of exercise, etc.) are also variables in the probabilistic equation to predict the onset of cancer. So our regular testing may not prevent the onset of cancer but only insure its early detection and possibly increase the effective value of remedial treatment. But the knowledge of the efficacy of those medical tests may not ultimately prevent our death from cancer. The point of this kind of knowledge of the truth is that it really does not establish any relationship with God! Knowledge of abstract truth as a guide for our actions is very real, but it is only a guide for actions lying within the scope of our natural abilities. And these are for the most part very limited.

The exercise of faith in Jesus Christ opening or enlarging our relationship with the Son of God goes far beyond this. In establishing or enlarging our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, it provides for the relational response of God's grace to our assent within that relationship. Grace within our lives and God's sovereignty over all the situations of life open far greater possibilities for both temporal and eternal for changes in us and in the situations of our life itself. Put simply, the consequences of faith in abstract truth are purely natural, whereas the consequences of faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, have both natural and supra-natural consequences! Of particular interest regarding the nature of discipleship is the transformative effect of God's grace on our person.

#### **a. Relational Transformation**

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."<sup>288</sup>



All of us live in a complex web of relationships: with parents, mates, children, fellow workers, fellow students, church members, organization members. All of those relationships have a certain tonality that reflects the character of the persons in that relationship. While a detailed discussion of relational structures and dynamics is beyond the scope of this discussion, it should be obvious that when we change significantly as persons in our relationship with God, the set points of all those other relationships will change as well. We are simply not the persons that folks around us once thought us to be. The apostle Peter describes this effect very acutely when he says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you..."<sup>289</sup>

Peter has in mind what today is called a radical change of lifestyle. The change is obviously because of the transforming operation of God's grace in the life of the believer in response to their faith in Jesus Christ. These believers who once "wrought the will of the Gentiles, when (they) walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" now do so no more. This elicits both amazement on the part of their old friends ("they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot") who now push back by

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<sup>288</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>289</sup> 1 Peter 4:1-4

“speaking evil of you”. Jesus gives a similar warning of the effect God’s transforming grace on our human relationships. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword, for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.”<sup>290</sup> And again, “...In the world ye shall have tribulation...”<sup>291</sup>

On a brighter note we also begin to find a whole new set of relationships among others of “like precious faith”. Jesus paints the whole picture of altered relationships when He says, “...Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.”<sup>292</sup>

### **b. Awareness in Prayer**

“... the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”<sup>293</sup>



God is supremely aware. In prayer awareness is required; awareness of God’s presence, His character, how we are in relation to Him, and why these are so. God has created us to have communion with Him. While created beings can ever know the fullness of the Divine purpose in creating us, it is enough to realize that the Eternal Son tells us that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Relationship involves communion; communion involves communication; and communication is two sided – sending and receiving. In the process of assent to Jesus Christ, prayer is central. But what is prayer?

“Prayer... is the *relationship* between a human being and God. By looking at prayer as relationship, we see that the words and phrases ... the thoughts...*if taken to heart*...deepen our relationship with the Almighty by transforming us. ... the purpose of prayer is to lead us into a deep and personal relationship with the divine Maker and Savior, in whom all that is has its being, and to whom, by our very humanness, we make our way through life. ...as we pray, as we live out the dynamism of this relationship with God, we grow *spiritually*, i.e., into whole and integrated people. It is only by praying that we learn how to pray – a process that clarifies and refines the deeper aspects of the pilgrimage of discovering who we are, what we should become, and how to achieve this transformation. The scriptural command to pray always<sup>294</sup> is no less than a challenge to turn our hearts and minds – indeed our entire being – and not just our mouths to the service of a loving God and living in harmony with this love. We have a pattern of prayer in the *Lord's Prayer*, and this shows us a practical application of this challenge. And, our response to prayer arises precisely from the attraction to God that burns at the very heart of our being. This enables us to grow in ever greater knowledge, reverence, and fortitude, and to acquire the strength to persevere in the ‘inner warfare’ in the face of society’s chaotic distractions.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Matthew 10:34-36

<sup>291</sup> John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

<sup>292</sup> Mark 10:29 – 30

<sup>293</sup> John 4:23

<sup>294</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17 “Pray without ceasing.”

<sup>295</sup> From the Introduction to Sighs of the Spirit New Skete 1997

It is highly significant that prayer and faith in Jesus Christ are so intimately linked.<sup>296</sup> If faith in Jesus Christ is the initiation/enlargement of our relationship with God, prayer is the “realization” of relationship. Awareness is central to prayer.

### **i. God’s Presence**

Prayer is communication. But what is the real basis of communication? For effective communication to take place, the presence of the persons in the relationship is required in some form or other (letter, telephone, face to face etc.), and the awareness that the respective persons are present. Our Lord reminds us, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”<sup>297</sup> Because our five senses are all focused on the material world, we have only the testimony of the ‘eye’ of faith. We must learn to rely steadfastly on faith’s testimony about the presence of God. The deep sense of God’s presence is absolutely essential to the spiritual life. That is why the writer to the Hebrews says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”<sup>298</sup> The lack of the awareness of God’s presence results in the failure to regularly communicate with Him. We act, all too often as if God, who is ever present and totally aware, is really nowhere and unaware. Such is the blindness of unbelief. It is in this sense that Stephen Charnock notes that all sin may be looked upon as a form of “virtual atheism”

All sin is founded in a secret atheism. Atheism is the spirit of every sin; all the floods of impieties in the world break in at the gate of secret atheism, and though several sins may disagree with one another, yet, like Herod and Pilate against Christ, they join hand in hand against the interest of God. ....All the wicked inclinations in the heart, and struggling motions, secret repinings, self-applauding confidences in our own wisdom, strength, &c, envy, ambition, revenge, are sparks from this latent fire; the language of every one of these is, I would be a Lord to myself and would not have a God superior to me.”<sup>299</sup>

We have a remarkable example of the consequences of a habitual recognition of the presence and character of God in the testimony of Nicholas Herman (better known by his 17<sup>th</sup> century monastic name Brother Lawrence). His simple faith, exercised in a monastic setting, bore witness of a real work of God in his Heart:

Br. Lawrence told me .... That all possible mortifications would not serve to blot out a single sin, unless they were grounded in the love of God. We ought patiently to await the remission

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<sup>296</sup> James 5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Mark 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. John 14:13,14 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”

A comment on “in my name”: as we approach prayer as the experiential “realization” of our relationship with God, we may lose sight of the basis for this relationship in a kind of formulaic conclusion of prayer “in Jesus’ name”. To be sure, the regular use of Jesus’ name as a conclusion to prayer is not in itself inappropriate, as long as we recognize that the value of the words lies not in any inherent verbal power as if they were some magic incantation, but rather in the deep and reverent realization that prayer to the Holy One is only possible because of the power of Jesus’ sacrificial death for each of us on the Cross in which we are placing our faith. It is by virtue of the power of His Person and finished work that we pray and are confident of God’s listening ear. We have an illustration of this formal use by the law enforcement officer who asks our obedience “in the name of the law”, i.e. by virtue of the power that is vested in the office he is sworn to perform in accord with the power of the social contract that we call “the law”. In just the same way there is “power” in the name of our Lord Jesus, by virtue of His person and work.

<sup>297</sup> John 4:24

<sup>298</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>299</sup> Chapter II “On practical Atheism” from Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God by Stephen Charnock, reprint of 1853 Robert Carter & Brothers Edition by Baker Book House 1988.

of our sins through the precious blood of our Lord, simply trying to love Him with all our heart.<sup>300</sup>

Brother Lawrence spoke to me, openly and with deep fervor, about his way of going to God, .... He told me that it consists in one good act of renunciation of all those things which we recognize do not lead to God, so that we may accustom ourselves to a continual communion with Him, a communion devoid both of vagueness and of artifice. We need only realize that God is close to us and to turn to Him at every moment, to ask for His help to learn His will in doubtful things, and to do gladly those which we clearly perceive He requires of us, offering them to Him before we begin, and giving Him thanks when they have been finished for His honor.

That in this uninterrupted communion we are unceasingly occupied in praising, worshipping and loving God for His infinite goodness and perfection. .... That his prayer was simply to realize the presence of God, at which time his soul was unconscious of aught else but love; and afterwards he found scarcely any difference, for he continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might. And so he passed his life in unbroken joy; yet hoping that God would give him somewhat to suffer when he should grow stronger.”<sup>301</sup>

## **ii. God’s Character**

The tone of our relationship with God depends not only on being aware of God’s presence at all times but also our affective response to an accurate, cognitive understanding of the character of the One with Whom we are dealing. This is the groundwork that comes from synthesis of God’s revelation of himself to us through our reading of the scriptures. Though God cannot be known in His Essential Being, still He makes himself known by reason of His activities in our lives and in the world, as well as by means of His specific revelation that we have of His person through the scriptures that testify of His beloved Son. Ignorance of His Character, Majesty, Power, Wisdom, Glory, and above all His Holiness is the ground of inappropriate attitudes in prayer. In the words of Jesus, “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”<sup>302</sup>

## **iii. Self in relation to God**

One cannot have a deep awareness of the character of God without it deeply affecting our response to Him. Job stated it so eloquently when God graciously revealed Himself to him. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”<sup>303</sup> Real prayer prepares us for God’s answer and real encounter with the Living God which leaves people changed forever. This altered God-self awareness from earlier cycles of the process of sanctification lies behind present affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>300</sup> Second conversation The Practice of the Presence of God recounted by Abbe de Beaufort, translated by Donald Attwater, Templegate Publishers 1974

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. Fourth conversation

<sup>302</sup> Mark 12:24b There are several accounts of ignorance of God’s character in carnal prayers. Matthew 20:22a But Jesus answered and said, **Ye know not what ye ask**. Luke 9:55-56a But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of**. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. John 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, **If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink**; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

<sup>303</sup> Job 42:5-6

### **3. The Practice of Assent**

In the last section four summaries of devotional readings covering 20 days were considered. These were: Trespass, Death, Awareness of Jesus' presence and Joy at that presence, and Doing the impossible. If we reiterate the last summary we have:

Doing the impossible - This is perhaps the most obvious and persistent leitmotif of all. The concept surfaces on Day 1 resurfaces on Days 11, 12, 13, 16 and 17. Day 1 presents us the resurrection as the ultimate impossibility that is possible with God. Ten days later the very quote ending Day 1 becomes the central thought on Day 11 and continues on Day 12 and 13. But on these days it is not the reality of the resurrection as evidenced in our spiritual lives but rather our answer to the world's terrible sufferings. On Day 11, we realize that God does the impossible in the most mysterious of ways. But Day 12 discovers that faith gives us our part in working with God and therefore our part in doing the impossible; love must wait on God's timing and wait patiently for Him to finish the impossible task. Meanwhile the sufferings of our neighbor whom we love and whose afflictions we are willing to bear try the patience of our faith leaving us only the rest of hope in God. Day 13 reiterates the reason for our ability to do the impossible, because it is not we who are ultimately doing it, but God. Faith makes us fellow laborers with God. Day 16 ultimately summarizes the whole matter. For our part we can do nothing! But God's grace in response to our active faith is indeed sufficient! Day 17 deals not so much with doing the impossible, but the characteristics of the person who will be used of God to do the impossible. The servant must be the one who sets God's word, will, and worthiness above himself, as Jesus manifestly did in His temptation in the wilderness!"

When I step back suddenly I realize that Jesus is the doorway to doing the impossible! The whole picture, so abstract, suddenly makes sense in the person of our Lord Jesus. A verse like: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"<sup>304</sup> summarizes all. It is not the impossible (a subset of 'all things') that is at issue, but "through Christ" that is critical. Suddenly I can affirm Him as 'the door' in a wholly new way. This is not a spatial parable as He once said, "...Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."<sup>305</sup> Jesus is literally the door to all opportunity! It is through Him that we pass on to do what ever it is that God has intended for us to do. Through Him, we 'enter into' relationship with the God whose omnipotence finds nothing impossible. We are linked to omnipotence, but omnipotence governed by omniscience and a Will in perfect conformity to insuperable love! The hagiography of the sub-apostolic age and the middle ages emphasized doing the manifestly impossible as a sure sign of sanctity. But distinctions such these were pointless. It is not whether it is possible or impossible in men's eyes, but only was what was done accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit! And the entry to a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit is only through Jesus Christ the Door! So I approach you Jesus as my door of complete opportunity. I have been seeking you. I have found you. Now I knock upon you and ask entry. I knock upon you in prayer asking through you to go into your life of devoted service, content to let your life 'swallow me up' in the folds of your love! I need no other.

To my reader: It is my sincere hope that in recounting this highly personal pilgrimage, you will observe somewhat of how we move from a daily reflection or meditation on God's word (analysis), through the summarizing of wider truths founded on several days (or months, or

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<sup>304</sup> Philippians 4:13

<sup>305</sup> John 10:7-9

years, or even in a moment) of experience (Synthesis) finally to a realization of the person of Jesus Christ in some facet of His supremely lovely Person, which by our acceptance (affirmation – prayer of faith) fundamentally deepens our relationship with Him.

#### **4. Assignment**

(n.b. Is it possible even to assign the discovery of Jesus Christ in His unspeakable perfections under such a humble rubric as 'homework'? Let us rather say we encourage you to continue your spiritual struggle. Even the writer to the Hebrews urges us not to “we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;”<sup>306</sup> and to “labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”<sup>307</sup>)

Go over your several days of journal entries and try to summarize those *leitmotifs* that emerge in your devotional notes. Consider the summary. Ask yourself, “Where is Jesus Christ in this? How does He make sense of all that I have written?” If there is still no light then pray for it, pray earnestly. Asking is part of seeking, and seeking is part of knocking. Victories that are won easily are never valued. But hard won victories have value our entire life long! If you are still not making progress then schedule a time to talk with Dianne and I relative to your efforts, and we will pray with you and by God’s grace help you. Remember your case is NOT IMPOSSIBLE!

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<sup>306</sup> Hebrews 2:3b

<sup>307</sup> Hebrews 4:11



## Chapter 4 Encounter

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers' twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."<sup>308</sup>



We come, now, to the nexus of all discipleship. Without the personal experience of meeting God, all that has gone before will become sterile and cold intellectualism, and all that follows will replicate the Pharisee-ism that went about to establish its own self-righteousness in total ignorance of God.<sup>309</sup> The chief difference between discipleship in general and Christian discipleship lies in the encounter with God and all that follows in its wake. The encounter with God is obviously experiential for the individual. But just as clearly it is an experience whose time, place, and circumstances are of God's choosing. In the particular event cited, Moses' circumstance involved the tendency to the children of Israel to "murmur against" him. This, in effect, was an expression of discontent with God Himself, not at all acceptable to God or His servant. So God chooses the scenario above in order to provide the people yet another miraculous demonstration of His presence, power, and plan for Moses and the children of Israel. All the rods were quite dead and when Aaron's rod developed leaves and fruit overnight, it was a plant-wise miracle akin to the resurrection from the dead. What is central for this lesson, however, is not the miraculous budding of a dead rod but the supremely important assertion "... I will meet with you." Fundamental to the ongoing spiritual history of Israel and the world was the belief that it is possible for a created human to meet with his Creator, to encounter God. From the first, with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the encounter with God is manifest.<sup>310</sup>

When we think of encountering God, the experience is likely to be seen as one of those rare exceptions to the humdrum round of daily life, an event that happens a few times in our lives, if at all. The Bible is a collection of the stories of such people. Jacob encounters God at Bethel and Peniel. Moses encounters God at the burning bush and the burning mount. Daniel encounters God and is found on his hands and knees in Babylon. Ezekiel sees visions of God by the river Chebar. In the year that king Uzziah died, Isaiah sees the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple. John is so awestruck on Patmos at the glorified Christ that he had to be encouraged to fear not after falling "at his feet as dead". But these are encounters with God in a heroic sense, reserved to a select few at His sovereign determination. After all there were many people in Bible times but very few prophets. Their life changing encounters with God were few, so as to be counted on one hand with fingers left over.

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<sup>308</sup> Numbers 17:1-5

<sup>309</sup> Romans 10:2-3 For I bear them (Israel) record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

<sup>310</sup> Genesis 3:8-10 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where art thou?" And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

When we consider this state of affairs, in our carnal nature, it can be discouraging. We are tempted to consider that the ancient prophets of God were “lucky” when we see God’s sovereign providence operative in their lives, but not ours. Maybe they were not so lucky to be stoned to death or sawn in two for their witness, but they were “lucky” in an eternal sense! In our carnal envy, we might even succumb to spiritual jealousy! Such a view is unnecessary and hurtful.

The command to make disciples is directed to all men<sup>311</sup>. The *sine qua non* of discipleship is encounter with the living Christ.<sup>312</sup> So for the offer of discipleship to be *bone fide*, the experience of encounter with the living Christ must also be universal, and should be expected by all who would follow Jesus.<sup>313</sup> But if the encounter with God is universal but not generally heroic, what then can we expect it to be?

While we cannot orchestrate the character, time, or place of an encounter with God, we can gain a better grasp of the nature of such encounters by studying the records of those events in Scripture. Since an encounter with God is, fundamentally, a human experience; we should consider a few aspects of human experience.

### 1. Awareness

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.”<sup>314</sup>



Some experiences ‘cast their shadows’ before them. Some do not. But all experiences of God involve an awakening of our awareness of His presence. In a reality, God is present in all our lives. Our understanding of His omnipresence in all time and space requires such a view. That is why Brother Lawrence’s practiced awareness of God, as recorded in his little classic: Practicing the Presence of God, resonates with thoughtful readers. If God is present in all our lives, then it is only necessary that we should practice living our lives in the awareness of this reality, in the light of this truth. So the testimony of Jacob at Bethel that “God is in this place and I knew it not” does not have to describe our own encounters with God. But at many points in our lives, it does. While God is present in all of our life, we tend to become aware of His presence at turns of circumstance or in life changing events, particularly in retrospect, as did Jacob.

We may also conclude from His omnipotence that God is not only present in all our lives but that He active in His governance of every facet of our existence.<sup>315</sup> So it is that an encounter with God is a potential for every one of us at every moment of our lives. This fills me with great hope, as I hope it will for you.

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<sup>311</sup> Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

<sup>312</sup> John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

<sup>313</sup> Hosea 6:1-3 Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

<sup>314</sup> Genesis 28:16

<sup>315</sup> Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

## **2. Emotional Response**

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, ... they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; ... many ... who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, ... wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.<sup>316</sup>



For generations men in particular have been suspicious of the emotional side of our nature. In recent years, however, it has become axiomatic that we should not “stuff our emotions.” I suppose the fear of generations past was that emotions would gain control over our will. Certainly acting out of anger, hate, or vengeance can be very destructive. But careful reflection will reveal how influential the emotions really are in our decision making. Emotions serve in the valuable role of messengers that warn us of unresolved issues and relational problems in our lives, often at the subconscious level. While an exhaustive discussion of their role in human experience is well beyond the scope of this short article, it suffices to say that we almost always react emotionally to life’s experiences. Indeed our emotional reactions to life experiences may be quite complex. In the passage above, the people seeing the temple dedicated after such a long captivity greeted the event with deep emotions. The intensity of their emotions may be judged by their shout, audible for miles around. The point of interest to us is the marked difference in the emotions registered: joy on the part of the young and weeping (sorrow) on the part of the elderly. The reasons for the difference are obvious. The older folks remembered a much larger and more glorious building. (They were small children then.) The younger rejoiced at the prospect of once again participating in the formal, corporate worship of Jehovah.

We can all feel different emotions in response to a particular event. We can even feel several discordant emotions (joy, confusion, frustration, anger, etc.) at the same time in our response to a particular experience. When we encounter God, when we suddenly become deeply aware of God’s actual presence in our life as a Person (not an idea), our emotions will almost certainly be engaged. Our response may run the gamut from peace, joy, and love; to guilt, fear, and self hatred; as well as combinations of these or other feelings. And, as in the case above, there are reasons why we feel as we do. If we recognize that emotions are messengers to our conscious minds, we need to be able to stop and consider the nature of the message that each one carries even though they may all come at once.

## **3. Emotional Intensity**

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.<sup>317</sup>



Experiences involve our response to them. Those responses are usually emotional and often physical and intellectual as well. We all have experienced ‘tears of joy’ and the heart ache of grief. Experiences may involve fear or confusion as we try to sort out why things have happened to us.

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<sup>316</sup> Ezra 3:10-13 (selected)

<sup>317</sup> Acts 9:3-5

Our emotional response to the experience may go on for some time after the experience itself, like grief at the death of a loved one. Dianne and I were once in an automobile accident. The experience of being hit by a drunk driver who swerved out of control and crossed into our side of the road, took only a split second. But the event, terrifying in its occurrence, left us with physical (and legal) consequences for weeks and months afterward. It is manifestly obvious that Paul's first encounter with the risen Christ, cited above, was very intense emotionally. The blinding light of the sudden appearance of Jesus in His heavenly glory quite literally 'knocked Paul off his high horse' and left him disoriented, confused, and frightened.

But not all human experiences are so intense. Indeed many life experiences are gentle and go virtually unnoticed. Can you tell me what you were doing a week ago at six o'clock in the evening? But I can tell you the exact place where I standing when I heard of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy many years ago. I remember exactly what I was doing when two planes crashed into the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001. Our experience is made more or less memorable by the nature and the intensity of our affective response to them.

The point here is that our emotional response to God's life changing activity in our lives need not be intense. Many events may pass unnoticed only to be understood in retrospect. This aspect of experiential reality brings us into the world of artists and poets. These are persons whose emotional sensitivity makes them helpful in expounding and interpreting the significance of even the least intense encounter with God. The wonderful hymn by Maltbie Babcock, "This is my Father's World", illustrates this gentler encounter with God with great insight.

This is my Father's world,  
And to my listening ears  
All nature sings, and round me rings  
The music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world:  
I rest me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;  
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world,  
The birds their carols raise,  
The morning light, the lily white,  
Declare their maker's praise.  
This is my Father's world:  
He shines in all that's fair;  
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;  
He speaks to me everywhere.

Lest we dismiss the observation "he speaks to me every where" as poetic nonsense, we do well to remember that much of the teaching of our Lord Jesus was drawn from such simple, everyday experiences.<sup>318</sup> God does not always have to speak to us in blinding light or thunderous tones to communicate.

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<sup>318</sup> For example: Matthew 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. - Matthew 5:14-15 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. - Matthew 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the

It is a mistaken notion that an encounter with God must be heroic like a Moses or Paul for it to be real and life changing. This leads us to consider another facet of human experience that can be a real hindrance in our encounter with God: expectation.

#### **4. Expectation**

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.<sup>319</sup>

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.<sup>320</sup>



Not only is the notion that the past is prologue to the future scriptural; it is foundational to our thinking. The notion was crystallized for many by the American Philosopher George Santayana's famous dictum: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Experiences, our own or those of others, tend to create expectations that the next occurrence will follow suit. Expectations pose a problem when poorly formulated in that they can become a source of frustration. Consider the role expectations play in education. Where the topology of a teacher's expectations matches the capabilities of their student, lessons and exercises will be generally more productive than where there is a serious mismatch between them. To put it another way, poor student exam grades are not *defacto* the indicator of a poor student. Instead they may possibly indicate a poor teacher whose unrealistic expectations of the student have caused them to set the academic goals beyond the student's reach.

As we look at the Biblical accounts of human encounters with God, we are tempted to formulate unrealistic expectations for ourselves based on those rare heroic encounters with God. Misplaced expectations send us looking for visions, ecstasies, auditions, or other dramatic characteristics of an encounter with God that, while they may have occurred, have little or no value to us in our lives and predispose us to miss the actual life changing events that could happen to us through more ordinary and commonplace means of grace. In writing of the remarkable "conversion experience of Blaise Pascal, Os Guinness notes:

"Can we understand fully what Pascal experienced? Should we expect to duplicate it exactly in our own lives? Emphatically not. But dare we survey the ice cold minds of countless Christians today and not yearn for some discernable fear of the Lord? Some working knowledge of the spiritual dimensions of intellectual warfare? Some irrepressible passion that betrays the fact of a direct, immediate, and unquestionable experience of God? In an age when attitudes to knowledge are strung out between technicians and fanatics, between knowledge-eunuchs and knowledge-hustlers, the distinctive Christian mind – sharp, objective, and critical, but committed and worshipping – is all too rare."<sup>321</sup>

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house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

<sup>319</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9

<sup>320</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11

<sup>321</sup> Os Guinness Introduction to [The Mind on Fire](#) (an anthology of the writings of Blaise Pascal) Classics of Faith and Devotion Series, Multnomah Press, 1989. ISBN 0-88070-159-5

The disciple will do well to look to the common means of grace like insight from scripture, everyday life experiences (trials), prayer, and spiritual guidance from older believers as the encounter they need with God. These events do change lives. And if God in His wisdom grants more; that will be according to His will, not you're your misplaced expectations.

### **5. Cognitive and Volitional Impact** <sup>322</sup>

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."<sup>323</sup>



An intense emotional reaction is not the only response we can have to an encounter with God. As we have seen, we may experience a sudden increase in awareness (illumination). Or we may experience a sudden reversal of our thoughts on a subject (μετάνοια or repentance). Or they may both come together. Either of these (and certainly both of them if occurring together) will produce a profound redirection of our will.

Both of these occur in Job's encounter with God at the end of his trials and afflictions. Job's intense emotional response is clear: "I abhor myself". But his mind set has been changed as well: "I...repent in dust and ashes"

In this passage, Job reiterates what he had known previously: "I know that thou canst do everything and that no thought can be withheld from thee" but now this knowledge has risen upon him with a new divinely-worked clearness, such as he has not hitherto experienced. His awareness of it is greatly deepened. When Job repeats the chastening word of Jehovah to himself from Job 38:2: "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge", he does so as a confession because he now perceives that his judgment was wrong, and that he consequently has merited the reproof.

The next words are in the manner of entreaty, "Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me." Job takes the form of these words from the demands of Jehovah: "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me"<sup>324</sup> and "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me."<sup>325</sup> Hitherto Jehovah has interrogated him, in order to bring him to the knowledge of his ignorance and weakness. Now, however, after he has thoroughly perceived this, he is anxious to put questions to Jehovah, in order to penetrate deeper and deeper into the knowledge of the divine power and wisdom. Now for the first time with him, the true, living perception of God has its beginning, being no longer affected by tradition, but by direct communication with God. In this new light he can no longer deceive himself concerning God and himself; the delusion of the conflict now yields to the vision of the truth, and only penitential sorrow for his sin towards God remains to him. Finally, and most importantly, the direction of Job's will has been significantly

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<sup>322</sup> In this section I am indebted for the excellent commentary on Job 42:1-6 by Keil & Delitzsch. I commend the passage to my reader.

<sup>323</sup> Job 42:1 -6

<sup>324</sup> Job 38:3

<sup>325</sup> Job 40:7

changed. When testifying of his unshakeable trust in God, he had maintained his self-righteousness “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: *but I will maintain mine own ways before him.*”<sup>326</sup> After this encounter, it is clear that Job will never again assert his will to “maintain mine own ways before him.” He has irreversibly repented from this error.

## **6. Duration**

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.<sup>327</sup>



Encounters with God are basically events that occur not only in time but over a period of time. The period of an event's time may be very short (as in the case of my auto accident) or very long time (as in the case of Dianne's and my marriage which has been developing for the last thirty five years). In the case of Jacob at Peniel cited above, the duration of his encounter with God lasted until the breaking of the day (presumably all night). In one sense the event has parabolic significance. Jacob wrestled with Esau and his father Isaac in order to wrest the blessing that he believed was meant for him. But in wrestling with Isaac and Esau, Jacob has been trying to accomplish in his own strength (cleverness not brute force) what was God's intent to accomplish by His grace alone. In effect, Jacob has been wrestling with God, the source of all blessing, for his entire life!<sup>328</sup>

This ongoing struggle is reflected in the difference between the unconditional promise of God, given at Bethel, and Jacob's insistence that it be a bargain with his “if-then”.<sup>329</sup> The entire spiritual

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<sup>326</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>327</sup> Genesis 32:24-30

<sup>328</sup> Genesis 25:22-23 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it be so, why am I thus?” And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and **the elder shall serve the younger.**

Genesis 27:33-36 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, “Who? Where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? Yea, and he shall be blessed.” And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, “Bless me, even me also, O my father.” And he said, “Thy brother came with subtlety, and hath taken away thy blessing.” And he said, “Is not he rightly named Jacob? For **he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing.**” And he said, “Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?”

Malachi 1:2-3 I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the LORD: yet **I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau,** and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

Romans 9:11-13 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, “**The elder shall serve the younger.**” As it is written, **Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.**

<sup>329</sup> Genesis 28:13-21 (selected) And, ... the LORD ... said, ... **I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.** ... And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, **If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, ... then shall the LORD be my God.**...

life may be seen in a sense as a single continuous experience of the grace and mercy of God for our entire lives.<sup>330</sup>

“Hermeneutics<sup>331</sup> helps to explain two types of phenomena. On the one side hermeneutics shows that understanding can be a slow process in which the disclosure of truth can take many years. Understanding is not an on/off event in which we expect belief always to happen suddenly. Some take many years fully to come to faith. Yet it is equally so otherwise with others. Some experience understanding dramatically and suddenly, as if the scales fell from their eyes. Both means, however, are equally in accord with what it is to understand. To understand understanding helps people to see that both ways of belief are to be expected.”<sup>332</sup>

## **7. Interior Condition and Response**

And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, “What seek ye?” They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathaniel said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathaniel saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathaniel answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.<sup>333</sup>



For John and Andrew, the encounter with Jesus took just one night to change their lives forever. The next day Andrew, in the joy of his new discovery, sought his brother Peter. In much the same way Philip when he was called, immediately sought his friend Nathaniel. Nathaniel heard just one sentence and was convinced so easily that Jesus was the Messiah that Jesus was impressed. The point here is that the disciples' positive responses are in some way related to their interior

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<sup>330</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

<sup>331</sup> “Hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own. Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts” Anthony C. Thiselton Hermeneutics an Introduction, Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2009, ISBN 978-0-8028-6410-9

<sup>332</sup> Ibid. P. 7

<sup>333</sup> John 1:37 – 50

condition<sup>334</sup>. Andrew, though skeptical, was easily converted because he was without that guile or pretense that so often accompanies pride and hypocrisy. John and Andrew had already been following John the Baptist and hearing his testimony of Jesus.<sup>335</sup> Unlike the Pharisees who came to John out of concern to maintain the *status quo*, John and Andrew were already seeking the Messiah!

Just what interior characteristics of the heart accompany a real encounter with God? In Gregory's early model of discipleship, the three step process included Purgation, Illumination, and Union. Most of the spiritual literature devoted to discipleship up to the reformation made use of this simple model, with good reason. Grace to live the Christian life comes in response to their faith. Faith, however as James points out, must issue in works of obedience. Even the faith that issues in obedience is God's gift to the individual. Such faith is a testimony of God's election of the individual believer. All such works of faith have the effect of lessening the bondage of habitual sin (vice) by enforcing godly new habits (virtue). Thus obedience purges sin and mortifies the flesh as we have already discussed. This process was called purgation because of the Divine admonition to holiness: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy"<sup>336</sup> and various admonitions to purity like "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."<sup>337</sup> Illumination is, of course, a work of God the Holy Spirit.<sup>338</sup> Historically the Beatitudes<sup>339</sup> that our Lord Jesus presents in His Sermon on the Mount are the very characteristics that encourage the effectual encounter with God. In this sense, the three earlier aspects of discipleship we have discussed (hearing, synthesis, and assent) may be seen as an inward preparation of the heart for the encounter with God.

## 8. Effect

He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name<sup>340</sup>



Experiences have an effect upon us. That effect may be physical, emotional, or cognitive. It may be temporary or more lasting. It may even be permanent. Encounters with God are experiences with irreversible effects. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."<sup>341</sup> From this verse we may infer that irreversibility is an evidence of an authentic encounter with God, insofar as that encounter is something that God does. But reason and human experience warn us that irreversibility is a necessary but not sufficient condition to validate an authentic encounter

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<sup>334</sup> This becomes much more obvious when one considers the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23). In that case the reception of the word of the gospel is almost wholly dependant on the condition of the heart, whether hard or soft, shallow or good ground.

<sup>335</sup> John 1:29 – 34 "... John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

<sup>336</sup> 1 Peter 1:15 -16

<sup>337</sup> 1 John 3:3 see also Matthew 5:8, Romans 14:20, Philippians 4:8, 1 Timothy 1:5, 3:9, 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:3, 2:22, Titus 1:15, Hebrews 10:22, James 1:27, 3:17, 1 Peter 1:22, 2 Peter 3:1.

<sup>338</sup> John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

<sup>339</sup> Matthew 5:3- 11: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for righteousness' sake.

<sup>340</sup> John 1:11-12

<sup>341</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:14

with God; which is to say that all encounters with God have irreversible effects but not all irreversible effects are the result of encounters with God. Many experiences in life leave irreversible effects but do not include God<sup>342</sup>. For authentic encounters with God, consideration of the interior state of the soul is profoundly important as well. The proof of Andrew's experience of Jesus as a valid encounter with God is as dependent on his interior state ("an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile") as the fact that it left him changed forever. It can be argued (as with the conversion of Paul) that God's direct intervention happens in many cases where the interior life would go in a direction opposite to His intentions unless He intervenes.

The encounter of all encounters with God is in the Person of Jesus Christ, the fruit of which is repentance not to be repented of.<sup>343</sup> The most common form of the average believer's encounter with Jesus Christ is at the moment of conversion. The believer's conversion marks the beginning of progress (however slight, halting, or slow) in a wholly other direction from what the life would have gone without it.

As the verse above makes clear, in the days of His earthly ministry, many experienced Him but few really encountered Him. They "received him not." Their encounter with God failed and their lives were unchanged. To those who did encounter him ("receive him"), he gave the "power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." An irreversible and lifelong process of growing conformity to the person of Jesus began in their lives. In terms of our discipleship model: empowerment followed encounter.

## **9. Circumstances**

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straightest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art

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<sup>342</sup> As in the case of a woman's encounter with a reprehensible man that leaves her a perennial misanthrope, for example.

<sup>343</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision..."<sup>344</sup>



Why God chooses the people He does is a profound mystery. All that we may safely say is that he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."<sup>345</sup> Humanly speaking, however, the encounter with God does not occur out of context with all the other things going on in our lives at the time of the encounter. For those who are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world,<sup>346</sup> this means an experiential continuity as well as an interruption or arrestment. We may then call these other experiences leading up to the encounter and following after it the circumstances of the encounter.

When we consider Paul's testimony before King Agrippa, it is interesting to note that he does not just describe his encounter with the risen and glorified Jesus, but everything leading up to that encounter and everything after it. The reason he does this is to emphasize not just the continuity but the discontinuity that would be humanly unexplainable unless the encounter that he claims he had with God was authentic.

A stone in motion tends to continue on its trajectory unless acted on by opposing forces. And then, even if those forces are unseen, their presence is made visible by the altered trajectory. The applicability of this natural paradigm to the spiritual life is substantiated by our Lord Jesus when He says: "The wind blows where it will, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell where it comes from, and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."<sup>347</sup> Just as the invisible force of the wind is made discernable by the sound and sight of tree limbs that experience its force; so too the power of the Holy Spirit is felt in the life of a person who encounters God. We may not see the event as Paul's companions on the Damascus road who "stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."<sup>348</sup> But we can vouchsafe the reality of it by seeing the change in behavior. A furious and hateful zealot bent on murder does not instantly cease, desist and "now preach the faith which once he destroyed."<sup>349</sup>

## **10. Testimony**

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them

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<sup>344</sup> Acts 26:1-19

<sup>345</sup> Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him **who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:**

<sup>346</sup> Ephesians 1:4 According as **he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,** that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

<sup>347</sup> John 3:8

<sup>348</sup> Acts 9:7

<sup>349</sup> Galatians 1:21-24 Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they had heard only, that he who persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD."<sup>350</sup>



When we encounter God, we are left with a testimony. I am writing this particular section at 4:30 am. Last night, when I went to bed, I was reflecting on the matter of how it is that believers encounter God. The thoughts on human helplessness and total dependency on God were all that I could arrive at. There is nothing better for the disciple than to continue his analysis of God's recorded word and the synthesis of its truths with other passages to form a coherent understanding of what God has said and some estimate of what He is like. This process will produce the inevitable assent to the truth of what has been reasoned out prayerfully. And the validity of that ascent to the truth as the disciple has come to understand it is reflected in his willingness to live according to it, faith revealed by works, as James puts it. But the profound encounter with God that marks a sudden expansion of our awareness of God's presence, His character, and all the things of life is rare. At least they were in my experience! I thought back over the years of my life where I could say that I had experienced such intense and irreversible expansions of awareness that had changed my life, in some area, forever. They were few and did not seem in any way connected with prior efforts on my part. They were acts of sovereign grace for which I shall be eternally grateful, and whose occurrence and effect still play out in my memory as clearly as at the first. But I did not make them happen! So I was left somewhat discouraged, prayed and left it with God. If that is the way of God with men, then truth requires that I explain it that way to my students. We can do nothing better than to reason about the scriptures, understand them, and live by them as best we can. So I thought and so I fell asleep.

But God would not leave me there! I was awakened by the remembrance of the dry bones of Ezekiel cited above. How many of my messages in their preparation have seemed like that to me. All the homework had been done. All the verses and their exposition were complete, and as far as I could see flawless in their connectivity. Yet it was like those dry bones. "There was a noise,

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<sup>350</sup> Ezekiel 37:1 - 14

and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.” My sermon was lifeless! And so I cried many times to the Lord. And it was at such times, as this morning, when God breathed life into my clumsy attempts. Suddenly it was not the sermon that had life, but the preacher. It can only be described as being on fire!<sup>351</sup> It is moments like that when I can understand what the bush that burned and was not consumed “felt” like. I had once again experienced the fellowship of the burning heart as the disciples of old when Jesus spoke to them on the Emmaus road. This morning my head was swimming with a new found awareness that the encounter with God need not be seen as an impossibly rare event, but rather God’s loving response, in our hour of need, a need to understand, our need for Him that lay behind all our analysis, synthesis, and ascent. If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me!<sup>352</sup> And my experience can say with certainty: God is there and He is not silent! And when God speaks, we must respond. So then sleep was swallowed up in the delight of writing this little article not as an exposition of some particular Bible verse, but as a testimony of God’s faithfulness to one who sought Him. God is true to His word!

While the experiences of those great servants, chosen of God like Moses, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John will everlastingly hold us in awe of God’s sovereignty; yet a sincere heart that seeks God faithfully, like David, will still find that ‘the Lord is my shepherd and that He continues to make me lie down in pleasant pastures with still waters and leads me in righteous paths for His name’s sake.’ Such a heart will find countless times the reassurance that they are loved of God which is the very best that life can offer.

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<sup>351</sup> See Blaise Pascal’s “Memorial” which reads in part: “from about half past ten at night to about half an hour before midnight – FIRE” described in The Mind on Fire (an anthology of the writings of Blaise Pascal), Introduction to Classics of Faith and Devotion Series, Multnomah Press, 1989. ISBN 0-88070-159-5

<sup>352</sup> Jeremiah 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.



## Chapter 5 Empowerment

“... without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>353</sup>

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”<sup>354</sup>



If the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life is the encounter with God, the measure *par excellence* of the spiritual life is obedience. Obedience points to the one area in the whole created universe where the battle of our sanctification is centered: the human will. Obedience is not incompatible with any of the phases of discipleship which we have been considering. The disciple who hears a command of God in the scripture will certainly want to obey it. As the disciple's comprehensive understanding of the word of God grows and individual commands are understood in the greater context of the overall will of God, the nature of life, and how they effect the current situations of our life, obedience begins to rest upon far more cogent arguments. The command is seen as that which really is “holy, and just, and good.”<sup>355</sup> Obedience is also compatible with assent. We choose to obey the command as a practical expression of our faith. In obeying we see ourselves as “doers of the word, and not hearers only.”<sup>356</sup>

While all obedience is desirable; in these phases, it is halting. We are inevitably confronted with ongoing failure. “For that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.”<sup>357</sup> We discover that we are still plagued by our old Sin nature. “I see another law (a governing principle) in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”<sup>358</sup>

For the earnest but misguided believer, this continuing ‘failure’ can be deeply disturbing. It may induce a profound sense of guilt and even foster the fear that they were never saved to begin with or that they have now lost their salvation. Verses like “As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly”<sup>359</sup> come to mean more in the believer's troubled thinking than Our Lord's comforting words “no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”<sup>360</sup> They feel that they have at last found the missing factor that puts the lie to the apostle Paul's foundational belief: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>361</sup> They think that this last failure has done just that – separated them from the love of God and damned them to a lost eternity!<sup>362</sup> They fail to realize that the same apostle who made such a bold statement about the

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<sup>353</sup> John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

<sup>354</sup> Philippians 4:13

<sup>355</sup> Romans 7:12b

<sup>356</sup> James 1:22

<sup>357</sup> Romans 7:15

<sup>358</sup> Romans 7:23

<sup>359</sup> Proverbs 26:11

<sup>360</sup> John 10:29b

<sup>361</sup> Romans 8:38-39

<sup>362</sup> There is a marvelous and detailed description of such sufferings by none less than the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, in his little book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. I highly commend it as helpful reading to any soul troubled about the Love of God for them and their salvation. While the account of Bunyan is that of his conversion, we do well to remember that conversion (our first encounter with God) is not just an event but the beginning of a process of similar encounters with God that repeat, a process which in the first instance we call justification and in later instances

inalienability of God's love had also experienced the same feelings of failure and distress that they feel. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" In halting obedience, Paul and the earnest disciple discover the force of Jesus' words "without me ye can do nothing." In short the command has been our schoolmaster leading us to Christ, the lesson being that without Him you cannot obey the command as you would. It is not a bad thing to have a schoolmaster like that! The whole scenario begs the question, how will you do on the final exam?!

Some students refuse to accept the truth of the lesson. They insist that by greater effort they can succeed in satisfying God's command (and win God's favor in so doing). Some students decide to leave the class room altogether, rejecting the whole process. "Once saved, always saved" they say and go on to live lives of moral carelessness and indifference. The one goes the way of the Pharisees the other the way of the Antinomian.<sup>363</sup> But for those who stay and learn the lesson, their hearts move from Paul's agonizing cry to his shout of victory. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."<sup>364</sup>

Paul has finally encountered God in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. And that encounter has opened for him a new way forward, a way characterized by walking "after the (Holy) Spirit." And this new way forward he calls "the law (governing principle) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Because he has this new way forward it is no longer necessary for him to walk in the old way of self empowered obedience to the law resulting in failure and death; a way he says is characterized by the "law (governing principle) of sin and death."

The instrumentality of spiritual empowerment then lies with the Holy Spirit. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: ..." <sup>365</sup> The means by which that power to live

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we call sanctification. The later process will not end until our last resurrection encounter glorification. But taken together, all are our salvation: Justification – deliverance from the guilt and judgment of sin, sanctification - deliverance from the power of sin, and glorification – deliverance from the presence of sin. It is the author's hope that for the present reader, the first is past, the second on-going and the last our mutual great hope! In any case, Bunyan is good reading and I highly commend him.

<sup>363</sup> "Antinomian comes from the two Greek words anti (against) and nomos (law). It refers to the doctrine that it is not necessary for Christians to preach and/or obey the moral law of the Old Testament. There have been several justifications for this view down through the centuries. Some have taught that once persons are justified by faith in Christ, they no longer have any obligation toward the moral law because Jesus freed them from it. A variant of this first position is that since Christ has raised believers above the positive precepts of the law, they need to be obedient only to the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will keep them from sin. ... Others have said that since sin was inevitable anyway, there is no need to resist it. An extension of this view is the contention of some that since God, in His eternal decree willed sin, it would be presumptuous to resist it. Finally still others have opposed the preaching of the law on the grounds that it is unnecessary, and, indeed, contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the first of these views the apostle Paul had to address in various letters to Christian churches in the first century, for example ... 1 Corinthians 5-6.... It was Luther who actually coined the word "antinomianism" in his theological struggle with his former student John Agricola. ... The Christian community as a whole has rejected antinomianism for several reasons. It has regarded the view as damaging to the unity of the Bible, which demands that one part of the divine revelation must not contradict another. Even more important, it has argued that antinomians have misunderstood the nature of justification by faith, which, though granted apart from works of the law, is not sanctification. In general, orthodoxy teaches that the moral principles of the law are still valid, not as objective strivings, but as the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the believer." - Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Baker Book House, 1984 ISBN: 0-8010-3413-2

<sup>364</sup> Romans 7:25-8:2

<sup>365</sup> Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

the sacrificial life of the disciple is conveyed lies in the 'love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.'<sup>366</sup> It is that same love which is the great principle underlying God's commandments.<sup>367</sup> The grace of God, manifest as His love, is what empowers the disciple to live the Christian life consistently.

Empowerment is not obedience per se. Empowerment affects the nature of our obedience. Before encountering God and being empowered by that encounter, our obedience is halting at best. We had some power to perceive the command of God as well as to attempt to obey it. But we had no power to succeed. After our encounter our obedience becomes an expression of a profound change in our person. The obedience of the believer before encounter when afflicted with the old man or nature was sporadic and marked by failure. The obedience after the encounter with God is the product of the new man or nature "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;"<sup>368</sup> "which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."<sup>369</sup> Such obedience is marked not by a disregard for the law but a consistent conformity to its moral guidance as a revelation of the Holiness of God.

Because the process of sanctification is directed to the whole person, it is inevitable that some areas of the disciple's life will have been changed and while other areas are still in the process leading up to such transformation. The stages of discipleship, then, should not be seen as a monolithic progress in which one stage must be complete before another can begin. It is rather an assemblage in which all the stages of discipleship are ongoing simultaneously. We are hearing God's voice in one area, understanding it (repenting) in another, affirming our faith in a third while encountering God elsewhere in our life. We are not discouraged or confused with all this, because we living the fulfilling life of loving service in still another area. To use Paul's simple assertion, we are to view our selves "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."<sup>370</sup>

What shall we then say of our obedience? It is a mixed bag. In some areas we are still learning "without me ye can do nothing". In other areas we are demonstrating the glorious truth "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." In some areas we feel that we are wretched people, while in others we are exulting in our new found deliverance. Our affections oscillate between highs and lows. Victorious wars proceed with simultaneous tactical victories and defeats. Does that mean that our former obedience has no value while our later obedience does? Certainly not! To be under the schoolmaster of the Law is no less valuable than passing his final exam and graduating! For "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."<sup>371</sup> How then are we to view this obedience to God in those earlier stages before God graciously intervenes in a particular area of our lives as He did in the lives of all His servants in Bible times? Surely we are to hope in God and not be cast down as we mentioned above.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

<sup>367</sup> Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

<sup>368</sup> Ephesians 4:24

<sup>369</sup> Colossians 3:10

<sup>370</sup> Philippians 3:12

<sup>371</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>372</sup> Psalm 42:5, 11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

Consider the lives of the first disciples who later became the apostles. For three years they followed Jesus down the dusty roads of Judea and Samaria. They listened to His teaching and saw His miracles. They did what they were told to do, sometimes with exhilarating effects: “even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.”<sup>373</sup> Yet they could also be puzzled, frustrated, and frustrate Jesus by their failures.<sup>374</sup> But who will say that those years spent with Jesus were wasted? We could say that they were a continual encounter with God in the person of His Son, but it is clear that the disciples did not receive power until the Holy Spirit was given unto them after Jesus’ death and resurrection.<sup>375</sup> If we consider Peter’s experience, his was a mixture of getting it right and getting it wrong at virtually the same time. He goes to Jesus walking on the water and almost drowns.<sup>376</sup> He confesses that Jesus is the Christ but opposes His way.<sup>377</sup> He professes that he is willing to die with Jesus but denies Him three times.<sup>378</sup> After his failure, Jesus invites him to follow once more but he turns to check out whether John is following only to be rebuked by the Savior.<sup>379</sup> Such are we all before God changes our heart! Does that mean that our halting obedience has been wasted? We must remember that the first three stages of discipleship have to do with God is light<sup>380</sup> while the latter three have to do with God is Love.<sup>381</sup> Our self empowered obedience far from being worthless has much value as a learning experience. As we have said many times, failure teaches us of our absolute need of Jesus Christ. But there is much more that self empowered obedience teaches us. By our attempted obedience we begin to learn something of the holiness of God. We also begin to discover how out of step our world is with the will of God. The danger here is that we begin to look at fallen humanity through a legal glass and our self deception makes us vulnerable to becoming a self-righteous judge who condemns others. Jesus warns us against this spiritual trap when He says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”<sup>382</sup> Nevertheless self empowered obedience can help us see sin or disobedience as a functional mistake that has painful consequences for those who commit it. Human experience viewed through this lens can make us much more compassionate for those who hurt themselves and others through their selfishness and sin. If we learn this lesson, we come much closer to our Lord Jesus who said of Himself, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Luke 10:17b

<sup>374</sup> Matthew 17:15-21 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oft times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

<sup>375</sup> Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

<sup>376</sup> Matthew 14:29-30

<sup>377</sup> Matthew 16:16 and 16:22,

<sup>378</sup> Matthew 26:33 and 26:75

<sup>379</sup> John 21:13 and 21:21&22

<sup>380</sup> 1 John 1:5

<sup>381</sup> 1 John 4:8 & 16

<sup>382</sup> Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but consider not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

<sup>383</sup> John 3:17

Self empowered obedience can spring from a certain delight in the law which causes us to meditate in it day and night.<sup>384</sup> And this meditation can reveal the hidden issues of the law that pervade many commandments. When these become visible, we gain a deeper understanding of the nature of God's holy character. All these lessons, far from being worthless, are extremely valuable in preparing the heart for the encounter with God that transforms our experience from the dry bones of Ezekiel to the standing army of the Most High God!

But what are we to say of that obedience after the encounter with God? Bernard of Clairvaux helps us here:

But what to those who find?  
Ah, this no tongue, nor pen can show;  
The love of Jesus! What it is  
None but His loved ones know.<sup>385</sup>

When we encounter God, our person is transformed<sup>386</sup> by the power of the Holy Spirit and we are made into that likeness of Jesus Christ such that the law far from describing what we should do describes rather who we have become. Obedience beyond the point of encounter manifests certain characteristics.

While we have a sense of self, we are no longer selfish.<sup>387</sup> If we fast it is to give our bread to the hungry<sup>388</sup> because we love them. We pray "give us this day our daily bread" as individuals and receive the answer as stewards who feed those whom we serve, the hungry in love.

We understand that the driving force of obedience in discipline is love not light.<sup>389</sup>

Sacrifice is no longer painful but a joy because of our love for those whom we are sacrificing.<sup>390</sup>

Our obedience is now consistent<sup>391</sup> and not grievous.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Psalm 1: 2 "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Remember that it was in the seventh chapter of Romans that Paul would say: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man..." Romans 7:22

<sup>385</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) translated by Edward Caswell (1814-1878) in "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee".

<sup>386</sup> Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

<sup>387</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:15 And that he died for all, that **they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves**, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

<sup>388</sup> Isaiah 58:6-7 **Is not this the fast that I have chosen?** to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not **to deal thy bread to the hungry**, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

<sup>389</sup> Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**.

<sup>390</sup> Philippians 2:17 Yea, and **if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy**, and rejoice with you all.

<sup>391</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh **repentance to salvation not to be repented of**: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

{Keil & Delitzsch - There is not in the *Greek* this play on words, so that the word qualified is not "repentance" merely, but "repentance unto salvation"; this, he says, *none will ever regret*, however attended with "sorrow" at the time. "*Repentance*" implies a *coming to a right mind*; "*regret*" implies merely uneasiness of feeling at the past or present, and is applied even to the *remorse* of Judas (Matthew 27:3 - *Greek*, "stricken with remorse," not as in the *English Version*, "repented himself"); so that, though sorrow always accompanies repentance, sorrow is not always accompanied by repentance. "*Repentance*" removes the impediments in the way of "salvation" (to which "death," namely, the death of the soul, is opposed). "The sorrow of the world" is not at the *sin* itself, but at its *penal consequences*: so that the tears of pain are no sooner dried up, than the pleasures of ungodliness are renewed.)

<sup>392</sup> 1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and **his commandments are not grievous**.

Our obedience is no longer for show to others<sup>393</sup> or even for us.<sup>394</sup>

Above all our obedience is an expression of who we are not who we want to become.<sup>395</sup>

Having reached this point in discipleship, one might think that complete obedience was the end of all. But such a view does injustice to God who not only created us, but loved us long before our creation. While obedience may be seen as satisfying to God, His real joy (and ours) lies in our fulfilling the purposes for which He created us. And to that we subject now turn.

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<sup>393</sup> Matthew 6:2 Therefore **when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee**, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

<sup>394</sup> Matthew 6:3 But **when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth**:

<sup>395</sup> Matthew 7:16-20 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. **A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit**, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by **their fruits ye shall know them**." We covered this aspect of the spiritual life in the section on Identity and Action (above)

## Chapter 6 Fulfillment

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.<sup>396</sup>

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)<sup>397</sup>



The term “fulfillment” is an interesting one to me, because it combines two closely related scriptural images: that of the empty vessel that is being filled and that of the vessel filled full to overflowing. The concept of fulfillment includes both the believer (as the empty clay vessel) and the Holy Spirit (as the living water). Filling can also be understood as drinking to the full as in the command for the believer not to be filled with alcoholic spirits, but with the Holy Spirit.

“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”<sup>398</sup>

The implication here is that the effects of imbibing too much wine (being “drunk with wine”) are not totally unlike the effects of being filled (or empowered) by the Holy Spirit. The metaphor sets the Holy Spirit (as water) a source of heavenly joy in contradistinction to wine, a source of earthly joy. As wine produces a certain joy expressed in happy songs, so too the filling of the Spirit should produce a holy joy in God marked by singing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” and by the presence of “melody in your heart to the Lord.” It highlights a mystery. Did ever a person get drunk from water? But this rejoicing is supra-natural, an evidence of God’s work in the soul.

The result of such spiritual filling also produces thankfulness to God and mutual submission to one another in respect of our awe at His presence in us. The word ‘filling’ points to the empowering operation of the Holy Spirit as a controlling influence in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure,”<sup>399</sup> just as too much wine controls the behavior in an earthly sense. The chief symptoms of this Spiritual filling are obedience and joyous mutual submission. Submission in its turn argues the absence of pride and selfishness or the presence of humility. Humility and obedience are the very virtues that were consistently revealed in our Lord’s earthly life<sup>400</sup>. Our Lord Jesus uses the image of water when He refers to the Spirit both as “the water that I shall give him” and “living water.” Clearly water in the physical sense is absolutely essential for plant

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<sup>396</sup> John 4:14

<sup>397</sup> John 7:37-39

<sup>398</sup> Ephesians 5:17-21

<sup>399</sup> Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

<sup>400</sup> Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

and animal life, a lesson that was never far from the mind of those who lived in Judea. Drought was seen as the judgment of God for sin.<sup>401</sup>

There is another robust symbol of the Spirit's motivational filling: the wind. Jesus illustrates the mystery of God's sovereign operation to Nicodemus thus: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but you can not tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."<sup>402</sup>

The passing wind makes its presence known in that it 'speaks' to our ears, but we cannot see who it is that speaks nor determine it's course (or purpose). But in that it 'speaks' to our ears it reveals its presence as well as its power. The image would call to mind the costal sailing ships of the day whose only reliable motive force was the wind that filled their sails. Catching the wind meant forward movement and ultimately commercial success. But the wind could be "contrary."<sup>403</sup> It could as easily destroy the ship by its power as move it. The mariners' frightening experience with the wind called Euroclydon, was recorded by Paul.<sup>404</sup> Water and wind were both symbols of judgment and death as well as of blessing and life. Their awesome power speaks of God's power! If we liken the believer to a small ship, the same wind that fills the sails to overflowing holds the sailors in awe, for the wind which empowers them, could also overpower the entire structure. No wonder obedience was seen as the critical parameter to balance the power of the wind.<sup>405</sup> The empowerment is the motivation for consistent obedience!

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<sup>401</sup> As the lesson to the returned exiles of Judah makes clear: Haggai 1:2-11 (selected) "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, **This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. ...Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough;** ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ... Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the LORD of hosts, because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. **... I called for a drought** upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands."

<sup>402</sup> John 3:8

<sup>403</sup> Acts 27:4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because **the winds were contrary.**

<sup>404</sup> A fascinating account given in Acts 27:12-20 "And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when **the south wind blew softly,** supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. **But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.** And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when **they** had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, **strake sail, and so were driven.** And **we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest,** the next day they lightened the ship; **And the third day** we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And **when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.**"

<sup>405</sup> Jonah 1:4-16 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast

If we return to the images of water that Jesus uses to refer to the operation of the Holy Spirit, we note two descriptions. The first is “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” and the second is “rivers of living water” flowing out. The picture is that of a vibrant internal life (“springing up ... in him”) that overflows to others (“flowing out” from him) to bring life. Heretofore we have been thinking about discipleship as a relationship between the disciple and their mentor. But with fulfillment, a new set of relationships come in view, the disciple to those around him. The reason fulfillment culminates the discipleship process is that now the disciple, having encountered God, has finally been empowered to minister to others. The disciple has become the master.

## **1. Love**

“God is love.”<sup>406</sup>



The filling implies to be controlled by something. Men may be full of wrath or full of themselves (i.e. pride and self sufficiency), or full of their own notions, but filling means to be controlled by something. To encounter God is to be changed. And that means the believer is now controlled (filled) by the love of God.

### **a. Fidelity and Progression in Love**

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.<sup>407</sup>



As was said above, Christian disciplines prepare the believer to live a life by the power of God’s love; to experience the “labor of love.” The labor of love that Paul found in the Thessalonians and that he thankfully remembers without ceasing before God is a labor that he, himself, has modeled for them. “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.”<sup>408</sup>

But what does it mean to love? Such a question may seem superfluous. In romantic movies the usual line was “When you’re in love you’ll know it!” But that is inadequate for this subject. The Apostle John says with profound simplicity, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.”<sup>409</sup> It took me many weeks of reflecting on this verse to realize that the measure of our theology is not in the number of facts that we know about God but in the degree to which we

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done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

<sup>406</sup> 1 John 4:8b

<sup>407</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4

<sup>408</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9

<sup>409</sup> 1 John 4:7-8

love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul was acutely aware of this as well. "And though I have... all knowledge; and though I have all faith... and have not love, I am nothing."<sup>410</sup> And it is in this very section of his letter to the contentious and divided Corinthian Church that he addresses perhaps one of the best known and oft quoted passages on the Love of God in the scriptures.

When God created us in His image, we were faithful reproductions of the Great Original! It is clear that He intended for us to love as He loves. So that love for us is linked to our fidelity to God. We were meant to reproduce His love. When I think of fidelity in reproducing God's love, I am reminded of the way my first record player reproduced sound. After placing the crank in the side of the box and winding up the main spring, I placed the 78 rpm record on the green felt turntable, moved the start lever, gave the record a nudge to get it turning and carefully lowered the little steel needle into the groove at the edge of the record. At first there was a hissing sound as the needle advanced into the grooves of the record. Then I heard the music. It sounded like a military band playing far away and that I was listening to it through a long tube. It was **low fidelity**. Later my family bought a new electronic record player! I would watch the vacuum tubes warm up. It had a diamond needle that never wore out, and the sound was so much better. It really was "Hi-Fi" or **high fidelity**. I thought it sounded just like the original orchestra, until I went to my first symphony orchestra concert! Concert sound was overwhelming. It surrounded me, it went through me. It moved me. It had power! Stereophonic sound, with Woofers and Tweeters came next. It had **excellent fidelity**. But if you listened carefully you could still hear the hiss and sometimes a click, click, click as the needle went over a scratch in the record. Years later, digital sound arrived with CD's and compact disk players. There was no needle, just a beam of light. And now I understand there is something called an MP3 player, what ever those are: no disks, no light, just digital memory. With the right combination of speakers, we have at last **great fidelity**.

But what is the nature of the love that we are to reproduce with such fidelity? In Greek, there are four words for "love"

Ερως –The first word is eros from which we get our words erotic and erogenous. It never occurs in the New Testament, although it has its counterpart in the Old Testament in the word דָּוָד (dowd), in the Song of Solomon. It does not occur because it is evil, though there is a tendency to selfishness in it. Eros is simply a love centered in pleasure. Now while pleasure may be good,<sup>411</sup> a life lived solely for pleasuring self is much less than God intended for us to live. We are all here because of the erotic love of our parents that expressed itself in sexual intercourse as they fulfilled God's command to be fruitful and multiply. It was a 'good and pleasant' exercise that got us started. Eros says "I love you because you make me feel good." Sadly, many lives never get past this first stage of love and are like the gramophone – low fidelity.

φιλεω – The second word is phileo. Phileo is a love that responds to both sensate and psychic inputs, arising partly from the attributes of the object loved and partly from within our own soul's response to its knowledge of the object. It occurs 27 times in the New Testament in its nominative form: φιλος, (philos) and is translated as friend or friends. It occurs as a verb φιλεω (phileo) 21 times and is translated as love. From phileo, we get words like philosophy (the love of wisdom - sophia) and philanthropy (the love of mankind - anthropos). When in relationship, people begin to experience the fundamental differences between each other in acute ways; they

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<sup>410</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2 (selected)

<sup>411</sup> Psalm 133:1 Behold, **how good and how pleasant** it is for brethren to dwell together in unity

suffer because of those differences. The emotional pain is both a sign that the relationship is at a crossroads and that the parties have an opportunity to rise from eros to phileo. They can learn to say more than I love you because you make me feel good. Phileo understands and appreciates differences. It is, like my first electronic record player, High Fidelity

στοργή - The third word is storge. It is used only twice in the New Testament<sup>412</sup> in its negative form α-στοργος and is translated as “with out natural affection”. Astorgos means to be hard hearted to family: to parents, siblings or spouses. On the other hand, storgos means to cherish affectionately as in the case of family or kindred. Storge is the kind of love which cherishes a person despite their moral weakness. It is a sad fact, that we are all still marked by sin ‘which so easily besets us’. In the face of such disappointing failure, storge says, “I see that this difference between us is not as it should be and while I wait for God to change your heart, I love you because you are my brother, my sister, my husband, my wife.” Storge is a love that responds more significantly to the internal awareness of the strength of the relationship itself rather than the attributes or behavior of the loved one especially when they are hardly desirable. It is a love that arises more from within our soul than from without. Storge is love that is like a stereo with woofers, tweeters and sub woofers – excellent fidelity.

αγαπᾶω - The last word is agapao. Agape is a love that arises wholly from within the one who loves. It says I love you because it is my nature to love. Therefore I choose to love you without conditions. In the N.T. it is used to describe an attribute of God.<sup>413</sup> It is a love which involves the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety. Because of this wholly interior basis, it is “warm” or “hearty” but not “fiery” or “passionate” (i.e. not involving the “suffering” of eros) It is from the essence of God’s Being that love springs. It is, in antithesis to eros, a love of the unworthy (unmerited or unconditional love) and a love which does not desire to possess (unselfish love). Agape is the love that Jesus and Paul tell us lies at the heart of the law.<sup>414</sup> This love that God created us to reproduce with complete fidelity!

When these four Greek words for love are taken together, one has a sense of the progressive nature of love. Each of these words, far from being different from one another, may be seen as a step to the next higher form of love. Agape is the ultimate love to which we are called. In discipleship, we approach this love by moving from one level to the next. Discipleship creates a spiritual environment in which such a transition can take place. We move from finding the basis for loving wholly without (eros) to a combination of within and without (phileo, and storge) and finally to that which has its basis wholly within ourselves. It was this God-like ability to love unconditionally that was lost by the sin of our first parents. It is absolutely impossible for us to recover apart from the filling work of God the Holy Spirit. What is this learning environment like? It is not unlike the environment that capable parents create for their children at home. Parenting is a special form of discipleship. Every parent realizes (if not consciously) that their children are, in fact, their disciples. Where the processes of either discipleship or parenting are

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<sup>412</sup> Romans 1:31 ...without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection (astorgos), implacable, unmerciful... 2 Timothy 3:3 ...without natural affection (astorgos), trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good...

<sup>413</sup> I John 4:8, 16

<sup>414</sup> Matthew 22:37-40 Thou shalt love (agapao) the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love (agapao) thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love (agapao) thy neighbor as thyself.

clearly understood, the other will be too. Christians who disciple may be looked at as surrogate parents for children of dysfunctional families. They become fathers (& mothers) of the fatherless (& motherless).

When we live fulfilled lives, we recognize the character of God's love in us and can rest in the certainty of that love by faith. The love of God becomes the basis for observing the commands of God as an expression of our love for Him. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. .... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."<sup>415</sup>

Yet this kind of obedience goes far beyond a mere mechanical fulfillment of obligatory duties. As parents we know the difference between a child who sullenly takes out the garbage because we told them to and one who makes it their regular activity because they recognize that this is their home and in doing so they contribute to a more harmonious (and less smelly) home life. There is cheerfulness about their service that doesn't require that they have to be told every time: "take out the garbage".

It is a correct attitude out of which their obedience grows. Thus we are expected to respond to the love of God in us, and our attitudes will show what is the nature of our obedience whether it be of the 'letter of the law' or of the Spirit. This response is most properly expressed by a cheerful or determined willingness to be obedient to Jesus no matter what the cost, i.e. to deny one-self and take up the cross daily and follow Jesus in living the kind of life He lived on earth below.

### **b. The Description of Love**

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."<sup>416</sup>



As we reach out to others in discipleship, it is helpful to understand exactly what the presenting nature of Agape really is. This passage, a hymn of love, falls naturally into three sections:

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<sup>415</sup> John 14:15, 21

<sup>416</sup> 1 Corinthians 1-13

The Necessity of Love - The first section (13:1-3) establishes the necessity of ἀγάπη (agape) as the essential basis of all other forms of sacrificial Christian living such as preaching, prophecy, knowledge, faith and miracles, acts of material sacrifice and even martyrdom. This confirms all that we have been saying so far.

The Definition of Love - The second section (13:4-8) makes fourteen separate but related assertions about the nature of love and is perhaps one of the most famous and beautiful descriptions of love known to man. It is a perennial favorite at weddings, even those that don't reflect the high values of which the Apostle speaks. The assertions fall in two categories, negative and positive. The negative assertions tell us what love is not while the remaining positive assertions tell us what love is. This is the section that we will concentrate on.

The Enduring Nature of Love - The last section (13:8b-13) tells us that while some aspects of the Christian life will change, love along with faith and hope will never pass away. This is so because of their necessity to support the life lived in God throughout all eternity. In a sense we will never outgrow our spiritual need for these three virtues, but the greatest and most important will always be love.

### **i. What Love is not**

“...love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness,...”



Love controls the fundamental character of all healthy relationships. We begin with what love is not. Very often, this is how our lives are. In that way, this passage provides us with essential help in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships even if we have not experienced them as part of our life, while growing up.

Love does not envy; seeketh not its own. - In creating us for Himself, God created a “place” within us for spiritual communion with Him. We are meant to be “God-centered.” Sin always puts self in God’s place in any relationship or action. These two sins describe self-centeredness, or selfishness. Envy is dissatisfaction that another has that we want. Self-seeking tends to advance our interests at the expense of others. They are both fundamentally adversarial, making enemies rather than friends. Envy of the possessions of others and seeking to obtain them for oneself is what the Bible calls covetousness.

The problem many young people have in this area is that taking heed to oneself is not selfishness but part of normal human development, and a necessary part of living. A newborn baby knows only its needs and cries incessantly to have those needs made known and met. Jesus and Paul both admonish us to “take heed to yourself.”<sup>417</sup> They are hardly recommending selfish behavior. When we grow up; infantile self-centeredness gives way to self awareness that takes account of the effect that our actions have on ourselves and on others that we love.

Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up - Many people ‘put themselves up, by putting others down.’ That is one of the principle signs of an unhealthy relationship. When we love people, we want to encourage them in ways leading to the development of their special gifts and person.

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<sup>417</sup> Mark 13:9, Luke 17:3, Luke 21:34, and Acts 20:28

Trials cause us to lose courage. We become discouraged. Love builds us up. Love encourages but not by flattery. The difference between encouragement and flattery is truth. Flattery contains a lie that sets us up for disappointment later on, but the truth helps us reject self deprecating visions of our self (low esteem of our human worth) and self limiting or self destructive lies that, when acted upon, ruin our spiritual progress. Love is humble, not proud.

Love doth not behave itself unseemly - Love does not cause embarrassment for the one loved. "And above all things have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins."<sup>418</sup> That is, love doesn't expose sin in the loved one just to cause shame and embarrassment. If you are in a relationship where the other person starts talking about your faults in front of another person or to other people, (rather than privately to you) in that area, you are in a destructive relationship.

Love is not provoked - In a good relationship, angry exchanges are rare, even though there may be significant differences between the partners. The reason this is so, is that, in a loving relationship, regular effectual communication prevents the buildup of frustration that ignites argument. Of all the human emotions, anger is perhaps the one that is the hardest to teach children to manage. I do not see any joy or happiness management classes, but anger management classes abound. Anger can arise when our needs are not met or we are hurt. It is part of the normal human emotional makeup. But anger should never become the basis for trying to willfully hurt the one who has made us angry.

Then too, frequent and violent anger is often part of abusive relationships where one partner wants to control the other's will. Frequent and possibly violent outbursts of anger that cause fear in the other person (or guilt which contains fear of punishment) may lead to involuntary submission on the part of one in order to avoid serious consequences (threats of emotional or physical violence) by the other. Love should be the **only** motivation in a loving relationship. Guilt, where it is real, should lead to confession, repentance, forgiveness and restoration and nothing else.

As to fear, you do well to meditate on the words of Paul to Titus: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."<sup>419</sup> While the fear of God (deep respect and awe) is appropriate in our relation to Him, we are told that "the fear of man bringeth a snare."<sup>420</sup> Love should liberate, not trap. Beware of relationships in which you feel trapped. They are as unhealthy as any dank, unsanitary Roman prison cell ever was.

Love taketh not account of evil - In short, love forgives. It does not keep accounts on wrongs done to it. It does not bear a grudge. The apostle Paul sets a natural time limit on anger on those rare occasions when it arises in our relationships. "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath."<sup>421</sup> From a human standpoint, when angry exchanges have focused attention on critical and unresolved issues in a relationship, it is imperative that the anger be discarded after its purpose of identifying the critical issue for discussion has been served. If this is not done anger gives way to resentment, and resentment gives way to a spirit of vengefulness that actively seeks to hurt the person who hurt us.

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<sup>418</sup> 1 Peter 4:8

<sup>419</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7

<sup>420</sup> Proverbs 29:25

<sup>421</sup> Ephesians 4:26

Love rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth - This marks the transition from negative assertions of what love is not back to those positive assertions with which the passage started (Love suffers long...). Basically love rejoices with you when you discover the truth because that is a liberating experience. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."<sup>422</sup>

When you are set free, you are set free **from** something and set free **for** something. These both elicit joy from love. So often it is the freedom necessary for growth that is the source of such joy. In short love is cheering you on to greater accomplishments in the areas of personal development and as well as success both in material things and especially in spiritual things. "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers, for I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."<sup>423</sup> Now that is the love of God in man!! In summary: love is not envious; proud, rude, self-centered, or vengeful. It doesn't get angry easily and doesn't rejoice in or gloat over the spiritual misfortunes of others. It does not exploit vulnerability, manipulate or abuse.

## **ii. What Love is**

We continue with what love is. As the positive statements about love are considered, it is hoped that a coherent picture will emerge in your mind.

Love rejoiceth with the truth - As noted above, love rejoices with you when as you discover the truth, you experience the freedom for growth that the truth brings. In short love is cheering for your personal development and success both in material things and especially in spiritual things.

Love suffereth long, and is kind (gentle) - Love is both patient and kind in tribulation. Life isn't always easy. There are many painful events that challenge our faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ. Have you ever wanted to say, "Sometimes, I become like another person when I'm under trial." That reflects an error in our self assessment. Actually we behave exactly according to what we really are under trial and often that is not "pretty". What is not obvious in such circumstances, however, is that the very circumstances which humble us also teach us what it is to love, both ourselves and others. Have you ever noticed how believers that have had real trials and even failure and moral lapses in their life are not as ready to be judgmental or critical? They seem more compassionate and understanding. This is because the love that we learn in such trials is actually a supernatural gift to us from God.

If we were to look at the love of God somewhat like a grain of wheat, then the pain of trials that we experience is really more like what the ground feels as the plow breaks it up getting it ready to receive the grain of wheat. Paul puts this so well when he says: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"<sup>424</sup> When trials have done their work on our hearts, we learn what it is to bear painful things patiently and be kind.

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<sup>422</sup> John 8:32

<sup>423</sup> 3 John 1:2-4

<sup>424</sup> Romans 5:1-5

Love believeth all things - Love supports you by believing in you at all times, it trusts you. When someone you love trusts you, it is a wonderful thing. It enables you to do things that you might otherwise never be able to do. We tend to sacrifice ourselves for people who trust us, because they trust us.

Love brings peace - Lesser forms of love, dependant as they are on something in the object loved, are all marked by attachments which manifest themselves in the fear of the loss of the loved object. If we desire wealth, we will fear the loss of it. So too with power, praise of men, people, possessions, etc. Only Agape is free of such attachments. With attachments and the consequent fear of loss comes lack of peace. God's love is free of attachments because it is derived from within and has no fear of loss. "There is no fear {phobos} in love {agape}; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."<sup>425</sup> Without the total trust in God (sometimes called abandonment to God) the peace that our Lord left us will not be appropriated. But when it is, then we become instruments of that profound peace so that we become peacemakers as Jesus says "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>426</sup>

Love is marked by goodness - When Jesus was approached by the 'rich young ruler', the conversation revolves around the word good: "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God."<sup>427</sup> Goodness pertains strictly to God alone. His love alone is good, with a goodness that cannot be touched by evil because it is not based on anything outside of itself and is not therefore influenced by evil in the one loved. Accordingly goodness is possessed of an innate and incorruptible purity.

Love is meek - Meekness is very close in character to both humility and gentleness and is often mentioned in conjunction with them. It seems to reflect an experiential knowledge of our own weakness that both warns us against being proud lest we fall and gives us, at the same time, a certain patience with the weakness of others so that we are gentle with them when they fall. Because of this, meekness is ideally suited to working with people; meek people are much more likely to find a way into a person's life and to be an instrument of God's grace. They are like the rain on my roof. If there is a way in, the rain will find it!

Love is temperate - Mentioned only three times in scripture, temperance is considered a virtue that describes an interior strength that enables us to resist the temptations of pleasure, hence its association with abstinence from drinking alcohol. In fact it is really an example of the remarkable strength that love gives us to deny ourselves for the one loved as we sacrifice for their well being.

Love beareth all things - One of the most moving events that I experienced when Dianne and I were first married was her getting really sick. I could do nothing at all. My heart was heavy. If it had been possible, I would have gladly taken her sickness unto myself if only to give her peace and health once again. I was burdened for Dianne's well being and bore that burden, though it was painful, because I loved her so. It was then, I began to understand what Paul who advocated "rejoicing in the Lord always,"<sup>428</sup> meant when he said: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my

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<sup>425</sup> 1 John 4:18

<sup>426</sup> Matthew 5:9

<sup>427</sup> Mark 10:17

<sup>428</sup> Philippians 4:4

conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."<sup>429</sup> Paul was willing to give up his salvation if only his Jewish brethren could come to faith in Jesus. He would have born the burden of a lost eternity for them so great was his love.

Love hopeth all things - Love places its hope in you, looking to you to take the appropriate actions in response to being loved. Love never stops hoping for you. Even death cannot stop hope. The father of the prodigal son never gave up hope that he would see his son again one day. His hope was rewarded: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."<sup>430</sup> For example, never give up hope that your loved ones though "dead in trespasses and sins" will one day live again to God through Jesus Christ.

Love endureth all things - Love endures despite all manner of setbacks. When you fail, one who truly loves you does not give up on you and stop meeting your needs because you have failed them. They are always there for you.

Notice the phrase "all things" in four of the descriptions of what love is. We might call this a reference to the unconditional aspect of love. Burden bearing, faith, hope, and endurance are in "all things" not some. They are unconditional! Where, apart from God, do we find an approximation such unconditionality? In children! That, in part, is why Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."<sup>431</sup> Children's love is unconditional. One of the marks of the Spirit filled life is a childlike love for others.

Love never faileth - How are we to understand this? When you have lived as long as I have, you begin to see that love is really a mystery. It has victory even in defeat. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the quintessential example of this. In the day that He was crucified, all seemed lost. Rejected by the people he came to redeem; deserted by his followers of three years; abandoned to the implacable wrath and vengeance of his enemies (including the devil, himself); feeling abandoned by God the Father; all was lost. It had come to nothing.

Yet, today, we recognize that total defeat as the greatest victory over sin, death, and hell in all time and eternity. The glory of it has filled the hearts and minds of believers for two thousand years, and still amazes the angelic host. Poets have sung of it. Martyrs have clung to it. We live our entire lives in the light of it. How can this be? Well in describing love, we are describing God. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ... And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."<sup>432</sup> In what sense may we be said to "know God" in essence? Never! Created beings cannot comprehend the Creator. Relationally, we understand Him as He reveals Himself to us by His operations in us, for us, and through us. And God, who is the *Mysterium Tremendum*, never fails. He will not.

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<sup>429</sup> Romans 9:1-3

<sup>430</sup> Luke 15:24

<sup>431</sup> Mark 10:14

<sup>432</sup> 1 John 4:8,16

## 2. Discipline

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”<sup>433</sup>



In the final stage of discipleship, the love that we have been studying must not only be resident in us but highly active in our life with good reason. How can we teach what we have not learned by experience? How can we give away what we do not have? We can we help others to learn to love as God does, if we have not learned it ourselves. But, having said this, there is still the practical matter, mentioned elsewhere, of creating an environment in which that love can be learned by others and in which we can continue to grow ourselves,<sup>434</sup> thus the need for a brief discussion on Christian discipline proper.

Christian disciplines are many and the conceptual proliferation of their number can become a cause of confusion if we are trying to understand each of them as an independent entity. Fortunately there is an underlying correspondence between the several disciplines that at once allows us to see similarities between what appear to be disparate disciplines and also allows us to understand their deeper relationship with each other and as an integrated corpus. To lay hold of

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<sup>433</sup> Matthew 6:1-18

<sup>434</sup> Let us settle it in our hearts, once and for all. The love of God is transcendent. We can never get to the end of it because that love, like God has no end. So here is a paradox. Discipling others, is the best way to be disciplined. It is an old saying, but true: if you would teach others, by your students you will be taught. Any parent of children knows all too well how those very same children helped them (the parents) grow up most effectively.

this conceptual framework we need to study our Lord's teaching on the subject of discipline quoted above.

#### **a. Not Optional and Not Hypocritical**

In this passage Jesus addresses three type of fasting: alms, prayer and fasting. In doing this He is not saying don't do alms or prayer or fasting; just don't do it like the Pharisees.<sup>435</sup> He consistently says "when" you pray, give alms, fast" not "if" you do these things. The disciplined life for the Christian is not optional. That is why our Lord's great command is universal. But our discipline is not self empowered either. It is not to be hypocritical, pharisaical. As He enjoins discipline, He warns against hypocrisy.

Most believers have no problem with alms or prayer, but when it comes to fasting, visions of monastic excess and charges of false asceticism arise. But Jesus' words: "when you fast" will not leave the field of argumentation. Jesus clearly expects us to fast. In an age of fast food chains and morbid obesity, that is an unpopular message.<sup>436</sup> The problem lies with understanding exactly how Jesus is speaking. Humanly, Jesus is a Jew speaking to a Jewish audience. Jews of that age did not think like Greeks. Greek thought, with which we are most familiar, is abstract. Jewish thought is parabolic. Things aren't just what they seem. Words are metaphors that stand for more than they mean. For example, the Greek would say "In unity there is strength". The Jew would say "A three-fold cord is not soon broken."<sup>437</sup> It's the same thought but in two different modes. The Jew knows that when he is talks about rope, he is talking about much more than rope. The Jewish Rabbis say "The Torah is not a spade." ... "Of course its not, it's a scroll!" we think. But that is the trivial solution. What they are really saying is that men should not use the things of the religious life for selfish profit. So when Jesus talks about fasting, He is talking about much more than fasting. In the language of the spiritual literature He is talking about "mortification"<sup>438</sup> or self **sacrifice** in general. When we understand this, we realize also that He is talking about much more than prayer or alms as well. The three specific disciplines that Jesus refers to, each stands at the head of the three directions of relationships: God (prayer), neighbor (alms), and self (fasting).

It is important to note that just as loving your neighbor and loving yourself are linked, so the discipline of fasting is linked to the discipline of alms. We see this very clearly in the classic saying on fasting in Isaiah. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"<sup>439</sup> The term "fast" as Isaiah uses it applies to seven seemingly different activities of which only one has to do with food. The concept that unites all seven activities, however, is self denial (forgoing selfish advantage at the expense of the slave, the burdened, the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless, the naked, your fellow human: your neighbor) and self sacrifice (to loose, to undo, to let the oppressed go free, to feed the hungry, to house the homeless, to cover the naked, and not turn away from your neighbor in need). These are exactly the terms

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<sup>435</sup> See the discussion on page 49 which covers this more completely.

<sup>436</sup> N.B. Fasting is not dieting. The difference here is the same as the difference between pilgrimage and tourism. One centers on God the other on self.

<sup>437</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:12 "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken"

<sup>438</sup> See notes on mortification starting on page 26

<sup>439</sup> Isaiah 58:6-7

of discipleship: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."<sup>440</sup>

So then, fasting involves more than taking the food out of your mouth (a form of self denial called abstinence) but also giving it to another so that you will never be able to eat it (self sacrifice). The hungry gets your food and you get their hunger. What makes this a jarring realization is that fasting (which involves both self denial and self sacrifice) should be seen as an expression of self love. The more usual assumption is that self gratification and self indulgence are the expressive forms of self love. Here we encounter the core paradox of the Christian life: that in humbling ourselves, we will be exalted and in losing our lives we keep them.

Acts of self denial and self sacrifice are acts of faith as well as love. The righteous did not "see" Jesus as they helped ordinary needy people. But the story is told so that we will "see" Him in every needy person – by faith! "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."<sup>441</sup> Acts of faith create the environment in which the grace of God transforms lesser forms of love to agape.

## **b. Types of Discipline**

The three directions of relationship involve major classes of disciplines that resemble each other in underlying principle. For the sake of clarity I am call these the disciplines of communion, self denial, and self sacrifice. When we consider the various disciplines (the list is clearly not complete only suggestive of a few) and group them under these heads we find the following:

### **i. Disciplines of Communion**

Prayer  
Worship  
Bible & Spiritual reading  
Attendance on Sermons or Teaching  
Solitude / Contemplation  
Quiet time

### **ii. Disciplines of Self Denial (Interior)**

Abstinence / Fast (taking the time, not spending the money, not eating the food)  
Vigil / Watchfulness  
Self examination  
Meditation / Memorization  
Silence / Study / Meditation  
Simplicity / Mortification

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<sup>440</sup> Luke 9:23

<sup>441</sup> Matthew 25:34-40

### **iii. Disciplines of Self Sacrifice (Ministerial)**

Alms  
Witness / Evangelism  
Preaching  
Teaching  
Pastoring / Discipling  
Stewardship / Obedience

Observe that there is at least a loose correspondence between Interior disciplines and Ministerial Disciplines. If we do not abstain from eating our sandwich, how will we ever give it to the homeless man? If we do not devote the time to studying, meditating (memorizing) in the solitude of our study how will we ever impart the Word in preaching, teaching or witness? This last brings us to a key to understanding the fulfilled life in its entirety: the believer as a steward of God's love.

### **3. Stewardship**

"And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon {or, riches} of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon {or, riches}, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."<sup>442</sup>



Discipleship has to do with giving what we have to one in need who does not have. Whether it is the gospel, the word of God, wise counsel, time, money, or an intelligent ear, it is giving something to someone in time of need. And giving requires wisdom and discipline. Remember that the first deacons were actually almoners and were to be "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom."<sup>443</sup> Considering that there is only a hair breadth between helping one in need and enabling one to continue in vice, it is no wonder that so much liberty is given the steward in determining appropriate action. "... ye have the poor with you always..." it is

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<sup>442</sup> Luke 16:1-13

<sup>443</sup> Acts 6:3

“whensoever ye will ye may do them good.”<sup>444</sup> No discipline of ministry comprehends more of wisdom in giving than that of stewardship. In one sense we may see discipleship as the stewardship of another’s soul. How much all the disciplines above are needed.

The parable, though disturbing to some, presents four of six important virtues of good stewardship.

### **Accountability**

“Give an account of thy stewardship”

“... we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”<sup>445</sup>



In the parable of the ‘unjust steward’, we see the critical question for all of us in the problem advanced. We must all give an account of our use of the master’s assets and it could be at a moment’s notice. The immanent coming of our Lord Jesus should be a real goad to action as quick as this steward. Here we have the first virtue this discipline inculcates – being prepared to give an account.

#### **a. Self Awareness**

“What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.”



The steward assesses his situation: Here is a second virtue that good stewardship builds – realistic self examination. What can we do with what we have?

#### **b. Quick and Decisive Action**

“I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.”



A fleeting moment passes and urgency brings out a third virtue – practical planning (“I am resolved what to do”) followed by decisive action. True, we can fault the man because the plan and ensuing actions are dishonest. Dishonesty is not, however, what our Lord is praising. He clearly makes a difference between the ‘children of light’ and the ‘children of this world’. What he is praising is the steward’s ability to take quick and decisive action. I wonder how urgently we feel each day the need to be investing the assets entrusted to us in the Master’s business.

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<sup>444</sup> Mark 14:7

<sup>445</sup> Romans 14:10,12-13

### **c. Wisdom**

“And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

The plan is executed. The “unjust steward” is “commended” not for just dealing but in that he has done wisely! His “wisdom” in dealing is marked by two attributes: enlightened self interest (“that they may receive me into their houses”) and quickness of execution (“sit down quickly”). But what is wisdom? Knowledge tells us how things are. Understanding tells us how things will go based on how they are. Wisdom tells us where things will end if they continue of the path that understanding tells us things are going. Wisdom deals with the end of all things. But God is the end of all things. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”<sup>446</sup> That is why “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...”<sup>447</sup> Jesus adds a gentle rebuke to His followers: “The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.” The obvious application lies in using whatever assets you have to express the love of God to men so that at your death (“when you fail”) and come to the judgment of Christ, there will be an everlasting consequence of your ministering of your Master’s assets.

The virtue that is missing in the unjust steward is the chief one expected of us: faithfulness. He was, after all, unjust.

### **d. Faithfulness**

“Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”<sup>448</sup>



Why is this so? Faithfulness in use of the little assets of the present moment (“the unrighteous mammon”) is the demonstration of faithfulness in an absolute sense (“in much”). We should remember that the present assets in our hands are in a sense only illusory because they are associated with a world under judgment. But at the judgment the assets will be “true” riches in the sense of their unchanging reality. Then too faithfulness in the assets of another (in the present time) is rewarded by receipt of assets belonging uniquely to you. Faithful service is ultimately the test of love, and love, because all consuming, can only have one object.

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me **five** talents: behold, I have gained beside them **five** talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I

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<sup>446</sup> Revelation 1:8

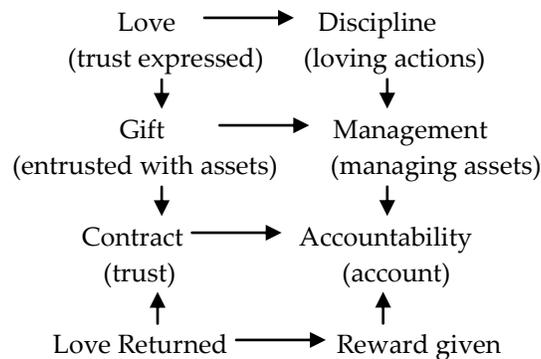
<sup>447</sup> Psalm 111:10

<sup>448</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:2

will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”<sup>449</sup>

The delivery of goods (assets, talents (as in the measure of wealth in the weight of a precious metal)) is a gift that is an expression of trust. The size of the gift is not important to the test of whether the Master’s love (trust) is met by the servant’s love (service). Rather the size of the trust is dependant on the several abilities. From this we learn that even the least able are still capable of great love for God which is the real issue. Assets and freedom are the ground in which loving service is expected to grow. “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”<sup>450</sup> “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”<sup>451</sup> Gain as with the parable of the unjust steward, the issue of accounting with reward is presented. Taken together we see a pattern emerge:

**Stewards of God (trusted managers of assets)**



Notice laziness always looks for an excuse. But God is not deceived. There remain for us two questions to ask. What are the assets we have? What are we doing to manage them?

<sup>449</sup> Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>450</sup> Titus 1:7-9

<sup>451</sup> 1 Peter 4:10

Clearly time is important among them. But really all is of grace. Rather than see discipleship as compassionate giving (which it is), why not look upon our disciples (the recipients of our beneficence) as eternally profitable people, and our gifts as investments in their lives? A kind word, a listening ear, a small gift at the right time can be the vehicles of the “manifold grace of God” of which we are the stewards. Who can say how far the consequences of God’s grace will be? May we not make every moment, our management of every asset to be accounted for as an expression of our love for God. Love does not know times and seasons but guarantees its reality by constancy. We call that constancy - **fidelity**. We have spoken of the connection between love and fidelity but there is one more observation. The steward’s fidelity is not just for show. His is a fidelity, like his love for his master is day in and day out. That constancy or fidelity we accord another descriptor: **integrity**. Coming as it does from the concept of oneness, integrity means oneness with his master, oneness borne of love.

#### **e. Obedience**

“Now therefore, my son, obey (שמע shama) my voice according to that which I command thee.”<sup>452</sup>



With obedience we come full circle. Obedience to his master’s wishes express or implied is always uppermost in the mind of a good steward. Obedience lies at the heart of stewardship in particular and, as mentioned, it is the measure, *par excellence* of the spiritual life. Obedience is the essential element of the relationship of man with God. God speaks and man, hearing lovingly and therefore attentively, obeys. While the Old Testament sets forth obedience as a conformity to a set of rules (365 prohibitive and 278 positive commands), there is still the sense that obedience is not a mindless or a mechanical activity. There is a connection between hearing and obeying. This is made clear in a typical mention of the word “obey” שמע shama` (pronounced shaw-mah') a primitive root which means to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention), to obey. Obedience to the law, which is so often seen as mechanical, was presented by David in Psalm 1 as the outgrowth of a process of “hearing” which involves delight and meditation as well as doing. The twin themes of delight and meditation become the grounds of good stewardship just as fasting is the proper ground for alms. The activity of hearing-obeying has both affective and cognitive aspects in addition to its volitional aspect (here expressed negatively). David’s view of obedience goes far beyond mechanical conformity to a fixed set of injunctions and positive commands. It involves the response of the whole person to the unbounded but revealed will of God.

For the steward, obedience is not an {external/finite/coerced/fear-ridden/closed-system}, but an {internal/infinite/free-will/loving-joyful/open-system}. He is the same whether his Master is present or not; buying or selling always with the master’s best interests at heart. Does the Master have servants? The steward will be to those as he knows his master would be. A bad servant both misuses his Master’s assets and abuses his Master’s servants.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Genesis 27:8

<sup>453</sup> Luke 12:40-46



## Conclusion

So why make disciples? We make disciples because Jesus asked us to and there are consequences in the lives of others (as well as our own), for even our smallest efforts.

Permit me to illustrate.



Dianne and I had gone for a Friday afternoon ride. We found our way to Litchfield County and after visiting a historic house there went over into Dutchess county New York for supper. As we were going home, Dianne remembered the story of an old acquaintance of her family, Jesse Langdon. He had lived somewhere around here. He rode with Teddy Roosevelt as one of his rough riders, she said. Intrigued, I searched on the internet that night for information about this old family acquaintance and I found this most remarkable story....

When Theodore Roosevelt lost his first wife and mother in the same day, his grief was so great that he seemed consumed by it. Although he had achieved some notoriety as a reform politician, his career seemed over. He went out west to North Dakota and started a cattle ranch. His herds were tended by a local veterinarian, named Langdon who had a son Jesse. Jesse got to know and like Roosevelt. Eventually Roosevelt left ranching and reentered politics.

"In strict confidence, I should welcome any war,..." wrote Theodore Roosevelt in 1891. "The country needs one." And soon enough the bellicose assistant secretary of the Navy had his wish: after a long period of neutrality, President William McKinley (to whom T. R. ascribed "no more backbone than a chocolate éclair") decided to intervene on behalf of the Cuban revolutionaries fighting for independence from Spain. On April 25, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain. Roosevelt—father of six—itched to get into the action. He resigned from the Navy Department and announced he was going to join the cavalry regiment being organized by Colonel Leonard Wood. The press promptly termed the outfit the Rough Riders.

In 1898, shortly before Langdon's seventeenth birthday, he heard about Roosevelt's proposed regiment. He hopped a train and rode hobo-style to Washington. He vividly recalls hurrying to the second-floor recruiting office on E Street near the Capitol. There he bumped into Roosevelt, who was coming down the outside stairway. The surprised youth blurted out, "You're Teddy Roosevelt!" As Langdon recalls it:

Colonel Roosevelt stopped and said, "Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Why," I said, "I'm Jesse Langdon from North Dakota, and I've beaten my way here on the train to join your Rough Riders."

"Well, can you ride a horse?" asked Roosevelt. [Langdon, who could run a hundred yards in ten seconds, was well on his way to a full growth of six feet and 225 pounds.]

"I can ride anything that's got hair on it," I said. He laughed. He had a funny way of laughing. He just went "Hah!" with his teeth set, and those in front showing. Then he told me to go upstairs and tell them he had sent me.

During the charges up Kettle and San Juan hills, Jesse jammed his bayonet into a sand bank to provide a step for other rough riders to ascend the steep bank. After his friends helped him up, he continued his advance. He was wearing the familiar the stiff-brimmed hats peculiar to the regiment. He fired a round and tried to load another round, his carbine got jammed on a grain of sand that lodged in the bolt when he had used the rifle as a step. As he bent to work the lock of

his carbine free, he bowed his head and a bullet went through the back brim of his hat "If I had been standing straight," he speculated, "it would have hit me right in the forehead."

There it was the story of a grain of sand that got stuck in a rifle bolt over 100 years ago. Had it not happened, Jesse would have been killed and never returned to marry Marie Story a friend of Dianne's mother Florence Scott. Dianne would never have met him or told me about him and I would not have had this story to tell you.<sup>454</sup>

As I thought about this story, I was struck that, although the consequences of that 'grain of sand' had rippled out for over a hundred years to my life, I had a choice to either omit it's telling or to tell it to others. I chose the latter and now that story continues to impact other lives, I hope yours. The events of our Lord Jesus life are far more affecting. The widow's mite, small and unobservable as it was, entered the mind of mankind with the telling first by Jesus and then by countless people. It has become proverbial. Jesus speaks of another small thing.

"And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it."<sup>455</sup>

The consequences of even a small action can be out of all proportion to its presenting occurrence. But the consequences of those remarkable events are not inherently assured; they are also dependant on our choices. When we say "no" to passing on their effect on ourselves to others, we end their consequences in so far as it was in our power to propagate them. When, however, we say "yes" to passing them on, we participate in the building of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is just such a choice as this that underlies all Christian disciplines. Give as it has been given to you.

"I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>456</sup>

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."<sup>457</sup>

When we choose to deny ourselves, to live self sacrificially, for the love of others, to that extent we fulfill our role in furthering the Kingdom of Heaven, and like the grain of sand in Jesse Langdon's carbine or the widow's mite, we never really know how much is at stake. But eternity will surely show the vast impact of such living both of others and our own lives. Remember little is much when God is in it! I hope under God that these few thoughts will be a help.

"His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."<sup>458</sup>



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<sup>454</sup> Jesse, incidentally, lived long enough to be the oldest surviving member of Roosevelt's Rough Riders, which explains the roughly 33000 references to him on the internet!

<sup>455</sup> Mark 4:30

<sup>456</sup> Acts 20:35

<sup>457</sup> Luke 6:38

<sup>458</sup> Matthew 25:21