

The Church - Covenant of Disciples

In these last weeks we have considered the covenant relationship we have as a church with Christ and with each other. First, we recognize the covenant of love that Christ has for *us* in the church, which is the Bride of Christ. Last week, we started examining the central purposes for covenant relationship in the church. The first purpose of the church we looked at was how we are supposed to pursue the bonds of fellowship. For those who are still babes in Christ, it will seem like that love is all we need. As we mature and serve Christ, we start to see more depth to our relationship. It is interesting to note that this is exactly what the Bible translators had in mind when they worked on 1 Corinthians 13. When you look there, you will see the word *charity* used. All through the New Testament the Greek word *agape* is translated as *love*. The reason why it was translated as *charity* is because that was the word that spoke of *love in action* that the translators wanted to convey. When we serve Christ in love, there is more than a sense of emotion involved. There is action.

To serve *also* requires a sense of discipline. This is why Christ, in the Great Commission, did not speak of making *converts*, but making *disciples*. It is true that when someone gets saved they are converted from being a child of the world into a child of God, but it is more appropriate to speak of us as *disciples* which is more like being an apprentice in ministry. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus references teaching two times. The second time, it is the usual word for teaching. The first time is different and refers to making *disciples* of all nations.

Matt 28:19-20 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have

commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

As believers form churches, they are not supposed to just get together for a big party every week. So many church attenders assume that church services happen automatically. They take the church for granted, not realizing that organizing and maintaining the church takes discipline. There are believers who think they are being noble when they say they are against organized religion. They imagine they are rejecting rigid, bureaucratic, and lifeless institutions in favor of a free-flowing spirituality. What they don't realize is that their opportunity to hear the Gospel was made possible because previous generations became disciples and organized to provide a church where they could hear that message. Their very salvation would be very nearly impossible if people had not been organized. If an average person had religious inclinations, they would not walk down the street in the hope of finding a random person who knew something about God. God's people, the church, are organized because the Gospel is message is serious and not just a collection of random thoughts and musings of random people.

Churches are always challenged by the world where the line between truth and error is being blurred. The danger is not always in bold rebellion, but in the slow drift of hearts untaught, unanchored, and unprepared. A church that neglects discipleship will inevitably exchange conviction for convenience and depth for shallowness.

1. The Un-Disciplined Church -

What is the danger of not becoming disciples? Look at the problems of the Emerging Church movement:

The Emerging Church movement "arose as a protest against the institutional church, modernism and seeker-sensitive churches... It has encouraged

evangelicals to take note of cultural trends and has emphasized authenticity among believers."

It has an emphasis on narrative rather than propositions ('tell me your story, don't explain principles')."

There is an emphasis "on affections and feelings over against rational, linear thought; on experience over truth; on inclusion rather than exclusion; on the corporate over the individualistic, etc. Tolerance is the principal virtue. [telling someone they are wrong either intellectually, doctrinally, or morally is disdained]."

— b a s e d o n
www.theopedia.com/Emerging_church

Don't choose a church based on the convenience of truth. "I don't like the teaching of such and such church." That is fine as long as those teachings are false. But people use this as a means of justifying their own doctrine as created by them (as in the case of a church teaching that homosexuality is normal). "I don't like it that $1 + 1 = 2$. It makes me feel poor when I balance my checkbook. I want it to equal 1 million. That would make me feel better." How smart is someone going to feel when they stand in front of the Judge of the universe for writing bounced checks in their righteousness account? They use the wrong standard: a personal feeling instead of God's standard.

People are woefully ignorant of God's Word. A pastor asked a class of Sunday School children, "Who broke down the walls of Jericho?" A boy answered, "Not me, sir!" Upset, the pastor asked the teacher, "Is this typical?" She replied, "I believe this boy is honest, and I really don't think he did it." The pastor went to the head deacon. "I've known the boy and the teacher for years," said the deacon, "and neither of them would do such a thing." Aghast, the pastor went to the Christian Education Board. "Pastor," said the chairman, "let's not make an issue of this. Let's just pay

for the damage and charge it to maintenance."

Hos 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

Satan destroys us by God's people not in covenant to study together. Destruction is not more likely to come from tempting the pastor or the Sunday School teacher to false doctrine. It is more likely to come from tempting the uneducated.

The world often targets students because they are especially vulnerable, whether from being glued to their phones, the distractions of social life, or simply a hunger for meaning and significance. Groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and other cults often find success among those who have spent years tuning out in church and neglecting Sunday School. When these students encounter someone who seems confident and well-versed in Scripture, they're easily impressed, especially if they've never been grounded in the truth themselves.

2. The Disciplers of the Church -

To make disciples out of the body of Christ, God has not left His church to figure it out alone. He gifted leaders, to the church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers – so that the church would not remain immature, scattered, or shallow.

Eph 4:11-16 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of

the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 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;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which 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.

These men were given to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. Their purpose is to bring believers to maturity, so that the whole body is built up in truth and love.

2Tim 3:14-17 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

The goal of all this leadership is not to create a clergy class above the congregation. It is to bring every member to full maturity "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." This means that every

believer is called to grow up, to stop being spiritual children, easily swayed by fads, false doctrines, or impressive personalities. Discipleship includes doctrinal stability, moral integrity, and spiritual discernment.

We are told in verse 14 that without proper teaching, believers can be "tossed to and fro" by false doctrine and deceptive teachers who lie in wait to lead people astray. But when the leaders of the church do their job – and when the people receive their ministry – something beautiful happens: the body "maketh increase... unto the edifying of itself in love." Growth becomes mutual. The church becomes a place where each part supports the other, all working together toward Christlikeness.

Paul gives Timothy a similar charge in 1 Timothy 4:6–7.

1Tim 4:6-7 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

A faithful minister is one who nourishes others with "the words of faith and of good doctrine." He warns against wasting time with empty speculations—what Paul calls "profane and old wives' fables"—and urges spiritual discipline. Just as physical exercise benefits the body, exercising ourselves in godliness brings lasting benefit to the soul.

3. The Discipline of the Word -

The discipline of the word is found the way the Bereans found it.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily,

whether those things were so.

Ps 1:2-3 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Isa 8:20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Time Magazine's cover story for April 1, 2007, was "The Case for Teaching the Bible." It is subtitled "Should the Holy Book be on the public school menu? Yes. It's the bedrock of Western culture. The article emphasizes that the Bible is not only the most widely read and influential book in history, but also the key to understanding much of Western literature and culture. Countless "classic" works, from Shakespeare to Hemingway, are filled with Biblical allusions that lose their depth and meaning without knowledge of Scripture. In the same way, major moments in U.S. history and reform movements drew directly on the Bible's language and ideas, making it indispensable for grasping both literature and history.

4. We must Study

2Tim 2:14-16 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

¹⁵Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

¹⁶But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

You might hear the catch phrases of

people who are tired of doctrinal disputes. They say, "Doctrine divides, but love unites." "God didn't invent doctrine, man did." But doctrine *is* meant to make a difference and God *did* "invent" doctrine. Truth matters.

2Tim 4:2-4 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

1Tim 4:13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

1Tim 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

5. We Disciple Each Other -

We must covenant with each other to study with each other

2Peter 1:19-20 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

²⁰Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

There is no scripture of *private* interpretation. All Scripture will have only one interpretation. It might have thousands of application, but only one interpretation. There is no secret knowledge about the Scripture that anyone has. It is not a matter of what the Scripture means to you. If there is truth,

it will be equally accessible. Everyone should be able to see it if they use normal ways to examine it.

When we have a baby dedication, we have a covenant for the parents and for the church during the service. I try to keep the dedication as much as possible from being an empty, meaningless religious ceremony. It's important to not be just a passive observer when we have the dedication. Listen carefully to the words because they speak more of *our* dedication than the dedication of the child.

R e c o g n i z i n g t h e
responsibility that you have as a congregation toward this child, do you promise to deal with him lovingly and tenderly, seeking to manifest the true Christian spirit toward him always?

Do you promise to provide spiritual instruction for him at this church, giving of your time, talents and money to make this possible, so long as you are a part of this congregation?

Do you promise to be a godly, spiritual encouragement for those who care for this child as they seek to raise him?

Do you promise to set forth before him an example of Christian charity, service, and zeal that he may know true Christian character?

We must learn as much as possible to be that kind of example. We try to teach about the significance of the ancient culture and how it relates to the issues of our modern culture. We try to teach about the doctrines of God in the Bible and how they answer the false doctrines of the cults. We try to teach about living for God. It can't be done in just one half hour per week.

I have to regularly check the things that I am thinking of teaching with others because I have to anticipate the process of give and take there will be so that I will be learning as well.

Prov 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron;
so a man sharpeneth the
countenance of his friend.

Prov 1:5 A wise man will hear,
and will increase learning; and a
man of understanding shall attain
unto wise counsels:

Prov 12:1 Whoso loveth
instruction loveth knowledge: but
he that hateth reproof is brutish.

Prov 26:12 Seest thou a man
wise in his own conceit? there is
more hope of a fool than of him.

Will you fulfill the covenant to study together? Would you like to enter into the covenant to study together? Can you be counted on to be there for each other?

People think they can lightly avoid making a commitment to discipleship. They don't realize that they are merely being self-centered and rebellious.

Eph 4:15-16 But speaking the
truth in love, may grow up into
him in all things, which is the
head, even Christ:

¹⁶From whom the whole body
fitly joined together and
compacted by that which 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.

Acts 2:41-42 Then they that
gladly received his word were
baptized: and the same day there
were added *unto them* about three
thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly
in the apostles' doctrine and
fellowship, and in breaking of
bread, and in prayers.

The call to discipleship is not a personal upgrade or a private study plan. It's a church-wide covenant to grow together in Christ. Discipleship is how we grow out of immaturity, avoid the

drift of culture, and become a light in a dark world. If we do not intentionally disciple one another in the Word, the world will be glad to do it for us. But when we commit together as parents, pastors, young believers, and mature saints to love, learn, and live the truth of Scripture, we become what Christ died and rose again to build: a church fitly joined together, growing up in all things into Him who is the Head.

Before you can grow as a disciple, you must first be born again. You cannot follow Christ until you've come to Him by faith, confessing your sin and trusting in His finished work on the cross. He died for your sin, rose again for your salvation, and now calls you, not just to believe in a moment, but to follow Him for a lifetime. You can have your sins forgiven and know that you have a home in heaven because of His sacrifice. If you've never made that decision, today is the day to surrender your heart and become His disciple.

And to those of you who are already saved: are you truly a disciple, or just a convert? Have you entered into covenant with Christ's church, to learn, to grow, to study, and to serve with your brothers and sisters? Have you taken your place in the body, or are you just attending without contributing? The Lord is not calling us to a *casual* Christianity, but to a *committed* one, a disciplined life, joined to a disciplined church. Do you avail yourself of all the opportunities of learning other than Sunday morning? I get questions all the time from believers that they would get answers to if they attended the other services.

Will you say today, "Yes, Lord. I will follow You, and I will walk in covenant with Your people"? Let us not merely attend church. Let us be the church. Let us grow up together into Christ.

Addendum – Author David Van Biema offered this insight:

Simply put, the Bible is the most influential book ever written. Not only is the Bible the best-selling book of all time, it is

the best-selling book of the year every year. In a 1992 survey of English teachers to determine the top-10 required "book-length works" in high school English classes, plays by Shakespeare occupied three spots and the Bible none. And yet, let's compare the two: Beauty of language: Shakespeare, by a nose. Depth of subject matter: toss-up. Breadth of subject matter: the Bible. Numbers published, translated etc: Bible. Number of people martyred for: The Bible. Number of wars attributed to: The Bible. Solace and hope provided to billions: you guessed it. And Shakespeare would almost surely have agreed. According to one estimate, he alludes to Scripture some 1,300 times. As for the rest of literature, when your seventh-grader reads *The Old Man and the Sea*, a teacher could tick off the references to Christ's Passion – the bleeding of the old man's palms, his stumbles while carrying his mast over his shoulder, his hat cutting his head – but wouldn't the thrill of recognition have been more satisfying on their own?

If literature doesn't interest you, you also need the Bible to make sense of the ideas and rhetoric that have helped drive U.S. history. "The shining city on the hill"? That's Puritan leader John Winthrop quoting Matthew to describe his settlement's covenantal standing with God. In his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln noted sadly that both sides in the Civil War "read the same Bible" to bolster their opposing claims. When Martin Luther King Jr. talked of "Justice rolling down like waters" in his "I Have a Dream" speech, he was consciously enlisting the Old Testament prophet Amos, who first spoke

those words. The Bible provided the argot – and theological underpinnings – of women's suffrage and prison-reform movements.

— Eric Buehrer, Gateways to Better Education Newsletter

Matt 28:19-20

1. The Un-Disciplined Church - Hos 4:6
2. The Disciples of the Church - Eph 4:11-16, 2Tim 3:14-17, 1Tim 4:6-7
3. The Discipline of the Word - Acts 17:11, Ps 1:2-3, Isa 8:20
4. We must Study 2Tim 4:14-16, 4:2-4, 1Tim 4:13, 4:16
5. We Disciple Each Other - 2Pet 1:19-20, Prov 27:17, 1:5, 12:1, 26:12, Eph 4:15-16, Acts 2:41-42,