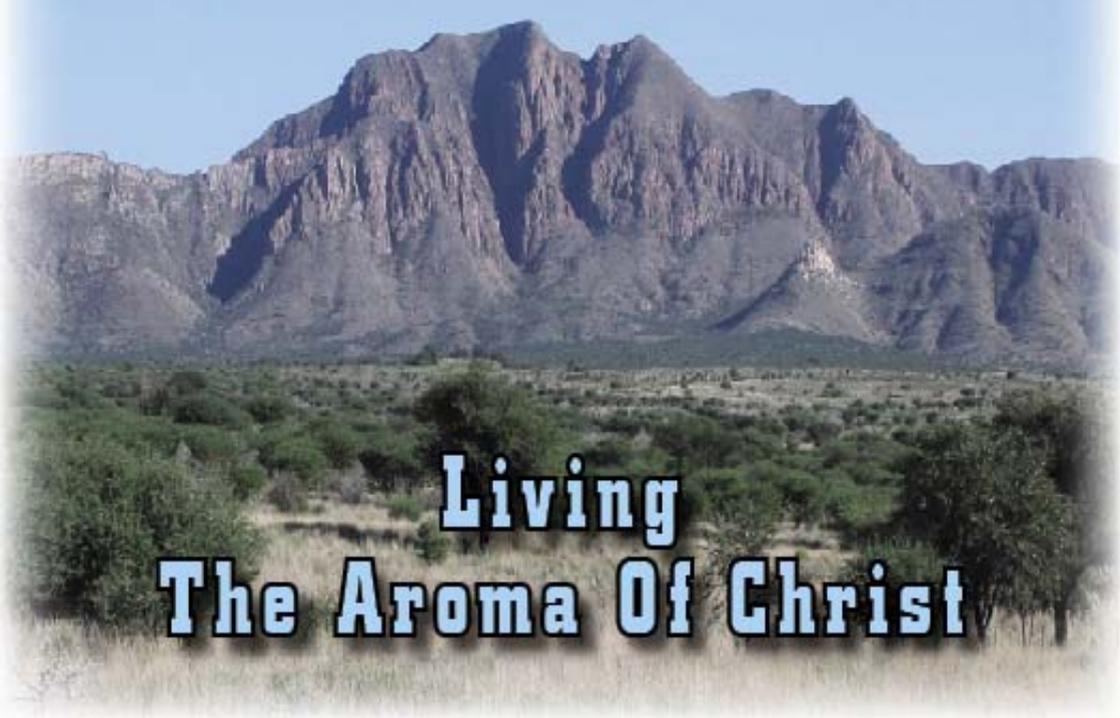


DISCIPLES OF DIVINITY



**Living
The Aroma Of Christ**

DICKSON

Disciples Of Divinity

Roger E. Dickson

Preface – 3

Introduction – 4

1 – *Totally Offered Sacrifices* – 5

2 – *Members One Of Another* – 13

3 – *Enemies Of Discipleship* – 16

4 – *Able Discipleship* – 21

5 – *Shoe Discipleship* – 27

6 – *Disturbing Discipleship* – 34

7 – *Tater Discipleship* – 40

8 – *Example Discipleship* – 47

9 – *Food Discipleship* – 54

10 – *Militant Discipleship* – 61

11 – *Multiple Discipleship* – 68

12 – *Envision The Summit* – 73

13 – *Victory On The Summit* – 83

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Preface

Many of the chapters of this book were taught by the author almost fifty years ago. Nevertheless, the message of these lessons are as relevant today as they were decades ago. Some of the metaphorical subpoints of a couple outlines have been preached for years by preachers around the world, though the content of the chapters in this book are original with the author. The message of the chapters must continue to be preached, and for this reason, they are contained in this book to aid Bible teachers to better explain discipleship.

Old truths never die. Though these lessons were delivered many years ago, the truth of their content remains unchanged today. The beautiful thing about the word of God is that its teachings remain unchanged throughout millennia. Illustrations of truths may be made more relevant—which thing we have tried to do—but the truths of God’s word remain unchanged throughout time.

It is the struggle of the disciple of Divinity to be clothed in the aroma of the One after whom he calls himself a follower. The theme of this book was written to aid readers in their struggle to be like Jesus. We have approached this struggle from both a positive and negative perspective. We felt that it was necessary to approach the subject of discipleship from a negative side in order to lay the foundation for personal correction. If one can recognize his or her flaws, then he or she can implement positive corrections in order to grow as a disciple.

Every effort has been made to use the textbook of the Bible as the road map

for personal development. Though some principles of psychology have been sourced, it has been the firm belief of the author that the Bible is the best textbook on life. Modern psychology has a tendency to follow the norms of modern society. Reference to such norms as the final authority in moral behavior often leads to social dysfunction and decay. For this reason, the Bible has been sourced for those principles that will sustain society. Because the early disciples survived in a hostile environment, and without all the modern books on psychology, through their discipleship they proved that the eternal principles of the Bible work. We have thus chosen to relate to our readers those biblical moral principles that have proven functional for centuries.

We want to encourage our readers to share the material of the chapters. Each chapter is designed to be presented for the benefit of those who are seeking to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. No credit need be given to the author, for the author claims no copyright over any biblical truth that is revealed in the word of God. Readers are encouraged to feel free to help build up the body of Christ by teaching those eternal biblical truths that encourage relational behavior among the members. It is our prayer that the messages of this book will aid those Bible teachers who have a sincere desire to apply the word of God as our textbook on life. It is our prayer that in some way this book will aid these teachers to proclaim those eternal truths that encourage us to be better people by patterning our lives after Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

A renowned poet can take a piece of paper, write a few words on it, and the paper will be worth millions. A wealthy man can write his name on a piece of paper and the paper check is worth millions. God can write His name on a finite sinner and the sinner becomes far more valuable than anything of this world. The omnipresent God who can focus even on the hairs of the head of the created, has the compassion to transform that which is mortal into immortality. Even our inadequate understanding of the power and ability of this great God is enough to compel us to submission. Our slightest comprehension of the Incomprehensible humbles us to follow Him. And once we allow Him to write His name on us, we are far more valuable than the words of a poet or the worth of a millionaire. In His sight, we are priceless and worthy of eternity.

The foolish ones of this world who deny the existence of our God will never understand what and why we are as we are. They will never understand that it is the Great Violinist who creates the music, not the instrument by which the music is revealed to the audience. Disciples of Divinity allow God to play a majestic song for the world through them. The world thus sees Him through them. The God who created all things can create anew our lives in order that we reveal a harmonic melody of joy before the world.

When we allow God to be the needle, and us the thread, He will stitch our lives together into a beautiful garment that is fit for the King. Discipleship is our privilege to reveal to the world the One who holds us together. True discipleship reveals to the world that our lives are not of this world. And being not of this world, it is spiritually overwhelming to be in the control of His supervision in order that the world may see that we are “other world” minded. Since we have relinquished our lives to Him, He in turn has exalted us above angels. It is our earnest desire, therefore, to continue as His disciples in order to make our way into His presence at the sound of the last trumpet. Therefore, we seek to be the heart of God through whom He feels the pain of this world. We seek to be His mouth through whom He speaks the gospel of salvation to the world. And we seek to be His hands through whom He ministers to the needy of this world. We are disciples of Divinity.

Chapter 1

TOTALLY OFFERED SACRIFICES

Romans 12:1-8 is one of the greatest contexts of Scripture concerning instructions by which disciples throughout the world can connect with God and function with one another. It is a context that permeates all cultural barriers. No greater challenge to unity could have existed at the time when Paul wrote the statements of this context, than the cultural, philosophical and sociological separation that existed between the Jews and Gentiles. No Jew was to eat with a Gentile. No Jew was to be caught even in the house of a Gentile. Gentiles were tolerated by the Jews only because the Jews had to live in a world of Gentiles. And yet in this social environment, God instituted a fellowship of people wherein both Jews and Gentiles could be what is stated in the following social environment:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gl 3:26-28).

The comments of the text of Romans 12:1-8 follows Paul's arguments that the Gentiles have been grafted into the family of God through the sacrificial

offering of the Son of God. They have been grafted in through faith. As some Jews were cut off because of unbelief, believing Gentiles were grafted into the true vine through faith. Paul convincingly revealed,

“Some of the branches [Jews] were broken off, and you [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rm 11:17).

Being grafted in, and maintaining the unity of this cultural fellowship, required a total commitment to the True Vine. In order to maintain the cultural identity of Christianity, one must forsake all those cultural identities that would harm the one body of Christ. This does not mean that Christians are to be culturally cloned. However, it does mean that there are to be no cultural barriers that would separate members of the body from one another. In order to accomplish this feat of fellowship, total commitment to the Head of the body is necessary. And if the Jews of the first century could accomplish this cultural feat, then there is absolutely no cultural barrier today that should keep members of the body separated from one another in Christ.

Discipleship to Divinity is not easy in reference to total commitment, espe-

cially in areas where individuals differ culturally. For this reason, we sometimes culturally fudge on the Holy Spirit's call for a total sacrifice. The Holy Spirit mandated that it will take "*a living sacrifice*" in order to behave according to the fellowship that must exist in preserving the unity of the faith. Each member of the body must be totally committed to being this sacrifice.

When the Spirit calls on us to present ourselves in total sacrifice to accomplish the mandate of cultural unity, we sometimes think about partial sacrifices, that is, how much we can keep ourselves culturally separated from sacrificing ourselves totally for those who are of a different cultural background. When Paul talks about total transformation in our thinking and behavior, we think more of a halfhearted commitment. We think doctrine, not culture. We thus put limits on our cultural identity, while we satisfy ourselves that we are still united as disciples of the One who gave up being on an equality with Deity culturally and in order to become in all ways culturally as finite humans (See Ph 2:5-11). We thus exalt "doctrinal unity" over "cultural unity."

It is easier to be doctrinally united than culturally united. When we preach total commitment to one another, we sometimes justify those cultural traits that cause division, while at the same time assume that our doctrinal unity will cover the sins of our cultural division.

We forget that culture involves relationships, and Christianity is about relationships. Two brethren may be united

doctrinally, but they abide in sin if they allow cultural differences to keep them divided from one another. This is the challenge about which Paul was writing when he came to the context of Romans 12. No individual disciple, or group of disciples, has a right to neglect a group who may be of a different cultural heritage (See At 6:1-7). Since both Jews and Gentiles have been grafted in by faith, then both Jews and Gentiles must accept one another in Christ through faith. And as he continues to explain throughout Romans 12, it is faith that moves both Jews and Gentiles to function as the one body.

A. Transitioning into a total walk.

"Therefore, I urge you, brethren ..."
(Rm 12:1).

Paul begins the context of Romans 12 with the word "therefore." "Therefore" is reflective. He wants his readers to reflect on the arguments that have been made in chapters 9-11 in order to make a relational commitment that is revealed in the context of chapter 12. In other words, because of the totality of the sacrificial work that God accomplished through the cross to graft both Jews and Gentiles into Christ through faith, then each disciple of faith must make the same commitment to be one in fellowship with the universal body of Christ.

This is taking up our cross and being a disciple of Jesus (Lk 14:27). Romans 12 is the spiritual conclusion to Paul's arguments in the preceding chapters of Romans, but specifically the conclusion to the redemptive work of the Son

of God who sacrificed Himself in order to graft the Gentiles into the true vine. Since the Jews were saved by grace, then they in turn must extend grace to the Gentiles. This is the disciple's walk in gratitude and thanksgiving.

B. Walking reasonable worship:

*"Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service**" (Rm 12:1).*

No greater call to discipleship could have been made. We commit ourselves to the One who became a heavenly disciple on our behalf in reference to our spiritual disconnection from God through our sins (See Is 59:2; Ph 2:5-11).

Since the behavior of the Israelites of the Old Testament is to be an example for our discipleship (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:6,11), what happened to some of the Israelites immediately after they came out of Egyptian bondage should be heeded. They were *"baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (1 Co 10:2). They too *"drank of the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the Spiritual Rock that followed them. And that Rock was Christ"* (1 Co 10:4).

"But God was not pleased with many of them ..." (1 Co 10:5). God was not pleased with many of them because they did not give themselves totally into His care. They did not walk straight to the land of promise and conquer it through faith in the power of God to work through them. Because of their lack of

faith, therefore, those who did not walk by faith were cut off. And when there is no total commitment today on the part of some who have been baptized into Christ, then there is the danger of being cut off for lack of faith. A faith that will not drive us to the promise land through obedience, is a dead faith that will maroon us in the wilderness of sin.

Paul used the word "sacrifice" as a metaphor in reference to our commitment. An Old Testament sacrifice was totally given for the purpose for which it was intended. No partial sacrifices were allowed under the Sinai law. Paul explained in Romans 6:13:

Neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

1. Living: The sacrifice of our lives must be living (total) and active (recognizable). Disciples cannot be monks who hide away in a monastery, and at the same time, profess a total commitment to discipleship. The totally committed life is relational. And to be relational, disciples must be totally committed to relate with one another. Disciples, therefore, must not be *"lagging behind in diligence,"* but *"fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"* (Rm 12:11). And *"serving the Lord"* means totally committed to serving others on behalf of the Lord. The totally committed disciple serves the Lord by serving others.

2. Holy: Purity (holiness) must be characteristic of those who have wholly committed themselves as a living sacrifice (See 1 Pt 1:15). It is a contradiction to claim that one is totally committed, but at the same time has not wholly given himself to function as a part of the body. The total sacrifice is the definition of holiness. The purity of one's discipleship is identified in the fact that his sacrifice involves the whole of his or her life to function relationally with all members of the body.

3. Acceptable: Unless the sacrifice is living and total, then it cannot be acceptable to God. One could not drag a dead animal to the altar of sacrifice and expect it to be accepted by God. One could not offer only the hind quarters of the sacrificed animal. No sacrifice of the Sinai law was to be blemished. The prophet Habakkuk judged the people unrighteous because they sought to offer blemished sacrifices to the Lord, as well as robbing God by holding back all that was to be given in a tithe to the Lord (See Hk). Their sacrifices were not acceptable because they were partial or blemished.

In the case of Habakkuk's generation, the people were "keeping back" the best sacrifices for themselves. In the same way, those who pose themselves to be totally committed Christians, often hold back the best for themselves. And those dead Christians (inactive) who drag themselves to the assembly on Sunday are fooling themselves. If the leadership judges their assembly to be dead, then it is composed of dead sacrifices sitting on

pews.

Disciples to Divinity are "*as living stones*" who "*are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1 Pt 2:5). It is not difficult to understand what the preceding statement means. Jesus explained:

And you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mk 12:30).

And again: "*If anyone will come after Me,*" Jesus continued to explain, "*let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*" (Lk 9:23).

We live in a departmentalized world, the thinking of which is totally contrary to Paul's definition of the total sacrifice. Our usual day begins in the morning with a departmentalized time for breakfast. We then move into the department of secular work. Once our work day is signed off with the sound of a bell, we close out the Work Department and move on to a variety of departments: Sports Department, Family Department, Date Department, Television Department, and Hobby Department.

On Sunday there is the Religion Department. Unfortunately, we have confined God to the Religion Department, opening up this department with an "opening prayer" and closing it off with a "closing prayer." As long as God remains in His department, we are content to believe that we are His totally com-

mitted people between the “closing prayer” on Sunday morning and the “opening prayer” the following Sunday.

We forget that the totally committed life has no departments from which God is excluded. Totally sacrificed disciples establish all their “departments” on the basis that they are totally sacrificed disciples to the God of heaven every minute of their lives. The only closing bell one will hear in reference to his discipleship is the sound of his last breath on earth.

4. Reasonable service: Translators have a difficult time translating a word that is here used in the Greek text. The Greek word is *latreia*. The *New International Version* reads “spiritual act of worship.” The *American Standard Version* reads, “spiritual service,” with “worship” in the footnote. But in reflecting back to the word “therefore,” with which the text of Romans 12 was introduced, and the context of Paul’s argument in concluding the preceding chapters, the *International King James Version* might have a better reading: “Reasonable service.” In view of all that God has done for us, as explained by Paul to the end of chapter 11, it is only reasonable that we present our lives in active service (worship) to the Lord. There can be no limits to the totality of our service to God. For this reason, the totality of our lives is a worshipful response (service) to the grace of God.

The Greek word *latreia* has a meaningful definition in the context of its use in Romans 12:1. Of the 21 times it is used in the New Testament, the word is

used to refer to worshipful behavior. It is for this reason that translators have a difficult time concerning whether to translate the word either “worship” or “service” in Romans 12:1. But as previously explained, the disciple’s walk in gratitude to the grace of God is a walk of worshipful service.

The “living sacrifice” of the context helps us to define how *latreia* is used in Romans 12:1. We are living sacrifices, and thus our worship is living. It is behavioral. And since the living sacrifice cannot be departmentalized, then the *latreia* of this context cannot be departmentalized. Therefore, the *latreia* of Romans 12:1 is a life-style of worshipful service. It is a vertical relationship with God in order to have a horizontal relationship with the fellow members of the body of Christ.

This is often difficult for some to understand, especially if they come from a background of departmentalized religiosity. It is difficult because so many have confined their worship to a ritualistic performance of ceremonies that are claimed to be worship, which ceremonies are often used to identify whether we are “church.” Once the ceremonies (“acts”) of the Church Department are completed, and signed off with a “closing prayer,” then it is assumed that we are no longer in worship. “Brother, John, would you lead the ‘closing prayer’ to conclude our worship?” Ever hear that request?

A ceremonial “hour of worship” does not fit into the context of Romans 12:1. It is certain that one worships during the “hour of worship.” But it is also

certain that the one who is a living sacrifice worships outside the confines of an “opening and closing prayer” and the ceremonial “hour of worship.”

The living sacrifice does not confine worship to either locations or ceremonies. The totality of his life is a response to the One to whom he has given his life as a sacrifice. His eating a fine lunch is not an “act of worship,” but he worshipfully eats in gratitude to the One who gave the food to be eaten. He drives his bicycle or vehicle, not as an act of worship, but in worshipful thanksgiving of the One who gives all things. All that the living sacrifice either owns or enjoys is appreciated because he recognizes the Great Giver and Provider of all things. His life, therefore, is a worshipful response to the One he recognizes to be the God of all things. His life, therefore, is a natural (reasonable) response (worship) of the one true and living God. His life can be nothing other than “reasonable worship” in view of all that he has and does.

All that the living sacrifice has and does is not a demand on his life. In view of the cross of Christ, it is only natural to present oneself totally to the One who gave Himself totally for all of us. And in looking into the future to what will eventually be given, the living sacrifice gives the totality of his life in worshipful service of the One who will eventually give eternal life.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed

to us (Rm 8:18).

C. Walking the transformed life:

“And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rm 12:2).

James used the word “adultery” in a spiritual context in James 4:4. He used the word metaphorically in order to refer to those who were spiritual covenant breakers. *“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (Js 4:4).*

If one would be transformed into the spiritual image of Jesus, then there must be struggle to divorce one’s mind from this world. Those who would seek to be totally committed to being a living sacrifice, and yet, try to be married to the world, are committing spiritual adultery. *“But if anyone loves the world,”* John explained, *“the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn 2:15).*

“No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt 6:24).

The explanation is as Phillips’ translation of Matthew 6:24: *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.”* The Greek word in the text that is translated “transformed” in Romans 12:2 is *metamorphousthe* (metamorphosis). Disciples of Divinity have

morphed out of the mentality of the world and into the thinking of God. They have transcended in mind to the One who is transcendent in all our lives. It is as the Holy Spirit explained:

If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Cl 3:1,2).

In order to transform (morph) our thinking from the world to things that are above, we must do as Paul exhorted the Ephesians: “*Be renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (Ep 4:23). When we connect Colossians 3:1,2 with Ephesians 4:23, we understand that when one is born anew from the waters of baptism, there is a renewal of focus. After obedience to the gospel, one focuses on those things that are above. The change in focus leads to the renewal. Because there is a refocus, then there can be a transformation. A metamorphosis takes place in one’s behavior because there has been a change in one’s focus. The change from focusing on the things of this world to things that are not of this world, transforms (morphs) us into being the living sacrifice. The refocus defines the living sacrifice.

When there is a change in our focus, there will subsequently be “proof” in our lives concerning what is the “*good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” In other words, our focus on those things that are above leads to a change in our behavior. And by a changed behavior,

one has proved in his life that the will of God has become the foundation upon which he bases his thinking. “*Your-will-be-done-on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven*” identifies the morphed Christian (Mt 6:10).

For example, it is as John wrote: “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). The more we focus on the God who loved us through Jesus (Jn 3:16), the more we walk in gratitude of His will to love others. Herein is the love by which the disciples of Jesus are identified (Jn 13:34,35). Our love of others is the proof that His love has permeated our lives. Paul explained:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another (1 Co 12:9,10).

D. Walking the humble life:

“*For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*” (Rm 12:3).

1. To everyone: The mandate of this text is relational in reference to every Christian. Solomon was right: “*For men to seek their own glory is not glory*” (Pv 25:27). Pride destroys relationships because it pits one disciple against another. Arrogance moves one to exalt himself over his fellow servant in Christ.

When one seeks his own glory, he often moves into “deglorifying” others.

In the sociological context of Romans 12:3, Paul is hitting directly at the pride of the Jews against the grafted in Gentiles. It must be noted what a particular transformed Jewish disciple [Peter] at one time said to a Gentile unbeliever [Cornelius] who had invited the Jew into his home, the following:

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him (At 10:34,35).

By the time Paul arrived at the context of Romans 12, it seems that a reverse cultural prejudice was taking place among the Gentile disciples. He explained this in chapter 11:17-21. The Gentiles were the “wild olive trees” who were grafted into the first Christians who were Jews (Rm 11:17). The Gentiles thus partook of the root and fatness of the Jewish heritage of salvation that came through the Jews. For some reason, some of the Gentile disciples marginalized the importance of this salvational heritage that came through Israel. But Paul answered, “... *do not boast against the branches. But if you [Gentiles] boast, remember that you do not support the root [Israel], but the root you*” (Rm 11:18).

When Jewish branches were broken off because of their unbelief, the Gentile branches were grafted in because of their faith (Rm 11:19). However, the Gentile branches must not forget that they stand

as grafted in branches because of faith (Rm 11:20). For this reason, there is no room for arrogance, but only fear lest one fall because of unbelief. So Paul’s warning to the Gentile branches was direct: “*For if God spared not the natural branches [the Jews], take heed lest He also not spare you [the Gentiles]*” (Rm 11:21).

2. Sobering thoughts: When discussing the transformed life of the disciple, therefore, there is never room for boasting and arrogance in reference to one’s religious heritage. The Jews came to Christ with a heritage of the one true and living God. The Gentiles came to Christ with the heritage of idolatry. But in Christ “*there is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gl 3:28).

This truth should inspire sobriety on the part of everyone who comes into Christ through obedience to the gospel. When Paul wrote concerning our resurrection with Christ out of the waters of baptism, he spoke of “*walking in newness of life*” (Rm 6:4). He was referring to the mind that had been transformed from focusing on the world and self to focusing on God. And since we stand by a faith that focuses on God, then we must be careful not to lose our focus.

3. A measure of faith: “Measure of faith” is defined in Romans 12:3 according to the consistent definition by which we must always understand faith. In verse 4 Paul explained that “... *all members do not have the same func-*

tion.” Verses 3 and 4 connect faith and function. When interpreters define faith as a simple mental ascent of belief without works, they have fallen victim to a twisted understanding of the faith by which disciples of Divinity are to be defined. We must never disconnect faith from function, for if we do, we will end up with a dead faith.

It seems that some of James’ audience had fallen victim to believing that one could be a living sacrifice by disconnecting faith from function. “*What does it profit,*” James questioned these people, “*if someone says he has faith but does not have works [function]? Can faith [alone] save him?*” (Jas 2:14). James’ inspired answer to the question was direct: “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not*

have works, is dead” (Jas 2:17).

No disciple can defend his discipleship on the basis of faith only. If he does, then his faith is dead. If there is no function as a result of our faith, then our faith is not acceptable before God. Both Paul and James agree. If our faith does not motivate one to function as a living sacrifice, then our faith is dead. We are living in the deception of our own lethargy.

Paul answers the “faith only” advocates in a positive manner. The body is universal. Local members manifest the working faith of the universal body, and thus, the universal body is defined by the “measure of [functioning] faith” that is given to each local member to minister to the body with universal results.

Chapter 2

MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER

Romans 12:5 is often overlooked in reference to the function of the body of Christ. As a fellow member of the universal body writing from Macedonia to his fellow members in Rome, Paul reminded the Roman members that we “*are one body in Christ, and everyone members of one another.*” Being a member of the body means that each member is a member of one another. Our needs are ministered to by one another because of our spiritual attachment to one another in Christ. Our membership of the body of Christ, therefore, means that **we are connected to one another as ministers to minister to one another wherever**

and whenever possible.

Each member of the universal body is gifted to function on behalf of Jesus in order to reveal the mutual ministry of the members of the one body. “*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another*” (Rm 12:5). 1 Corinthians 12:12-18 is the commentary passage on what Paul reveals in Romans 12:5: “*For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ*” (1 Co 12:12). Paul was speaking in reference to the universal body of Christ. He reminded the Achaian members concern-

ing the oneness of this body of many members: *“For the body is not one member, but many”* (1 Co 12:14). And because the body is one universally, then a member that is a “foot” that may be in Ephesus cannot say to an “eye” that may be in Corinth, *“I am not of the body,”* and thus disconnect from the universal membership of the body of Christ (1 Co 12:16). Members function locally because of faith, and thus they function universally because they are connected to the one universal body. No one member has a right to disconnect from any other member regardless of where any particular member lives in the world.

Peter’s letter of 1 Peter is a good example of how this works. Peter wrote specifically to Jewish Christians of the Jewish Dispersion (1 Pt 1:1). These Jewish Christians were scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pt 1:1). Imagine the distance these Christians lived from one another? Most certainly did not know one another, but may only have known of one another. Nevertheless, in 1 Peter 4 Peter wrote to these scattered members to *“be hospitable one to another without grumbling”* (1 Pt 4:9). Every Christian has the responsibility of opening up his house to any traveling Christian. Though he may not have previously known a particular traveling member, fellowship in Christ goes beyond knowledge of other members. (See At 18:1-3 when Aquila and Priscilla took in Paul.)

In reference to the function of the universal body, Peter exhorted all these

Christians who were scattered throughout all the previously mentioned Roman provinces: *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Pt 4:10). This is the membership of the body functioning universally as the global family of God.

A very good example of this universal function is the publication of this book. This book was written by a member of the body in South Africa. However, proof reading of the manuscript was conducted by members of the body in America. The webmaster in America functioned to add the book to the Biblical Research Library on the Internet. It was then distributed by members of the worldwide body from the Internet, and then electronically circulated to all the world through emails and the Internet by members of the body. This is the one universal body of Christ functioning as a united force to teach the word of God to people throughout the world.

In the historical context of both Paul and Peter, each writer wanted the individual members of the body not to forget that the whole universal body is made up of individual Jews and Gentiles. For this reason there can be no disconnection of members in reference to race or location, when functioning as the universal church. The members of the body, all of whom are gifted, can never be autonomous from one another. When any group of members bunches up and claims independence from any other group of members, then they are not functioning as a part of the whole body. They are saying in their dec-

laration of autonomy that “we are not of the body,” or “we are the only body of disciples.” If it is wrong for any one member of the body to declare his or her autonomy from any other member of the body, then it is also wrong and divisive for any group of disciples to declare their function to be autonomous from any other group of disciples. The universal body is not composed of a consortium of autonomous local bodies. It is one body, though members have a right to organize together locally in order to accomplish unique functions.

We must never forget as universal disciples of Divinity that “*God has set the members, each one of them [universally] in the body, just as He has desired*” (1 Co 12:18). This is another way of saying, “*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved,*” or as the King James’ rendering of Acts 2:47, “*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*”

When individual members of the universal body function as one body, then the body grows. It grows when each disciple is connected directly to Christ, ...

... from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love (Ep 4:16).

All gifts of every member of the body throughout the world are necessary

for the building up of the body universally. Therefore, disciples must think universally, not just locally, when considering the importance of their gifts to build up of the body of Christ. The point is that all parts (gifted members) of the body are not all the same, but function in harmony as parts of the same body. When one part works, therefore, he or she functions as one with all other parts of the body throughout the world. When one works in teaching (“prophecy”), then he or she works for the benefit of the one universal body. When one works through serving (“ministry”), then he or she is working to serve the whole body. When one works to edify (“exhortation”), then he or she is working to encourage the body to function to the glory of God. Every member of the one universal body is necessary and gifted for the growth of the body throughout the world.

Paul concludes the context of Romans 12 with a “relational constitution” concerning the unified function of all disciples of Divinity (Rm 12:9-21). In his concluding remarks, he uses words as “love,” “kind,” “diligence,” “serving,” “perseverance,” “contributing,” “blessing,” and “rejoicing.” All these words explain the relational function of the members of the one universal body of Christ. These are the marks that identify the nature of the true body. It is by the implementation of these relational marks of identity that the whole body overcomes all evil of this world (Rm 12:21).

Chapter 3

ENEMIES OF DISCIPLESHIP

When we were children in America during the 1950s we grew up being constantly reminded by the slogan, “Bit by bit by every little bit - - EVERY LITTER BIT HURTS.”

We were taught to keep America clean. As school children we were taught never to discard any trash, no matter how small it might be, without discarding it in a trash bin or appropriate disposal container. Automobile owners were instructed to always have a trash bag in their vehicles. No trash was ever to be thrown out the window of a vehicle. When driving down a road, we were constantly reminded with warning signs along the road that read: “UP TO \$500 FINE IF CONVICTED OF LITTERING!” And since 25 cents was a great deal of money to a young boy in those days, we were fearful of ever throwing any rubbish out the vehicle window.

The advertisements and warnings changed America. America cleaned up. Even to this day, we are compelled to always dispose of waste in an appropriate container or rubbish bin. It is a part of the culture. America was cleaned up bit by bit, by every litter bit.

Oceans are maintained by small rain drops. Beaches are composed of small grains of sand. All matter in the universe is a combination of atoms that the eye cannot see. And when discussing the energy of the organic body of Christ, each

individual member “bit” throughout the world is a small force. When these small forces are united with one another, they compose a mighty army against the forces of evil. Great things happen when little bits work together. But also, a great tragedy happens when little bits become a detriment to the whole, especially if they are little bits of evil in our lives.

When little bits of unrighteousness are allowed to invade the behavior of each member of the body, then the body becomes diseased. Though we are strong when united, we as individual members of the body can individually deteriorate spiritually with the smallest of evils that may seem harmless in our lives. James reminded all of us: “*Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by a small fire!*” (Jas 3:5). Every little harsh word hurts. Little bits can trash our souls.

We must not forget the Holy Spirit’s warning: “*For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil*” (Ec 12:14). We will give account for every little bit of sin that may litter our souls. With the Spirit’s words on their minds, the early disciples heard the Master warn, “*But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment*” (Mt 12:36). Every little bit hurts.

As disciples of Divinity, we must keep in mind that every bit of trash in

our lives hurts our relationship with one another, but especially our relationship with God. It is for this reason that Christians must be on the lookout for those small things in their hearts and minds that will lead them away from God, and subsequently, destroy their discipleship.

We each have our “demons” with which we must deal, and thus, it takes more than ourselves to slay these unrighteous attitudes and behavioral traits. It was for this reason that James mandated, “*Confess your sins [‘demons’] to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed*” (Jas 5:16). Through individual prayer, we can receive power to overcome. But many times, we need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ in order to overcome those bits of trash in our lives that persistently plague our efforts to be the living sacrifice we desire to be. When “demons” persist, then it is time to call in the army of our brothers and sisters in Christ to offer up prayers for us.

A. Little bits of error hurt.

Disciples of Divinity must caution themselves in two areas in reference to self-inflicted spiritual harm:

1. Little bits of lordship: Paul saw something coming in the future of the church in Ephesus. On his last visit there, he warned the elders of Ephesus, “*From your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things ...*” (At 20:30). When men start leading others away from total commitment to the Lord to commitment

to themselves as lords over the flock, then perverse things are being spoken. When leaders start standing between the Head of the body and the members, then new lords are rising up.

Apostasy to a worldwide system of church control among the disciples arises when individuals would speak perverse things. Diotrephes was an individual disciple who assumed control over those whom he had direct influence (3 Jn 9,10). He spoke perverse things of others in order to maintain his control. John called such behavior evil (3 Jn 11). What Paul saw was coming in autocratic leadership in Ephesus, Diotrephes was practicing. Peter realized such leadership was in existence at the time he wrote. He rebuked the would be lords in 1 Peter 5:1-3: “*Shepherd the flock that is among you ... not under compulsion ... nor being lords*”

When just one leader is allowed to be a lord over any other member of the body, then a little bit of apostasy is arising, that if not checked, will eventually lead to a worldwide hierarchy of leadership. We must never forget that we are fellow servants in the kingdom. We work **with** one another as servants. We do not function as one disciple **over** another (See Mk 10:35-45). There is no hierarchy among slaves. Once discipleship involves one disciple working over another disciple, then we are on the road to an apostasy to lordship leadership.

2. Little bits of error: Paul’s warning in Galatians 1:8 was stark: “*But even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have*

preached to you, **let him be accursed.**” Paul’s warning was harsh because he knew that “*the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching*” (2 Tm 4:3).

Because all of us have a little “Athenian” in us, we are always searching for some “new thing” (At 17:21). And because we are always searching, we are often “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching*” (Ep 4:14). When our searching turns from searching the Scriptures to searching the vain philosophies of the world, then we are in trouble.

Following doctrines of demons will cause one to lose his discipleship. Being a disciple means that we are a disciple of Divinity, and being a disciple of Divinity means that we seek to follow the teachings of God. It is as simple as what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21:

Not every one who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Those who do not follow the “will of the Father” are certainly not disciples of the Father. Those who allow their discipleship to be eroded by every wind of doctrine that passes through will lose what they have in their relationship with Divinity, which relationship is based on a knowledge of and obedience to the word of God. We must be cautious about losing that which we have, as the Hebrew writer cautioned his readers:

Looking carefully lest any man falls short

of the grace of God; least any root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled (Hb 12:15).

B. Little bits of indifference hurt.

In order not to be deceived, those who were in Berea “*searched the Scriptures daily*” (At 17:11). They were not indifferent in reference to their beliefs. They were diligent to keep their thinking in tune with the word of God (2 Tm 2:15). They based their beliefs on the word of God, and when anyone came through town teaching something they did not know or understand, they searched their Bibles.

1. Indifference to teaching: It seems that the disciples to whom the Hebrew writer wrote were becoming indifferent to that which they first learned and believed. But the Hebrew writer responded to this indifference with words that should be a warning to every member of the body: “*How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation ...*” (Hb 2:3).

If we become indifferent to the truth that brought us into discipleship with God, then we will not escape if we ignore its importance in our relationship with God. What we believe is important, especially in reference to those fundamental truths upon which our faith is based. If we become indifferent to that which must be believed in order to inherit salvation, then we are on the road to destruction. The Hebrew writer, therefore, concluded his reminder of essen-

tial teachings that must be believed by reminding his readers, “*But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*” (Hb 10:39).

2. Indifference to relational discipleship: By “relational discipleship” we mean that Christians must function in fellowship with one another as members of the body. Each member has a responsibility to associate (assemble) with other members in order to encourage love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). Members of the body are to love one another, and loving one another means functioning in some way with one another (See Jn 13:34,35; 1 Pt 2:17).

Christians coming together in a one-on-one social and worshipful context is a beginning to a loving function as members one with another. But there is no progress in their relationships with one another until they are bound together in love. When disciples begin working together, it is then that they will be successful as disciples of Divinity and in manifesting their love for one another. Sitting together in assemblies, no matter how energetic the assemblies may be, will not generate the love for one another that we should have. We do no good works together while sitting on pews. It is only when the members of the body function together outside the assembly that love is produced and results realized.

When Jesus said, “*I and My Father are one,*” He meant that they were one in function at the time He made this statement during His earthly ministry (Jn 10:30). He had given up being on an

equality with the Father at the time He made the statement (Ph 2:5-8). However, in the flesh of man, He was still one with the Father in the purpose for which He came into the world. As long as He functioned in His redemptive ministry, He was one with the Father. And so it is in our function with one another for His purpose.

Our discipleship on earth depends on our being one with Jesus. He is now in heaven, **but we are one with Him by functioning after the same purpose for which He came into this world.** While on earth, Jesus said, “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Lk 19:10). When we function in seeking and saving the lost, **then we are one with Jesus and with one another.** This is the living sacrifice about which Paul wrote. Those who become indifferent to Jesus, will become indifferent to their sacrificial walk with Jesus. When we become indifferent in seeking and saving the lost together, then we are endangering our oneness with the One after whom we call ourselves disciples.

C. Little bits of bad attitude hurt.

Attitude is the foundation upon which relationships are constructed. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another*” (Rm 12:10). In reference to relationships, this is being “*rooted and grounded in love*” (Ep 3:17). In order to be the type of disciples that Jesus would have us be, then we must “*let all bitter-*

ness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away ... with all malice" (Ep 4:31). In doing this, we must "*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ...*" (Ep 4:32). In order to accomplish these relational tasks, each member must associate (function) with other members.

When we harbor unfriendliness, and thus are inhospitable to one another, then our relationships with one another are broken. If we confine our function as the body of Christ only to assemblies, then we will often allow our social inadequacies outside the assembly to keep us away from one another. We must keep in mind that friendships are developed over a long period of time, but are destroyed with just one careless word or act of unkindness. Harsh attitudes cause wounds that may never be repaired. A crushed piece of paper will always bear the scars of being crushed. For this reason, members of the body must continually function together in order to constantly "iron out" any wrinkles that would keep them from one another.

There are those who are always looking for the bright side of things, which is being positive about life. However, there are those also who are always trying to polish up that which is tarnished. The attitude of a disciple must always be a polishing cloth that must be used to put a shine on the hearts of the disheartened. Every bit of bad attitude tarnishes relationships. But every bit of kindness, joy and appreciation puts a shine on a tarnished surface. In order to polish the tarnished, however, there must be contact

between the polishing cloth and that which is tarnished.

D. Little bits of covetousness hurt.

Some poetic preacher once wrote in a church bulletin,

He always said he would retire,
When he had made a million clear;
And so he toiled into the dusk,
From day to day, from year to year.

At last he put his ledgers up,
And laid his stock reports aside;
But when he started out to live,
He found he had already died!

Everyone must read of the sin of the covetous Israelites against whom Habakkuk wrote. They robbed God because they held back a little bit from the tithe that was to be given in total sacrifice to God (See Mt 3:8). Every little bit of the tithe that was held back was considered by God to be something that was stolen from Him. When all of Israel held back a little bit, then the accumulation of all the little bits that were held back added up to be a great hindrance to the work of God.

Where our treasure is found, there will our heart be (See Mt 6:21). When we love money, we always want to build bigger barns (See Lk 12:17-21). Commitment to being the living sacrifice can never be total if our heart is divided between building bigger barns for our treasures and Christ after whom we seek to be a disciple (Mt 6:24). A totally com-

mitted disciple never has two masters, one being the world and the other being the Lord Jesus.

Total commitment is the sum of a great deal of goodness that is sustained

throughout our lives. When every prayer, hour of Bible study, good deed and offering come together throughout a lifetime, they add up to being a lifetime of worshipful service to the Lord.

Chapter 4

ABLE DISCIPLESHIP

This chapter is a play on words in reference to the character and behavior of those who are disciples of Divinity. We are inspired by a particular word that Paul used in 2 Timothy 2:2: “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be **able** to teach others also.*”

Timothy was to focus on “able” men who had the ability to teach. So we also focus on “able” disciples who can affect the global function of the body of Christ. These would be the *Ability* disciples, who, according to their abilities, determine whether the body of Christ will grow or stagnate. Some members of the *Ability* family make us go and grow because they are gifted with advantageous leadership skills that lead the church on to victory. However, with the family of enabled disciples comes also some negative *Ability* members who hold up growth. So we introduce to you the *Ability* members of the body of Christ, who influence us in different ways.

A. Cap Ability:

Cap Ability is gifted. He is willing

to take on any task without grumbling. He is capable of standing against the wiles of the Devil (Ep 6:16) because he does “*not give opportunity to the devil*” (Ep 4:27). He has “*put on the whole armor of God so that*” he “*may **be able** to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). He guards himself against “*being puffed up with pride*” lest “*he fall into the condemnation of the devil*” (1 Tm 3:6). He knows “*the Holy Scriptures that **are able** to make*” him wise unto salvation through faith (2 Tm 3:15). *Cap Ability* holds “*fast the faithful word as he has been taught, so that he may **be able** by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9). And for this reason, he is able to resist the devil (Js 4:7).

Cap Ability does not allow himself to be led into temptation, but seeks for those escapes from temptation that God provides in order to guard his discipleship (See 1 Co 10:13). He may be tempted, but *Cap* does not surrender to temptation (Js 1:14).

Because *Cap Ability* remains strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might (Ep 3:16; Ph 4:13; Cl 1:11), he is “*able to comfort those who are in any*

trouble” (2 Co 1:4). *Cap* realizes that we are not “adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves, but **our adequacy is from God**, who has also **made us able servants**” (2 Co 3:5,6). *Cap Ability* walks with the understanding that it is God working in him as a disciple. With this realization, he is empowered with the Spirit of God.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that you, always having all sufficiency in everything, may abound to every good work (2 Co 9:8).

It is as Paul concluded:

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us (Ep 3:20).

Every member of the body has some genes from *Cap Ability*, for everyone is gifted in some way to function as a capable member of the body.

B. Avail Ability:

Avail Ability has the mind to work. He is ready and willing to answer all calls for help. Those of the family of *Avail Ability* were the disciples about whom Paul spoke in reference to contributing to the needs of the saints:

But now finish doing [the contribution] so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also a comple-

tion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is acceptable according to what one has and not according to what he does not have (2 Co 8:11,12).

The disciples in Achaia had a great desire to help the famine stricken disciples in Judea. They were able to help. Their discipleship was identified by their desire to first help, and then do what they planned. In Paul’s encouragement, they were to follow through with their desires, which thing they did. *Avail Ability* makes himself known first by a desire to help. He then follows through with what he desires. He makes the plan, and then works his plan.

In reference to zeal to reach out to the lost, Paul made himself available. He first realized that he was a debtor because of the grace of God (Rm 1:14). God had given him so much. He was thus moved into action to live a life of gratitude. So he wrote, “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15).

Paul expressed the same availability as Isaiah when God revealed to the prophet the spiritual need of Israel. Many years later Isaiah recorded his reaction to the call of God to go to the people: “*I also heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom will I send and who will go for us?’*” (Is 6:8). Isaiah made himself available. He responded, “*Here am I. Send me*” (Is 6:8).

The body of Christ functions when men and women make themselves available for work. When Nehemiah revealed

a project that needed immediate attention, the people responded. The people responded because they “*had a mind to work*” (Ne 4:6). Disciples of Divinity have a mind to do the work of God. Their discipleship is revealed through their work ethic in kingdom business.

C. Adapt Ability:

Life is about adapting to change. Eternal truths of the word of God never change, but how they are implemented in our lives may take some challenge as we live in changing times. However, we must never allow cultural changes to the standards of sin to become so influential in our lives that we sacrifice the eternal moral truths of God. But when neither the doctrinal nor moral standards of God are endangered, Christians must allow themselves to be able to adapt as Paul did when he traveled from one culture to another: “*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*” (1 Co 9:22).

Becoming all things to all men in order to save souls is the character of *Adapt Ability*. This disciple realizes that he or she must, if necessary, sacrifice some of his or her cultural treasures in order to adapt to the cultural wealth of others. Doing this emulates in our lives the adaptability of Jesus when He left heaven and came for us. From His dwelling in heaven to His death as a man, Jesus was willing to adapt to us in order that He might save us. Paul wrote of Jesus’ long road to the cross.

... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself ...” (Ph 2:6-8).

Paul had introduced this incredible adaptability of Jesus with the words, “***Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus***” (Ph 2:5). In other words, if we would be disciples of Divinity, this is the extremity to which we must be willing to change in order to accomplish Jesus’ kingdom business of saving the lost.

The conclusion of the challenge of Jesus’ mission to this world is inspiring. There is no extremity of cultural adaptation to which His disciples can go in order to become all things to all men. They are willing to do this in order to preach the gospel to the lost. If one is not willing to go to the extent to which Jesus did in order to find us, then he or she might find it difficult to claim to be walking as a disciple with Jesus.

After we have been in heaven forever, we question whether there will be any cultural differences in heaven that will separate us. If cultural differences in heaven—if there are differences—will not separate us in heaven, then neither should we allow them to separate us on earth.

In an era where the “gospel of prosperity” has become the fashionable message of so many “Balaamite” preachers, such preachers should seriously consider

what God demands in reference to discipleship. When the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to write, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ,*” some might have a hard time giving up the treasures of this world, as Jesus gave up the treasure of heaven in order to live a simple life on earth without a cellphone or computer (See 1 Co 11:1).

Paul’s availability to preach the gospel did not depend on the availability of finances. He did not preach the gospel “*in regard to need*” (Ph 4:11). He did not exploit the people for money (2 Th 3:7,8). He did not because he learned to be financially content: “*I have learned in whatever state I am to be content*” (Ph 4:11). And when he spoke of “state,” he was speaking of his ability to adapt to any financial state of being. “*I know,*” he wrote, “*how to be in need and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Ph 4:12). He was able to do this because Jesus Christ lived in him: “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). Paul was thus able to walk the life of a totally offered sacrifice because it was Jesus in him who empowered him. Every disciple can do the same.

Our financial life-style often reveals the extent of our discipleship. Finances did not determine Paul’s discipleship. And because it did not, the Holy Spirit gave him the privilege of saying to the rest of us, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1).

We must be able to adapt to all cul-

tural and financial conditions in order to preach the gospel to the world. The living sacrifice who is a walking worship service to God is willing to give up living on an equality with the rich and famous of this world in order to preach the gospel to the world. As Jesus lowered Himself to come into our culture and state of finances, we too, as His disciples, must make ourselves available to Him to fulfill His ministry on earth. We must remember that every man will die poor, being unable to take any of the world’s treasures to the grave and beyond.

D. Depend Ability:

The members of the family of *Depend Ability* were in the mind of Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians, “*My beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ...*” (1 Co 15:58). We must be as the Holy Spirit exhorted the disciples in Colosse, that they “*continue in the faith grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel*” (Cl 1:23).

If we would be disciples of Divinity, then we must follow the example of brother *Depend Ability* and remain steadfast through all trials of this life. “*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold to the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*” (Hb 3:14). It is our hope that will keep us faithful. “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil*” (Hb 6:19). Those who give up their hope become unstable.

There were many brethren as *Depend Ability* in the history of the early church. Luke, for example, was with Paul in prison until the very end. When Paul wrote his final words, he mentioned that “*only Luke is with me*” (2 Tm 4:11). When everyone else had forsaken him, Paul could depend on Luke. Peter considered Silvanus a “*faithful brother*” (1 Pt 5:12). Those who are dependable are following the example of faithful Moses. “*Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant*” (Hb 3:5). Disciples of Divinity must be faithful in their function in the house of God (See Mt 24:45-47). No matter how insignificant we might think we are, someone is depending on us for an example.

We follow the example of those who remain strong in the face of all trials of this life. Such people are blessed because of their ability to stand against those things that detour many. But “*blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life ...*” (Js 1:12).

Enduring hardships qualifies one to receive the crown. Demas, however, relinquished to the things of the world, and thus left the side of Paul when Paul was in prison (See 2 Tm 4:10). On the other hand, John Mark was once undependable in his youth. He turned from his mission to preach the gospel in the companionship of Paul and Barnabas (See At 15:36-41). However, many years later, and after he matured, Paul, while in prison, called for Mark’s companionship and ministry (2 Tm 4:11). From the example of John Mark, sometimes young people

must grow into being dependable.

E. Prob Ability:

Prob Ability sits around waiting for something to come along that might stimulate him or her into action. For this reason, there is always apprehension about depending on *Prob Ability* for anything. *Prob Ability* may be the disciple about whom Paul wrote, who had become weary in doing good works (Gl 6:9).

The dangerous position in which *Prob Ability* places himself is that, in his idleness, he offers Satan the opportunity to distract him to do that which is evil. It was concerning some *Prob Ability* brethren that Peter wrote the following warning:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Pt 2:20).

Prob Ability becomes indifferent to the needs around him. And in becoming indifferent, his abilities are allowed to remain unused (See Mt 25:24-30). In a time of discouragement, Timothy fell into this emotional prison. He laid down his gift and stopped preaching. So Paul wrote a very direct letter to him with the words, “*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.*” (2 Tm 4:2).

Paul had previously admonished Timothy, “*Do not neglect the gift that is in you ...*” (1 Tm 4:14). And again Paul

exhorted, “*I remind you that you stir up the gift of God that is in you ...*” (2 Tm 1:6). Timothy needed to remember the life of the one who had disciplesd him in Christ, which one in his final years wrote, “*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith*” (2 Tm 4:7). Paul never neglected his gift. He continued to fight until his last breath.

We must dream like children who see no obstacles in reference to what they want to do. The older we become, the more challenges we see in everything we want to accomplish. But God asks us to dream in a way that allows Him the opportunity to remove the obstacles. We must keep in mind that when we dream to exercise our gifts in ministry, Satan starts working by stirring up imagined obstacles. And sometimes the obstacles are real. But these obstacles should never disable us. God will take care of the real obstacles.

F. Dis Ability:

When dreams are crushed by imagined obstacles, we are disabled. Timothy allowed Satan to disable his gift, and thus, for a moment in time he became dysfunctional. It can happen to the best of us.

When we consider our gifts as members of the body of Christ, *Dis Ability* is trying to deceive the rest of us. He is self-deceived because we know that no one is without the ability to do something. Timothy’s dysfunction because of discouragement did not deceive Paul. Paul knew that Timothy was capable of exer-

cising his gift. He knew that there were some who had despised Timothy’s youth (1 Tm 4:12). Timothy simply allowed these antagonists to discourage him. But when Paul wrote to Timothy, that time was over.

Hard times and opposition to our discipleship draws out of us things we thought we could not do. Hard times and opposition thus become the opportunity for self-discovery. Our relationship with others helps us discover those gifts we never knew we had. So for this reason, *Dis Ability* is lying to himself and others. He is simply offering an excuse to do nothing. Timothy possibly hung around *Prob Ability* too long until he became the friend of *Dis Ability*.

Discipleship is about taking ownership of our God-given gifts in order to exercise them for His use in His kingdom business. Sitting around and doing nothing can be a very tiresome job. It is a wearisome job because one cannot quit and rest. Unfortunately, we have befriended *Dis Ability* too long. He often thinks that things are going too fast. He often finds himself being the brakeman to change and growth. We must hang around more firemen as *Cap Ability* and *Avail Ability* who will arise to the occasion of a fallen world.

In order to grow as the body of Christ, we must allow the Spirit of God to enable us to be productive disciples. We simply cannot be as the idle itching flea on the elephant’s back that just crossed an old rickety bridge that creaked and bowed under the weight of the elephant. The small itchy flea said, “Boy,

we sure shook that bridge this time.”

Kinetic energy is energy in motion. A kinetically energized disciple is on the move. Potential energy, however, is simply inert unless moved into motion. As a disciple, one must determine if he or she is potential energy, or kinetic energy. Are

we in motion, or are we simply one who is the friend of *Prob Ability*, and thus, have only the potential to move into action. Disciples of Divinity are identified by their kinetic motion, not by their potential energy.

Chapter 5

SHOE DISCIPLESHIP

Every Christian often has his or her own definition of what a disciple must be and do. What determines our definition of discipleship is our knowledge of the Scriptures, especially our knowledge of the New Testament. If we would be a disciple of Jesus, then it is assumed that we would conduct our lives according to the instructions of Jesus. But if one has little knowledge of what Jesus said, and especially how Jesus enacted in His own behavior His teachings, then we can be assured that our behavior as a disciple of Jesus will be dysfunctional.

When we investigate the New Testament concerning the function of discipleship, we are not surprised to discover that the Holy Spirit knew there would be those who call themselves after Christ, but at the same time, they would have a flawed understanding of what discipleship really is. One of our first indications, or warnings, concerning this “fake discipleship” was voiced by Jesus when He said,

Not every one who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of

heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21).

It is frightening to conclude from this statement that there are those who would claim to be disciples of Jesus, but would not be true disciples because they failed “to do the will of the Father in heaven.” We certainly would not want to be “fake disciples” who do not live according to the will of the Father in heaven. Therefore, in order to separate true discipleship from that which is false, it might be good to review what the New Testament defines as “fake disciples.” The following types of shoes might help illustrate some disciples who claim to be disciples, but are not following the will of the Father:

A. Loafer Shoe Disciples:

Loafer shoes are made for light use. One does not climb a mountain in loafers, neither are these shoes used for construction work. One does not get up in the morning, put on loafers, and then go to work. Loafers are not shoes that are

used for hardy work.

Loafer Shoe disciples are the same. They are like one of three turtles who went out for coffee at the local coffee shop. When the coffee was served, it started to rain outside. The two older turtles said to the younger turtle, “Could you go out and get the umbrella, so when we are finished with coffee, we can leave without walking in the rain?” The younger turtle replied, “I will if you don’t drink my coffee!” The two older turtles complied.

So the young turtle went out the door in order to fetch the umbrella. The two turtles inside waited and waited. After several hours had passed, one of the turtles said to the other, “Well, since he is not coming back, we might as well drink his coffee.” At that moment, the younger turtle stuck his head back in the door and said, “If you drink my coffee, I won’t fetch the umbrella.”

Loafer Shoe disciples are like that. They are not determined to accomplish a task, sometimes even when they say they will. They have good intentions, but they loaf around, usually waiting for someone else to do the work. In the parable of the Talents, the master said to the “loafer” servant who had buried his talent in idleness, “*You wicked and lazy bondservant ...*” (Mt 25:26). This loafer servant was as the one about whom Solomon wrote: “*The desire of the slothful kills him, for his hands refuse to labor*” (Pv 21:25). He is as the young turtle about whom Solomon would also say, “*The soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing ...*” (Pv 13:4).

James wrote about some *Loafer Shoe* disciples who thought that they could trust in a simple inactive faith to get them to where they desired to go. But James revealed to them a surprise: “*What does it profit, my [loafer] brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*” (Js 2:14). *Loafer Shoe* disciples need to remember James’ exhortation: “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17).

B. High Heel Shoe Disciples:

High heel shoes are used strictly for presentation. They are worn by those who seek to be above their stature, and thus parade themselves as sophisticated in the crowd. These shoes are not made for running, working tuff jobs, or climbing mountains. When it comes to doing physical work, high heel shoes are worthless.

There are *High Heel* disciples who like to strut their stuff. They pretend to be someone greater than they are. There were some *High Heel* disciples among the disciples in Rome. Paul exhorted the entire group of disciples, “*For I say ... to everyone that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ...*” (Rm 12:3). The reason for this exhortation is simple. The Holy Spirit continued, “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gl 6:3). *High Heel* disciples think they can spiritually stand above others. But they are disciples who are living a life of deception. If a

disciple struts around on high heels, he must be careful. “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Co 10:12).

It is easy to fall from “high heel pride.” Someone said, “The only thing which really hurts me is that which hurts my pride.” In the beginning when Adam dwelt in the garden of Eden, the first thing that overcame him was his pride. It will be the last thing all of us will overcome until God humbles all creation before Him in the end. Before that time, therefore, it would be wise to heed the words of Peter in 1 Peter 5:5,6:

*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, **humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time.***

An ambitious young boy said to his mother, “I am as tall as Goliath!” The mother asked why. The boy replied, “I made a ruler and measured myself.” Such were some of the *High Heel* disciples in Corinth. However, Paul judged their erroneous attitudes: “*But they, **measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise***” (2 Co 10:12).

We remember the prideful words of the Pharisee: “*God, I thank You that I am not as other men ... I fast twice a week. I give tithes ...*” (Lk 18:11,12). The high heel Pharisee forgot these precious words of Jesus: “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*” (Mt 5:5).

C. Overshoe Disciples:

Overshoes are slipped over existing shoes. They are made of rubber and have no structure of their own to stand alone. They maintain their structure because of the shoe over which they are slipped. Overshoes are not stable when they stand alone.

The *Overshoe* disciple never develops any spiritual structure in order to stand alone. He is faithful because he trusts in the faithfulness of someone else. This is the husband who may trust in the faithfulness of his godly wife. Because of his lack of knowledge of the word of God, this is the person who must always ask for the opinion of the “pastor” before discussing any Bible subjects. This is the attendee who is there on Sunday because he or she is infatuated with the personality of the preacher. The *Overshoe* disciple is usually following men and not Christ.

The *Overshoe* disciple is sometimes as the hunter who had a confrontation with a bear. The bear asked the hunter, “Why do you want to shoot me?”

The hunter replied, “I need a fur coat in order to keep warm.”

The bear replied, “Well then, all I need is breakfast.” So the two sat down and made a compromise. The bear eventually got up alone, having eaten his breakfast. And the hunter had his covering of a fur coat.

Contrary to the nature of *Overshoe* disciples, Paul exhorted, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). In order

to stand strong in the Lord, Paul continued to exhort, “*Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11).

Overshoe disciples are always limp when it comes to standing for truth. They are as children “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching*” (Ep 4:14). Because they do “*not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved,*” God allows them to be deluded with lies (2 Th 2:10,11).

The *Overshoe* disciple stands for nothing, and thus falls for everything. He or she is embarrassed to take a stand for what is right. It was about *Overshoe* disciples that Paul wrote 2 Timothy 4:3,4:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables.

D. House Shoe Disciples:

We slip on house shoes in order to walk around the house on carpets and cleaned floors. These are shoes we wear inside the house when we have finished our work for the day, and then want to lounge in the lounge. We put on our house shoes, lay back, and sit idly as the world goes by.

House Shoe disciples could be identified with the word “lackadaisical.” The lackadaisical disciple is not excited about

anything, and thus feels no urgency to accomplish any work. This is not the disciple who has a mind to work, for he feels that he has completed his work. He is the part time disciple who has often grown “*weary in doing good*” (Ti 3:13). In his “couch potato Christianity,” he has not seized the opportunities to do good to all men (Gl 6:9). The *House Shoe* disciple has not heeded the words of Paul: “*Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Co 6:2).

House Shoe disciples are certainly not like the disciples in Philippi. They had searched for an opportunity to help Paul on his journeys in order that they might preach the gospel to the world through him. When they eventually found him—he was in a Roman prison—they sent support to him through Epaphroditus (Ph 4:18). Paul then wrote to them the following words:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your concern for me has flourished again; though you were concerned, but you lacked opportunity to show it (Ph 4:10).

The Philippians never slipped on their house shoes and forgot about their responsibility to evangelize the world when Paul left town. As living sacrifices who were totally committed, they never slipped off their responsibility to accomplish the work of God. *House Shoe* disciples need to heed the exhortation of Amos: “*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion*” (Am 6:1).

E. Sandal Shoe Disciples:

Sandal shoes are the skeleton of a shoe. They leave a major part of the foot exposed because they are only the remnants of a shoe. Sandals are composed of only the basics of a shoe, and yet are considered a shoe.

Sandal Shoe disciples are not complete. They have not grown “*in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” in order to become a mature disciple (2 Pt 3:18). They do not want to “*grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ*” (Ep 4:15). The problem is their lack of desire to grow in order to be complete in Christ.

Sandal Shoe disciples are satisfied to remain as incomplete disciples. Instead of being “*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,*” they are satisfied to remain as they are without putting “*on the whole armor of God*” in order to be considered a complete disciple (Ep 6:10,11). They are simply satisfied with putting on partial armor, while at the same time, they claim to be disciples who are totally committed to being a living sacrifice.

Peter exhorted some *Sandal Shoe* disciples to grow from immaturity as children of faith, to that which would guard them against the onslaught of error by which every Christian is continually bombarded: “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). If there is no growth beyond the first principles of the faith (See Hb 6:1,2), then one will suffer what was happening to

the Hebrew disciples, many of whom were *Sandal Shoe* disciples. The Hebrew writer rebuked these disciples with strong words:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And you have come to need milk and not solid food (Hb 5:12).

The Hebrew writer was not addressing those who were novices in the faith. He was speaking to those who had been disciples for many years, and yet, were remaining novices in knowledge and faith. He was speaking to those who had previously undergone many hardships for their faith (See Hb 10:32,33). And yet, these disciples had not grown beyond questioning the deity of the Son of God (Hb 1,2), His high priesthood (Hb 4:14-16), and many other fundamental teachings concerning Christ and Christianity.

Their beliefs were not strong enough to endure the intimidation of the Jewish culture in which they lived. They were thus on the verge of falling back into spiritual destruction (See Hb 10:38,39). For this reason they needed the exhortation of the Hebrew writer: “*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*” (Hb 10:36).

Sandal Shoe disciples must grow in their knowledge of the word of God in order not to fall. They need to put some “*meat teachings*” on their spiritual skeleton in order to enjoy the fullness of the faith and inherit the promises.

F. Sneaker Shoe Disciples:

Sneaker shoes are quiet. They are used to quietly move around without the noise of a fully constructed shoe.

Sneaker Shoe disciples have convinced themselves that they can sneak around without God's notice. We laugh at what some Muslims in Afghanistan do in reference to drinking alcohol. They will build a small covering, under which they will sit and have a little sip of whiskey or beer. When asked why they do this, they reply that Allah cannot see them drinking under the covering.

Sneaker Shoe disciples are likewise deceived. When a *Sneaker Shoe* disciple is on vacation, he will involve himself in some behavior that is contrary to the moral principles of God. A traveling *Sneaker Shoe* disciple will watch pornographic movies and read pornographic magazines when he is outside the presence of his fellow disciples. He believes he is sneaking around the omnipresence of God.

What the *Sneaker Shoe* disciple has forgotten is that God knows the hearts of all men (Lk 16:15). The *Sneaker Shoe* disciple forgets how God looks on men: *"For the Lord does not see as man sees. For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"* (1 Sm 16:7). And for this reason, Paul warned some *Sneaker Shoe* disciples in Achaia, *"If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again in himself"* (2 Co 10:7).

If one thinks he is sneaking around God, and thus considers himself a dis-

ciple of Christ, then he should be honest with himself. It may be a time when one should confess his faults (See Js 5:16). If one feels sneaky in reference to his relationship with God, then he has no relationship with God.

G. Sunday Shoe Disciples:

This is not a particular style of shoe. However, most of us grew up with these special shoes that were reserved only for Sunday morning. They were reserved for an outward show of exquisite dress that was for Sunday morning assemblies. Sunday shoes were for dressing outwardly in order to give the appearance that one was respectful and proper for an assembly before God. However, all of us knew that we were dressing for one another in order to give an appearance of holiness.

The *Sunday Shoe* disciple is focusing on the outward appearance. As the *Sneaker Shoe* disciple, he too forgets that God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Sm 16:7). He also forgets that discipleship is 24-7. The living sacrifice is not sacrificed on Sunday alone, and then off the altar after the "closing prayer."

If one seeks to conceal himself with stylish dress on Sunday morning, then he has deceived himself into thinking that his behavior outside the "worship hour" is free time for possibly unrighteous behavior. If one seeks to "dress up for God on Sunday," then he has truly deceived himself into thinking that God cannot see his heart on Monday through Saturday.

Fine dress on Sunday morning may conceal our hearts from our fellow members, but God can see right through fancy clothes.

Disciples who have given themselves to be a living sacrifice focus on dressing themselves with Christ. They are those who have been “*baptized into Christ*,” and thus “*have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). They are “*clothed with humility*” every day of the week (1 Pt 5:5). They take up their crosses daily (Lk 9:23). They study the word of God daily (At 17:11). They teach daily (At 5:42). And they sacrifice their lives for the Lord daily (1 Co 15:31). There are no special occasions for the disciples of Divinity to give the appearance that they are especially righteous on that occasion.

H. Combat Boot Disciples:

Boots need little description concerning their purpose. They are for rugged and productive living. And sometimes, they are meant to trudge through difficult terrain. Combat boots are designed strictly for battle. A soldier does not wear loafers, or sandals, or Sunday shoes into battle. He is assigned and given the best boots possible in order to engage the enemy. In contrast to all the preceding “shoe disciples,” this is the disciple we must be.

Combat Boot disciples get down to work. They set their mind to winning the war against Satan and his hosts. They are prepared to walk right over the most

difficult times of life, right into the heat of the battle. It is as the singer, Nancy Sinatra, who uttered the lyrics of the 1960 song, *Boots*. And as she sang the song in reference to being jilted by a lover, we would use the words in reference to a battle cry against Satan,

These boots are made for walkin',
and that's just what they'll do.

One of these days
these boots are gonna walk all over you.

Combat Boot disciples would say to Satan, “These boots are gonna to walk right over you.”

Combat Boot disciples are tough and strong. They are “*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*” (1 Co 15:58). They will be faithful unto death on the battle field (Rv 2:10). They are courageous and will take a stand for that which is right (Ja 1:7). And they get to work doing that which must be done (Jn 9:4). When it comes to laboring in kingdom business, *Combat Boot* disciples are always ready for action (1 Pt 3:15). They engage the enemy of the gospel without wavering from the mission. They are as Paul when he wrote, “*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course*” (2 Tm 4:7).

As disciples of Divinity, we must always have our combat boots on and be engaged in the warfare of the Lord. As disciples of our Lord Jesus, we will sleep in our combat boots.

Chapter 6

DISTURBING DISCIPLESHIP

The behavior of certain disciples that affect the organic function of the body of Christ was discussed in the previous chapter. Herein we dig deeper into the character of the dysfunctional disciple. We again use a play on words in order to identify what the Holy Spirit would consider dysfunctional members who cause harm to the organic function of the body.

A. Miss Quotation:

Paul identified this sister in 1 Timothy 5:13. *Miss Quotation* and her sisters “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”

Someone called up the house of *Miss Quotation*, and her roommate answered the telephone: “*Miss Quotation* is not at home at this time. Would you care to leave a rumor?” *Miss Quotation* is known for majoring in rumors, being driven by gossip and assumptions to twist the character and beliefs of others. She is the one who would say, “I won’t go into all the details. In fact, I’ve already told you more about it than I know.”

Miss Quotation is invariably one who talks too much, and in her much talking, she speaks of things about which she knows little or nothing. Or, in order to dominate a conversation, she embellishes that which she does know, and thus makes

a falsehood out of what she communicates to others.

When God instructed Israel concerning their function as individuals in a community of people, He commanded, “*You will not go up and down as a tale-bearer among your people*” (Lv 19:16). Doing so causes community tension. Talebearing separates one neighbor from another. Solomon was right: “*He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with him who flatters with his lips*” (Pv 20:19). “*A perverse man sows strife, and a gossip separates best friends*” (Pv 16:28). This is true because “*the words of a gossip are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body*” (Pv 18:8). *Miss Quotation* takes pleasure in gossiping “*about the pain of those*” who have been wounded (Ps 69:26). She does so because there is a flaw in her character. Either she feels inferior to others because she has little self-esteem, or she is trying to exalt herself over others, or both. In either case, she is the cause of much of the relational dysfunction among the members of the body of Christ.

B. Miss Alliance:

Miss Alliance seeks to compromise in order to avoid confrontation. She lacks a strong spirit in the faith in order to stand for that which is right. *Miss Alliance* was certainly in the mind of Jesus when He said,

No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Mt 6:24).

Miss Alliance must decide whether she wants to be a totally sacrificed disciple, or if she wants to compromise Jesus for something that is of this world. Jesus would say to her, “*He who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not gather with Me, scatters*” (Lk 11:23).

Miss Alliance must make a choice whether to be totally committed to Jesus, or compromise Jesus in her life by being a friend of the world (See Js 4:4). She must decide whether to have friends who are a part of the body of Christ, or be friends with those who would lead her to compromise her faith. She must determine whether to take a stand for the truth of the gospel, or compromise her faith, and thus, be led to her destruction. One important point about being the totally sacrificed offering to God is there can be no fences in one’s life that he or she would straddle.

C. Miss Behavior:

The Holy Spirit certainly had *Miss Behavior* in mind when He issued the following mandate:

In like manner also, that women dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and sobriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but rather that which manifests women pro-

fessing godliness through good works (1 Tm 2:9,10).

Miss Behavior thinks that she can sow wild oats throughout the week, and then show up with the saints on Sunday and pray for a crop failure. When one becomes a disciple of Divinity, the old behavior must be put away. The old man who was buried in the grave of baptism must be kept there (Rm 6:6). Paul reminded his readers of his own life, and also their former misbehavior in sin:

For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another (Ti 3:3).

This was the former life-style of *Miss Behavior*. However, she seems not to have buried the behavior of the old man. Things must change when one becomes a disciple. Paul explained, “***The older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior ...***” (Ti 2:3). They are to be such because love “*does not behave unbecomingly*” (1 Co 13:5). If one was known for misbehaving while living the old man (woman) before obedience to the gospel, then as a disciple one must be known for behaving as a new creature in Christ (2 Co 5:17).

We are fortunate to have the written word of God today because we can read how we ought to behave before God. Paul explained, “***I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God***” (1 Tm 3:15). If

one walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and flies south every winter like a duck, then he is a duck. If one walks like a disciple of Christ, speaks like a disciple, he will eventually fly away to his heavenly home because he is a disciple. *Miss Behavior* must be reminded of this.

D. Miss Disposition:

Miss Disposition behaves as if she were baptized in vinegar. She seems to be married to a man with the same disposition. As her husband walked out of the house one day going to work, she yelled out, “Do you have everything? Your wallet? Your keys? Your snarl?”

Jude may have had *Miss Disposition* in mind when he wrote,

These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts. And their mouth speaks great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage (Jd 16).

Someone once said, “Contentment sometimes depends on a person’s position, but more often on his disposition.” When one is not content in the state in which he or she lives, it is often manifested to others through bad attitudes. But Paul rebuked such attitudes, “*Do all things without grumbling and disputing*” (Ph 2:14). And in addition to this, “*Be hospitable one to another without grumbling*” (1 Pt 4:9). Therefore, we must “*receive him who is weak in the faith, but not to judgments and disputable thoughts*” (Rm 14:1). The poet was right:

‘Taint what we have, but what we give,
‘Taint what we are, but how we live;
‘Taint what we do, but how we do it,
That makes life worth going through it.

E. Miss Advise:

Miss Advise lacks wisdom. The result is that she often gives some bad advice. James had *Miss Advise* in mind when he encouraged such people, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to them*” (Js 1:5). It is true, as someone said, “There’s no fool like the fool who is always taking advice, except the fool who is always giving it.” In the religious world today, religionists spend millions on self-help books, when they should be going to the greatest self-help book that has been around for centuries. The self-helps of the Bible are just as relevant today as they were when the ink first dried on the original autographs.

If one seeks wisdom, then he must realize that the source for unquestionable wisdom is God. When we ask for advice, we must first ask from God. It is always wise to ask for advice from others, but it is wise to ask advice from the experienced. Paul was undoubtedly given the correct advice from God for some sailors not to continue on a particular voyage into dangerous weather. Nevertheless, the pilot and owner of the ship decided against his advice. And subsequently, it was not a good voyage (See At 27:9-12). *Miss Advise* may have been

on board also giving advice. Because of some bad advice, the voyage ended with all those on board being shipwrecked on the island of Malta. When asking for advice from inexperienced people, one should be prepared for a shipwreck.

F. Miss Conclusion:

The problem with *Miss Conclusion* is that she does not get all the facts before she makes a decision. Or, she speaks before she understands all the events and facts that surround that about which she speaks. Then again, because she is too much a friend of *Miss Disposition*, she takes everything wrong.

This was the problem with some of the Christians in Rome. Some believed an erroneous doctrinal/behavioral theology concerning grace. Paul repeated in question what they had erroneously concluded: “*Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*” (Rm 6:1). Some had concluded that if we are saved by grace alone, then we can sin in order that grace may abound in our lives. They came to the wrong conclusion.

Paul explained throughout the book of Romans that grace is not a license to sin. There were some in the early church who turned “*the grace of God into licentiousness*” by thinking, and thus behaving, contrary to the word of God (Jd 4). They concluded that since they could not fall from the grace of God, then they could sin without endangering their eternal destiny. Some today continue with this erroneous conclusion by teaching that if the Christian has been predestined

to eternal life, then no sin can detour him from this destination.

But this was not the conclusion about which Peter wrote. He wrote that if we “*escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord,*” and we are “*again entangled in them and overcome,*” then we are as the dog who “*returns to his own vomit*” (2 Pt 2:20-22). The Hebrew writer was also specific: “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*” (Hb 6:4-6).

They were able to fall away because they were first “OK” through their obedience to the gospel. However, they were not once saved, and then in a state where it was impossible for them to lose their salvation. There is no teaching in the New Testament that teaches that once one is saved, he is always saved. If one believes such a doctrine, then he has listened to *Miss Advise* and fallen into the company of *Miss Conclusion*, and subsequently, become a theological *Miss Fit*.

G. Miss Fit:

Paul identified *Miss Fit* among the disciples with whom Timothy was associated. These disciples, “*having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm*” (1 Tm 1:6,7).

Dictionaries define a “misfit” to be a person who is not suited to the position

in which he or she is. These teachers about whom Paul wrote were not fit to be teachers because they did not know the law of God. They misunderstood that which was central to Christianity, that is, grace.

In order to guard against “misfit” teachers, James cautioned, “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment*” (Jas 3:1). *Miss Fit* should have listened to this advice. Because of her lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, she was not qualified for the position in which she desired to be.

Miss Fit should heed the exhortation that Paul wrote to the Philippians: “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (Ph 1:27). If we say that we are disciples of Jesus, then our behavior should fit the identity of discipleship. This was the principle about which Jesus spoke in John 13:35: “*By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” *Miss Fit* will not fit in as a disciple if she does not learn to love the brotherhood (1 Pt 2:17). If one would seek to live the sacrificial life of a disciple, then he or she must read and follow the Rule Book on what is required to fit in as a disciple of Divinity.

H. *Miss Cellaneous*:

Miss Cellaneous is a many-sided person. One might say that she is a little schizophrenic. We never know who she is going to be on any particular occasion. There is little consistency in her person-

ality because she allows her environment to affect her personality. And because of this, people usually do not put much trust in *Miss Cellaneous*. She is so moody that they never know when she will be in a mood for suggestions or help.

If *Miss Cellaneous* is to be a consistent disciple of Divinity, then she must pattern her behavior after the unchangeable God of whom she claims to be a disciple. The Hebrew writer addressed this point because there was a great deal of *Miss Cellaneous*' influence among the disciples to whom he wrote. His readers were thinking about returning to the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law because of the religious intimidation of the society in which they lived. But the writer reminded them of the God to whom they had given allegiance through Jesus Christ: “*Therefore, God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath*” (Hb 6:17).

If the God of our promises does not change in the promises He makes to us, then we have no right to change in our commitment to Him. God does not change His promises, nor does He fall short in fulfilling His promises. He does not because of “*two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie*” (Hb 6:18). For this reason we “*have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*” (Hb 6:18).

We can trust in God because He does not change. Spiritually stable people can be trusted. Because *Miss Cellaneous* lacks stability in her person-

ality, people have a difficult time trusting what she says. Because she allows the religious community to sway her beliefs, she is doctrinally unstable.

The personality problem of *Miss Cellaneous* is also that she often catches herself in a lie. She says she will do something, but contrary to the character of God, she changes her mind, or worse, she forgets that she made a commitment.

Our advice to *Miss Cellaneous* is to “**hold fast the pattern of sound words that you have heard**” (2 Tm 1:13). Hold consistently to the word of God, and in doing this, one will find consistency in his or her life. Establishing one’s life on the unchanging word of God adds stability to one’s life. There must never be any religious schizophrenics among the disciples of Christ.

I. Miss Lead:

Paul spoke of *Miss Lead* in a warning to Timothy: “*For of these are those who creep into houses and lead captive gullible women weighed down with sins, led away with various lusts*” (2 Tm 3:6). This would be those of the Sea Beast in Revelation who led people away from the Lord. John also warned those who are of the work of the Sea Beast to lead people away from God. They must remember, “*He who leads into captivity*

will go into captivity” (Rv 13:10). Every disciple, therefore, should utter the following plea in prayer to God, “*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (Mt 6:13).

Miss Lead always represents the way that is broad “*that leads to destruction*” (Mt 7:13). *Miss Lead* is one of the “*blind leaders of the blind*” (Mt 15:14). If one would guard himself or herself against such blind leadership, then one must be on guard with the word of God lest one be “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching*” (Ep 4:14). *Miss Lead* is a blind leader. “*And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*” (Mt 15:14).

If a religious leader is ignorant of the word of God, then he or she is a blind leader. If one is led by a blind leader, then he or she is a blind follower. Both will end up in the ditch of destruction. It is for this reason that the disciples of Divinity are avid students of the One who has the words of life. We therefore take seriously the following words of our Lord Jesus Christ that should be heeded by *Miss Lead*.

He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day (Jn 12:48).

Chapter 7

TATER DISCIPLESHIP

Leaders of the Lord's people have throughout the years been very positive about encouraging members of the body to function in a manner that benefits the whole body. Books abound around the world that focus on positive discipleship. The books have flourished so abundantly, however, that we often forget that the epistles of the New Testament were written to correct dysfunctions in the body. Sometimes "feel good" books are written with a total disregard for the Holy Spirit's instructions on how to correct dysfunctional discipleship.

It is great to think positive about the whole of discipleship, but in order to do so, we must identify and correct dysfunctional behavior that hinders the growth of the body. One of the means by which preachers and Bible teachers have done this throughout the years is to use words of the English language on which a reminder can be tagged to illustrate good and bad characteristics of discipleship.

We preached almost a half century ago a lesson on the "Tater" family. If one would go to the Internet, he will discover many preachers who have used this play on words of the English language in order to identify and correct relational dysfunctions in discipleship. We have done the same.

God revealed to Isaiah in reference to the reconstruction of Israel, "*And one will say, 'Built up! Build up! Prepare the way. Remove every obstacle out of*

the way of My people" (Is 57:14). In order to build again, every obstacle must be identified and removed from a building site. Our application of character obstacles that are presented here, therefore, are done so in order to build up the body of Christ. It is as Paul instructed in the context of Ephesians 4. Ministries of the word of God (apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers), were designated in the early church in order that the members not be as "*children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching*" (Ep 4:11,14).

The body of Christ is about relationships, but we must never forget that these relationships are based first on a common belief in and obedience to the truth of the gospel (See Gl 2:5; 1 Jn 1:3). Since the body of Christ is about relationships that are based on a common obedience to the truth of the gospel, then there are certain personality obstacles that must be corrected in order to construct healthy relationships that identify the loving nature of the disciples of Divinity (See Jn 13:34,35).

Belief in and obedience to a common truth is necessary. However, our initial obedience to the gospel does not iron out our behavioral dysfunctions that we often harbor while we struggle to live as a living sacrifice. Correcting behavioral dysfunctions is a lifetime project. Therefore, we must be cautious not to allow such dysfunctions to remain un-

challenged in the body of Christ, and thus hinder the growth of the body. So here, with a play on the word “potato,” we introduce to you the “Tater” family, using the colloquial word “tater” that is often used in America to refer to potatoes. These members are those who pose different challenges to the organic function of the body of Christ.

A. Dick Tater:

Dick Tater is autocratic and controlling. He seeks to be the boss, and thus, enjoys telling everyone what to do instead of showing them through the example of his own behavior. In the early church, the behavior of Diotrephes illustrates the autocratic behavior of *Dick Tater*. Diotrephes loved to be first among the disciples (3 Jn 9). And because he loved to be preeminent, his behavior was contrary to Christian leadership principles. He went so far in this dysfunctional behavior, that when he could not get his way among the members, he threatened to excommunicate those who would not submit to his control (3 Jn 10).

Dick Tater's scheme to gain and maintain dictatorial control over the members must be clarified because some leaders are unaware of their autocratic behavior. *Dick Tater* accomplishes his preeminent scheme through many means. He possibly announces to the members that “God told Him” through special means what to say or do. Or, he may announce to the church, “I had a dream.” Or because of his position among the politicians of the land, he possibly feels

that he should be held in high esteem among those of the church. And then there is his smooth and fair speech by which he beguiles the hearts of the innocent (See Rm 16:18). He is possibly a good speaker, and thus, through charming words he holds captive those who succumb to his charismatic persuasion (See 2 Tm 4:3). Or, it may be through his success in the business world that he feels that he has a financial advantage over the whole of the members. He may use his money to determine the direction of the works of the church by contributing only to those works in which he believes.

The behavior of *Dick Tater* is certainly contrary to one very specific mandate of Jesus concerning Christian leadership. It is a mandate that is crystal clear, but often so clearly violated by those who consider themselves leaders:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you*** (Mk 10:42,43).

Dick Tater should have these words written on a piece of paper and tagged on his refrigerator. This is a mandate that should be engraved on his mind. *Dick Tater*, and all his cousins, should not be functioning among the disciples of Divinity until they humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pt 5:5,6). They must realize that King Jesus has all authority among His disciples on earth (Mt 28:18).

B. Imi Tater:

Now we must give credit to *Imi Tater*. She can imitate that which is good. Paul wrote, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). The shepherds of the flock must leave an example for the sheep to imitate (1 Pt 5:3). By imitating that which is good, *Imi Tater* is giving heed to the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy: “*But you, O man of God ... follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness*” (1 Tm 6:11).

Unfortunately, *Imi Tater* also has a tendency to follow the crowd. She likes to “get on the bandwagon” and enjoy the company of those who may be going in the wrong direction. The problem with “bandwagons” is that the people on these wagons are often out of tune with the instructions of God. Religious bandwagons are directed more by society, than by the word of God.

The crowd is allowed to determine what is culturally correct on the bandwagon, and thus what is supposedly religiously correct. For this reason, the idiomatic expression “bandwagon” is used more in a negative sense than in a positive manner. *Imi Tater* is on that wagon in order to follow the bad example of others simply because everyone is there, and she does not want to be left out.

Imi Tater has a problem with standing alone upon God’s “bandwagon” of truth and integrity. Because of her weak character, therefore, she yields her behavior to the social pressures that are contrary to the will of God. Because she is

weak in the word of God, she easily follows the social religious beliefs of the crowd.

C. Common Tater:

Common Tater has the problem of wanting to comment on everything. He thinks he knows it all. He is the friend of too many of the sisters who were mentioned in the previous chapter.

One might say that *Common Tater* is a walking radio broadcast about all the affairs of the body of Christ. He is like the crows that were once flying off the pump handle of a local farm water pump. As the farmer sat quietly, he noticed several crows perched on the handle of his well pump. As each crow launched into flight, he also noticed that a crow would give out a loud squawk. *Common Tater* squawks about everything. He has a comment to make about more things than he knows. He is as someone stated, “It is better to let people think you are a fool than to open your mouth and prove it.”

Common Tater should heed the advice of Paul: “*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*” (Cl 4:6). And he should listen to James: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (Js 1:19). So we ask when *Common Tater* should speak, and about what he should speak? Peter would reply,

But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a rea-

son for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Pt 3:15).

D. Irra & Aggie Tater:

These two sisters are twins. And in being twins, their dysfunctional behavior in the family continually causes stress among the members. They are constantly stirring up feelings. They do not speak with speech that is seasoned with salt, but with speech that is seasoned with pepper. Where there are no problems, they have a talent to generate problems and tension. They wander about “*from house to house,*” being “*gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not*” (1 Tm 5:13).

Solomon warned about these two sisters: “*He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with him who flatters with his lips*” (Pv 20:19). Irra and Aggie have forgotten the exhortation of Solomon: “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit*” (Pv 18:21). They have forgotten that one will give account of every idle word he has spoken (Mt 12:36), “*for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned* (Mt 12:37).

James had Irra and Aggie Tater in mind when he wrote the context of James 3:2-12. In this context there were some stern warnings concerning one’s use of his or her mouth. Primarily, the exhortation of verse 8 is pertinent to the behavior of Irra and Aggie: “*But no one can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.*” Those who do not

realize this truth are the ones who often misuse their tongues.

E. Medi Tater

Medi Tater is the family member about whom Paul thought when he wrote the words, “*Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*” (Ep 5:14). *Medi Tater* spends a lot of time in meditating, but little time in getting the job done. He is inactive. He is slow. He is a dormant deadbeat in the work of the Lord. He is the member who must realize that we should make “*the most of the time because the days are evil*” (Ep 5:16). He is the one about whom also James wrote, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). *Medi Tater* will often be there faithfully every Sunday. However, when the “closing prayer” is uttered, the rest of the members must not expect any work from him throughout the week.

Sometimes a group of members will convince themselves that a “Sunday Morning Christianity” is all that is needed to get one through the pearly gates. They have deceived themselves into believing that faith without works will enable one to slide through the judgment into what is God’s final rest. They have forgotten, however, that heaven is a rest (Hb 4). But in order to enjoy the rest of heaven, one must have worked diligently to deserve the rest.

The character of *Medi Tater* often shows up in his work, if indeed he is energized to leave the security of his own

father and mother in order to work to support himself. Christianity is about “earning one’s keep.” Paul explained his behavior as a disciple when he was with the Thessalonians. “*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we did not behave ourselves disorderly among you*” (2 Th 3:7). The word “disorderly” is a military term. It was used in the military of the day in reference to one walking out of step with the rest of the soldiers.

In Paul’s use of the word, therefore, there is an “orderly” walk in reference to discipleship. And in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3, the orderly walk refers to working for one’s own sustenance. Paul continued, “... *nor did we eat any man’s bread without paying for it*” (2 Th 3:8). Paul did not freeload off the people. In this case, he felt no entitlement in reference to preaching the gospel to unbelievers. He reminded the Thessalonians, “*But we worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a [financial] burden to any of you*” (2 Th 3:8). (A lot of preachers need to read this statement again.)

Indeed, Paul did have the right to receive support from believers for teaching (1 Co 9:14; Gl 6:6). But he reminded the Thessalonians that when they were unbelievers, he preached the gospel to them without asking for a contribution. He did this in order to leave them an example of working with their own hands to support themselves. And when they were obedient to the gospel, and thus became members of the body, his mandate was that these disciples “*with qui-*

etness they work and eat their own bread” (2 Th 3:12). And if they did not work, then the working disciples must change their relationship with all those who were friends of *Medi Tater*: “*And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, note that man and have no company with him so that he may be ashamed*” (2 Th 3:14).

Therefore, “*if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*” (2 Th 3:10). Discipleship is about being busy in providing for one’s own needs. In providing for one’s own needs, he then has the opportunity to help provide for the needs of others until they are trained to provide for their own needs (See At 20:34,35; Ep 4:28). The conclusion to New Testament instructions for *Medi Tater* is that if he does not get to work to provide for his own needs, then he is to be disfellowshipped from the body of disciples (2 Th 3:6). He is walking dysfunctionally in reference to discipleship. He is out of step with the soldiers of Christ

F. Hesa Tater:

Hesa Tater suffers from apprehension. His problem is that he is so afraid of making a mistake, he ends up doing nothing lest he make a mistake. He has no dreams, for he allows all his fears of making a mistake to discourage him and others from launching out. He is the one during the meeting of the saints to plan work who always says, “Let me play the devil’s advocate.” And truly he does in reality function as the devil by posing all

sorts of obstacles in the minds of others that certain things cannot be done. His negative attitude during work meetings often results in work never getting done.

After the resurrection of Jesus, and while the disciples were on the sea of Galilee, Jesus appeared to them on the beach (See Jn 21:1-14). They had fished all night and accomplished nothing. Then one of the disciples looked up in the early morning hours and recognized Jesus at a distance standing on the beach beside some fish He was cooking. The disciple yelled out, "It's the Lord!" Upon hearing these words, Peter threw himself into the water and headed for Jesus.

We would do well to repeat to ourselves the words "It's the Lord" so many times that our ears ring with a desire to throw ourselves into His work. If we sit around apprehensive as *Hesa Tater*, opportunities will pass us by.

When we worked in the West Indies in the early 70s, one could freely walk down any mountain path and up to any house. He could ask if the occupants would like to study the Bible. The residents of nine out of ten houses in those days would cordially invite a stranger in to study the Bible. Those days are past. It is now that the occupants of nine out of ten houses will shut their doors to a study of the Bible. An opportunity passed by where there were few laborers to reap the receptivity of the day. There were too many *Hesa Taters* sitting on mission committees who hesitated to send laborers to those who were hungering and thirsting after the word of God.

G. Speck Tater:

The twin brother of *Hesa Tater* is *Speck Tater*. We all know the behavior of *Speck Tater*. He is willing to be a spectator of other people's work, but he or she sits idly by, often taking glory for the work of other disciples. There were some *Speck Tater* members in Corinth, for Paul rebuked them with the words in reference to his own labors, "*We are not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other man's labors*" (2 Co 10:15).

Speck Tater is willing to allow others to build the church while he sits and watches. When the work is done, he will take credit for the work with the actual workers who accomplished the work.

One of the fatal theologies of *Speck Tater* is the erroneous belief that his discipleship is determined by his spectator attendance at the assemblies of the saints. Or, he may believe that he is someone important if he attends important meetings and lectureships of the leaders of the saints, but does nothing at home to build the body.

Speck Tater fails to understand that attendance does not define discipleship. Attendance at meetings of the disciples reflects obedience to attend, but it does not determine the participation in the work of all those who attend. There were many brothers of *Speck Tater* in the early church. They first developed a "faith only" theology in order to pacify their laziness. James rebuked these spectators by revealing that their "faith only" was actually a dead faith (See Js 2:14-26).

The problem seemed to go beyond the theology of “faith only” to the point that *Speck Tator* did not show up at the assemblies of the saints. He did not because doing so meant that he would be intimidated into going to work. So the Hebrew writer answered *Speck Tater* with the statement, “*Let us consider one another to stir up love and good works*” (Hb 10:24). *Speck Tater* is not considerate of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He does not desire to be in any assembly wherein love and good works are encouraged. In such meetings, he would be the brother who would be encouraged to get to work. Because he developed the habit of not showing up, the Hebrew writer was more direct: “... *not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the habit of some ...*” (Hb 10:25).

Because he is inconsiderate of other disciples, *Speck Tater* developed a bad habit. He would not show up at any assembly where love and good works were encouraged. He stayed away, and thus denied his discipleship of Divinity. **No disciple can consider himself or herself a disciple of Divinity if he or she stays away from the family of disciples who would encourage them to love others, as well as become involved in the function of the body.**

H. Rot Tater:

There is no English word on which we can make a play to describe *Rot Tater*. The character of *Rot Tater* simply comes from the old proverbial statement, “He is a rotten potato,” meaning that in the

potato sack, one potato is rotten, and thus, should be discarded. And so should *Rot Tater*.

Rot Tater could be the traditional disciple who seeks to legally bind behavior and beliefs where God has not bound (See Rm 16:17). Or, he could be the lazy disciple about whom Paul spoke in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3. And then, he could be following his sister *Miss Fit*. What we would say to *Rot Tater* are the words that Paul wrote to a few *Rot Taters* in Colossians 3:12,13:

... put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you.

After repeating these words many times in his mind, *Rot Tater* should pray, “*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6:12).

I. Sweet Tater:

Sister *Sweet Tater* is the example for us all. She has followed the example of the early evangelists about whom Paul wrote to the Thessalonian disciples: “*We were gentle among you, even as a nurse tenderly cares for her own children*” (1 Th 2:7). She is the sister who has “*a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering*” (Cl 3:12). Her character is as some poet once wrote:

Just a friendly word or two,
Or a sympathetic smile;
And glad courage comes anew,
Shortening the weary mile.

Just to know that others care,
If we fail or if we fall;
And the ills that brought despair,
Will soon matter nothing at all.

Chapter 8

EXAMPLE DISCIPLESHIP

The historical sections of the New Testament focus mostly on how people responded to the person and mission of Jesus Christ. It is not that we bind as law the examples of their obedient responses to the law of God. If we would do this, then it would be justification for us doing the same in reference to binding our own example of obedience on others. And if we did this, we would bring into bondage those who would admire our example. We would thus minimize obedience to the law of God. Those who followed our examples would be encouraged to ignore God's law in order to keep our traditions, and thus, they would give up their own freedom in Christ (See Mk 7:1-9; Gl 5:1). It is the binding law of God that must be obeyed. The New Testament is filled with examples of how people obediently responded to the will of God.

In recording the obedient example of the early disciples, the Holy Spirit is trying to encourage and challenge us. We read the examples of the first century heroes of faith as illustrations, or challenges to better our own discipleship. When we see the effect that Jesus had on their lives, we are challenged to be transformed into a better living sacrifice that

is offered to God. If the early disciples responded in such a marvelous manner to the resurrected Son of God, then we also can do the same.

What is very encouraging is the extent, or extremity, to which the early saints committed themselves to live a totally sacrificed life in daily worship of the One who released them from the burden of their sins. Barnabas was one of these disciples. A definitive statement of his character and "spiritual worship" was written of him by the Holy Spirit:

*Then news of these things came to the ears of the church that was in Jerusalem. And **they sent Barnabas** off to Antioch. Now when he came and **saw the grace of God, he was glad. And he encouraged them** all that with purpose of heart that they remain faithful to the Lord. For **he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And many people were added to the Lord** (At 11:22-24).*

Every disciple of Divinity would desire that such be said of them in their ministry for the Lord. Before the announcement that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God on the day of Pentecost in

A.D. 30, and before he obeyed the gospel in response to this truth, Barnabas was an ordinary man just like the rest of us. His original name was Joseph, but he was later named “Barnabas” by the apostles (At 4:36). He was the cousin of John Mark (Cl 4:10). He was a Levite from Cyprus, and a former owner of land (See At 4:36,37).

It was not that Barnabas was a unique person. He simply responded uniquely to the person of Jesus in order to be a dedicated disciple. Because the Holy Spirit wanted all of us to recognize the totally committed response of Barnabas to the gospel, He recorded in Holy Scripture the example of his life. Since we have a New Testament record of Barnabas’ living sacrifice, the Holy Spirit is asking us to be encouraged by what we see in Barnabas.

A. Barnabas was an evangelistic disciple.

Barnabas “... *having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet*” (At 4:37). The historical context of this contribution is what made Barnabas’ action of giving so thrilling in reference to world evangelism.

Jewish and proselyte visitors came from throughout the world to be at one or more of the annual Pentecost celebrations in Jerusalem (See At 2:5-12). They came with money and supplies for the fifty-day celebration. But when the visitors arrived on the A.D. 30 Pentecost, God had a surprise for them.

On the A.D. 30 Pentecost, there

were about 3,000 people baptized in response to the announcement of the resurrection and reigning Jesus, whom the apostles declared to be the Messiah (Christ) and Son of God (At 2:29-38,41). At the following Pentecost a year later in A.D. 31, we would expect that the crowd was even greater, for Isaiah, 600 years before, had prophesied that the word of God would go from Jerusalem (Is 2:1-4). Once the word (gospel) was initially announced at the A.D. 30 Pentecost, it motivated the first respondents to broadcast the good news to synagogues throughout the Roman Empire. One can only imagine the multitude of people who went forth into all the known world with the news of the resurrected Jesus in their hearts. They went forth to announce to the world the good news that the apostles had declared in the streets of Jerusalem.

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were the “Bibles” who declared the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, as well as God’s instructions for those who were now His new creation in Christ (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). The apostles thus stayed in Jerusalem for as long as fifteen years in order to greet Jews who continued annually to come to the Pentecost feasts. It was a “lectureship” for the returning Jewish saints, but an opportunity to evangelistically reach out to those Jews, who for the first time, would encounter Jesus through the apostles’ teaching.

The need for support for these visitors who came from all parts of the world, became critical for the local disciples. The local disciples knew that the visitors

needed to continue “*steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship*” (At 2:42). Because everyone knew that the gospel must be preached to every creature of the world (Mk 16:15), the local Christians partnered financially with the visitors in order to keep the visitors at the apostles’ feet to be taught for as long as possible. When these disciples returned home throughout the world, they would preach Jesus in their synagogues and communities.

For this reason, the local Christians responded to the financial needs of the day. “*Great grace was upon them all*” (At 4:33). Therefore, there was no one “*among them [the visitors], who lacked, for as many [local disciples] as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds and the things that were sold*” (At 4:34). And Barnabas was right in there among those who sold their possessions. “*Barnabas ... having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet*” (At 4:36,37). Barnabas, too, believed the prophecies and mandate of Jesus that the gospel must be preached to all the world.

Since Jesus’ prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem would in the near future take away all the possessions of the Judean Christians, and depopulate Judea of Jewish residents, the local disciples believed Jesus, and subsequently they disinvested in Palestine (See Mt 24). Barnabas as well, believed Jesus and sold out. He joined with the other disciples in putting his money into world evangelism.

This is just a small window into the

heart of a true disciple of Divinity. In reference to finances, Barnabas had his priorities in order concerning what was most important in reference to preaching the gospel to the world. The following words of Jesus continued to ring in his ears: “*You cannot serve God and wealth*” (Mt 6:24). Barnabas chose to serve God. He knew that it was better to die poor, than to leave an inheritance that could be wasted away by heirs who loved wealth.

Barnabas was a disciple who understood the continued work of the One of whom he claimed to be a disciple. Throughout his life as a disciple, he not only gave to support the preaching of the gospel, but he also personally did the work by going with Paul on Paul’s first mission journey (At 13, 14). True disciples of Divinity both support missions, and sometimes, they are missionaries themselves. If they cannot go to other fields, they make sure that someone does (See Rm 10:14,15; 3 Jn 5-8).

B. Barnabas was an exhorting disciple.

Because Joseph was gifted with the personality and ability to encourage people, the apostles changed his name. They changed it to “Barnabas,” which name means “*The Son of Encouragement*” (At 4:36). This makes one think. If we were in contact with the apostles, and they really knew who we were, then what name would they give us? Would our new name be “The Son of Joy”? Or possibly, it might be “The Son of Opti-

mism.” Or maybe it would be, “The Son of Despair,” or, “The Son of Discouragement,” or even, “The Son of Lazy.” If our name were changed by our friends, then what name would they give us?

Barnabas had the gift of encouraging others because he was an encouraging personality. The room became brighter when he entered. Because Barnabas had the spirit of encouragement, God could use him for unique ministries. For example, when the disciples in Judea heard that there were new disciples in Antioch, *“they sent Barnabas off to Antioch”* (At 11:22). And when Barnabas arrived, *“he encouraged them all that with purpose of heart that they remain faithful to the Lord”* (At 11:23).

When in a mission area where boldness was needed to preach the gospel to unbelievers, Barnabas was there. And when many believed what Barnabas and Paul taught, the two speakers *“persuaded them to continue in the grace of God”* (At 13:43). But when the opposition saw that the people were giving heed to what Barnabas and Paul were preaching, the two evangelists *“grew bold”* (At 13:46). On their return to cities to which they had first preached the gospel, Barnabas and Paul *“taught many ... confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith”* (At 14:21,22).

Barnabas was one who certainly implemented in his life the mandate of the Hebrew writer: *“But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (Hb 3:13). Barnabas was one with all those saints who were

for *“encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching”* (Hb 10:25).

One of the tasks of a good evangelist is to encourage the disciples wherever they are encountered. When Paul and Silas left Philippi, *“they encouraged”* the brethren (At 16:40). Aquila and Priscilla encouraged Apollos to continue on in his personal mission to Corinth (At 18:27; see 1 Co 16:12). Even when Paul was in the midst of a storm at sea, he encouraged everyone who was on board the doomed vessel by revealing to them that they would all survive (At 27:33).

One of the signals of true discipleship is manifested in how we affect people in a positive manner. And there is no greater gift in human relationships than to be one who brings encouragement to the disheartened.

Christianity is about mutual encouragement. Paul wanted to visit the disciples in Rome, so that, he wrote, he might be *“encouraged together”* with them (Rm 1:12; compare Rm 15:4,5; Ph 2:1). As a Christian, Barnabas realized his responsibility was to always encourage those in whose company he was at any particular time.

C. Barnabas was a good disciple.

We find the following statement most incredible in reference to God commending a man. It is a statement of the Holy Spirit in reference to the character of Barnabas: *“For he [Barnabas] was a good man”* (At 11:24). This is God mak-

ing a statement concerning the character of one of His precious children.

If the Holy Spirit referred to Barnabas as “a good man,” then certainly we would want to know what was necessary in order that we too be considered good by God. We would certainly say that Barnabas was considered good by God because of feeling the needs of others, for he gave his possessions (At 4:37). He was one who perceived the heart of God to preach the gospel to the world, for he both gave to missions, and then he gave himself as a missionary (At 13,14; see 3 Jn 5-8). And he was right in his faith, for he, being a Levite, believed and obeyed the gospel. In one’s life as a disciple, he or she is either portraying Christ or betraying Christ. Barnabas was a shining example of what the Holy Spirit would declare to us as one who portrayed Christ. Because he portrayed Christ, he was a good man.

If one were carrying a bucket of water from the well to his house, and was accidentally bumped by his neighbor, he would spill only what was in the bucket, that is, water. Life is full of bumps. We are often bumped daily as we walk along life’s journey. It seems that in Barnabas’ case, he spilled only goodness. And because he spilled only that which was good, the Holy Spirit identified him as a good man. If we are filled with the Spirit, then we will be considered by God to be good, and thus, spill only good when we are bumped.

D. Barnabas was a man full of the Holy Spirit.

Most people today misunderstand what being “full of the Holy Spirit” means. It helps to understand being full of the Spirit by reasoning what it cannot be. Reference cannot be to degrees by which the Spirit dwells within the Christian, for we all have Him the same. The Holy Spirit does not present the opportunity for any disciple to glory in reference to how much the Spirit works in his life, for the Spirit does not work to give one the opportunity to glory in himself. Being filled with the Spirit cannot refer to one’s gifts being marginalized, or overpowered by His influence. If this were the case, then the Spirit would become a respecter of persons in that He would enhance one person’s gifts, but ignore another’s. Being filled with the Spirit cannot refer to one being more “spiritual” than any other disciple. Again, this would be saying that the Spirit shows respect of persons. We would wonder why He would empower one disciple and ignore another. And if one disciple claimed to be especially empowered directly by the Holy Spirit, then a fellow disciple would feel that he was marginalized by the Spirit because he was neglected or overlooked by the Spirit.

Understanding “being filled with the Spirit” as it is used in several New Testament contexts might help. John the Baptist was “*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb*” (Lk 1:15). This certainly had no reference to baby John speaking in tongues, preaching marvelous lessons, being spiritually minded, or giving spiritual counsel. We can only assume from this statement that

as a babe, John was a good infant. There was something about his demeanor, even as a babe, that signaled to everyone that there was something special about this child. And certainly, when he was able to speak, things started to happen in his life.

Those who were filled with the Spirit conducted their lives with sobriety. The demeanor of their behavior commanded the attention of others. In this way, they were led by the Spirit, for they followed a course of ministry to be useful to the Holy Spirit to both live and speak the word of God.

Any who would be filled with the Spirit would speak out for God. They would not be timid. Elizabeth, John's mother, "*as filled with the Holy Spirit. And she spoke out ...*" (Lk 1:41,42). "*Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit. And he prophesied ...*" (Lk 1:67). "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them ...*" (At 4:8). "*Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they spoke the word of God with boldness*" (At 4:31). "*Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, ... said ...*" (At 13:9). Get the point? Barnabas was filled with the Spirit, and thus used his gift of encouragement to speak forth the word of God to the people. He was an encouraging person, both in the demeanor of his life and by the words he spoke.

The behavior of Barnabas identified him as a Spirit-filled person. It was as Paul later wrote to the Ephesians: "*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*" (Ep 5:18). Being drunk will lead one to

do all sorts of senseless things. According to Paul's statement to the Ephesians, when one is emotionally behaving senselessly, he is not filled with the Spirit. Losing control of one's emotions is like being drunk. But the opposite is true for those who are filled with the Spirit.

When a disciple behaves soberly, it is then that his behavior reveals that the Spirit is directing him through his obedience to the word of God. Those religionists who writhe on the ground in senseless nonsense are as those who are as one drunk with wine. They are not filled with the Spirit because they are emotionally out of control. Because of his sober behavior, on the other hand, people could see that Barnabas was a man filled with the Spirit. And because his demeanor was under control, people listened when he spoke.

E. Barnabas was a man full of faith.

The Holy Spirit tagged Barnabas as a man "*who was full ... of faith*" (At 11:24).

1. He had faith in the mission of Jesus: The extent of his faith was revealed through the contribution he made to the mission of preaching the gospel to the world. The text reads, "*... having land, sold it ...*" (At 4:37). The indication is that he sold **all his land**. He did not sell some of his land, and deceptively hold back some as Ananias and Sapphira did in reference to the sale of their possessions (At 5:1-11). But as a land owner, he sold all of that which many consid-

ered to be the one possession that is most difficult to release ... land!

The extent of Barnabas' faith was not revealed in what he gave, but in how much he kept back for himself. **He sold it all and kept back nothing for himself.** It was as someone said, "Generosity is not a sum in addition. It is a sum in subtraction." And the sum in subtraction in reference to the contribution of Barnabas' land was 100%. He believed that the land belonged to God. Whether he had personal control over his land, or the church to which he contributed the proceeds of the sale, he believed that his possessions always belonged to God.

2. He had faith in people: Barnabas also had faith in people. Something happened in the early life of Barnabas as a disciple that manifested his faith in people. After his conversion in Acts 9, Saul (Paul) eventually returned to Jerusalem. However, it seems that the fear of him as a persecutor of the church continued to prevail among the saints in the city. Luke recorded, "*And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him*" (At 9:26).

Having faith in people is sometimes difficult, especially if a particular person has been one's enemy. Of all the saints in Jerusalem who knew that Saul formerly persecuted the church, it seems that Barnabas stood alone and above the crowd. Luke continued the record of this event, "***But Barnabas took him [Saul] and brought him to the apostles***" (At 9:27). This is the epitome of a disciple of Divinity. The following is the example

of what Divinity did for us:

*For when we were still without strength, at the right time **Christ died for the ungodly.** For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Rm 5:6-8).*

And such was the example Barnabas followed in reference to loving one who was once his enemy in the faith. His faith in people illustrated his faith in God, for by his faith in God he was able to overlook the wrongs of one who was once his enemy.

The faith of Barnabas moved him to be patient with people. Many years later, when he and Paul were going on Paul's second mission journey, Barnabas wanted to take with them his cousin John Mark. But on the first journey, Mark had departed from Barnabas and Paul (At 13:13).

Paul knew that they were again going into hostile territory on the second journey, and thus thought it not wise to take Mark (Acts 15:36-41). An argument ensued and Barnabas ended up patiently taking Mark with him back to familiar territory where they had previously visited.

Barnabas' faith in Mark eventually paid off, for at the end of Paul's life, and while in prison, Paul called for Mark to bravely come to what would be the future seat of persecution (Rome) (2 Tm 4:11). Paul needed Mark for ministry in Rome.

Barnabas seems to have always recognized something good in people. Because he always looked for the best in people, he treated people accordingly. And for this reason he reassured everyone he met that he considered them for the good they were and not for the wrongs of their past. Barnabas made a decision to always remember the good about the past, and thus he sweetened the present through his sweet memories of the past. Maybe we should have more sessions with one another wherein we say in one another's presence all the good that we

know about one another.

When we think about Barnabas, we think of a disciple who sought to emulate in his life the character and actions of the God who loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). Barnabas would take the side of the downcast in order to draw from within them their greatness which they could use for the glory of God. We remember what John exhorted Gaius to do: *"Imitate that which is good"* (3 Jn 11). And Barnabas is a good disciple we should imitate.

Chapter 9

FOOD DISCIPLESHIP

Different fruits and vegetables affect different people in different ways, depending on their tastes. And so it is with our personality and character. How we portray Christ to others often depends on the tastes of those in whose presence we are. And for this reason, it is important for every Christian to fine tune his personality and character in order to manifest, as Paul said, *"the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place"* (2 Co 2:14).

Our influence on others is as Paul continued in his letter to the Christians in Achaia, *"To the one we are the aroma from death to death, and to the other the aroma from life to life"* (2 Co 2:16). We thus work on how we present ourselves to others for a very important purpose: *"For we are to God a sweet fragrance of Christ, in those who are being saved and*

in those who are perishing" (2 Co 2:15). It is our goal to present to others the sweet fragrance of Christ in order that others be attracted to Christ, and thus, come to life.

One of the purposes for our close relationship with one another in Christ is that we are offered the opportunity to check one another's personality and character. The closer we become, the more our personalities are identified by one another. Assets are discovered, and detriments are discouraged. As disciples of Divinity we are relational in order that we can fine tune our personalities and characters for a better presentation of the radiant aroma of Christ to the world.

In our travels around the world, we have encountered hundreds of fruits and vegetables that often identify the personality and character of Christians. In a

metaphorical application, some of the following fruits and vegetables may not be fully understood by every reader, simply because a particular reader may not have eaten the fruit or vegetable. Nevertheless, in the definition of the tastes of the selected fruit or vegetable, we hope to describe metaphorically a particular personality or character that we may have encountered or portray ourselves.

A. Breadfruit disciples:

Breadfruit is a fruit that originated in the South Pacific. Once discovered as a fruit that could be eaten, the tree was planted in many places of the world in order to provide food for slaves. When we were in the West Indies we ate breadfruit. When eaten straight from the tree, this fruit is so bland that it needs a great deal of help to be pleasing to the tastes. It is thus cooked in every possible way in order to make it palatable. It is simply a bland fruit that always needs help in order to make it acceptable.

There are some very bland disciples who need a lot of help with their personality. These are disciples who need to heed the words of the Holy Spirit: *“Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”* (Ep 5:14).

There may be some who are bland simply because they have grown disheartened. These disciples need to listen to the Hebrew writer when he spoke in reference to the hardships of Jesus: *“For consider Him who endured such hostil-*

ity by sinners against Himself, so that you not grow weary and faint in your minds” (Hb 12:3). And, *“My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him”* (Hb 12:5).

If one feels that he needs help in order not to become weary and faint, then it may be that he has become dull of hearing the exhorting word of God that is able to build us up (At 20:32; Hb 5:11). If the word of God is able to build up our faith—and it is—then when our faith is not being built up, we must assume that we are not into the word as we should be (See Rm 10:17).

A good point to remember is what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* If one’s life is bland because he or she has become weary and faint-hearted, then it is time to wake up and smell the coffee. All disciples go through times when life seems bland. It is not wrong to sometimes be down, but it is wrong to stay down. If we stay down, then one is not allowing Christ to strengthen him. The problem is not in what causes us to be bland, but our rejection of that which is able to build us up. When one becomes excited about the seed of the kingdom, the result is that he becomes excited about the spiritual needs of others. And when one is excited about the needs of others, he will become more excited about the Seed. Seed and need build one up in spiritual strength (See At 20:32).

B. Squash disciples:

There are numerous types of squash throughout the world. But there is one thing that is common with every squash in reference to being used as a food. Once cooked, every squash is squashed. The name of the food is appropriate. Squash is made to be squashed as a food, and thus in being squashed, it loses its identity. Unless one has identified the food before it was smashed into an eatable food, one would not know if it were squash, a pumpkin, a potato, or some root.

Some Christians lose their identity when “squashed” by the heat of persecution, or simply by a trying situation in which they find themselves. Such was the case with the disciples to whom the Hebrew writer gave instructions to stand strong in Christ. He wrote the following to these disciples who were on the verge of apostasy:

For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and brings forth herbs useful for those by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God (Hb 6:7).

The point: We receive God’s blessing when we faithfully produce. However, there was a problem with these disciples. The recipients of this exhortation, who were being intimidated to return to the Sinai law, were in the process of losing their identity as Christians, and thus, their salvational blessing from God.

The writer continued, “*But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected*

and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned” (Hb 6:8). If these Christians were “squashed” by the “thorns and thistles” into apostasy, then they would eventually be burned. Therefore, they must “*imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hb 6:12).* In other words, without faithfulness, there is no blessing of the promises.

This is critical in reference to our salvation, “*for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hb 10:26).* Squash disciples, therefore, must be cautioned about losing their identity as Christians, and thus, their inheritance of the promises. They must not allow the world in which they live to weaken their identity as disciples of Divinity, and thus, rob them of their salvation.

One can lose his identity as a Christian if he follows after any faith that is not identified as true by the will of God (See Mt 7:21). One can lose his identity as a Christian if he becomes a friend of the world (Js 4:4). If one is squashed into the image of the world, then certainly he has lost his discipleship of Divinity, and subsequently, his eternal salvation.

C. Radish disciples:

The first bite of a radish is hot. It looks good on the outside because it is red. But when eaten, it is often too hot for some people to be eaten alone. It must be mixed with another food, possibly in a salad.

Some disciples are like this in their personality. They have a hot temper. They forget that their hot temper is too close to danger. But someone advised, "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow." One hot word will often cool a relationship.

The radish disciple is in need of patience. Solomon would admonish him with the words, "*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who controls his spirit than he who takes a city*" (Pv 16:32). "*Therefore, my beloved brethren,*" James exhorted, "*let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*" (Js 1:19).

Radish disciples have one of the most difficult personalities to overcome. It is hard to overcome because they have usually been this way from their youth. Others have allowed them to get away with their outbursts of anger. And now in an age of social media, their hot temper shows up as "online bullying." They are very critical, and subsequently, they make heated remarks in response to something they read on someone's timeline.

Hot tempered people are known for speaking (writing) before they think. They will make their critical statements on social media because they know that no one will be able to give them a face-to-face response with which they must deal personally. They become social media trolls who are in search of some innocent victim to vent their "radish personality."

These are those disciples who have lost their aroma of Christ, and thus,

people do not desire to be around them, lest something is said that sets them off. They are opinionated to the point that others are in fear of voicing their own opinions, lest the discussion digresses into debate. These are those disciples who need to heed the Holy Spirit's advice to "*let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*" (Cl 4:6).

A wise writer once wrote the following short story of a radish disciple:

Once upon a time there was a fellow who got very angry at something that was done to him in the church. So he said, "I'll never go back to that church again. I'll die and go to hell first." And so he did.

D. Grapefruit disciples:

Ever just take a big bite of a grapefruit? It makes one cringe.

Some personalities are like this. When encountered, they make one cringe. Not only do grapefruit personalities cause others to cringe, they sometimes cringe themselves at the word of God when they learn something in their Bibles that conflicts with their behavior. Therefore, one must be very cautious around a grapefruit disciple, because if something is said or read that sets him off, then he brings tension into the discussion.

1. Cringed by harsh words: Grapefruit people react with caustic statements, wherein the audience becomes shocked, stunned and quiet. The sad thing about the grapefruit disciple is that one day he

eventually wakes up and finds himself alone. People are too frightened about even calling him on the telephone. His personality does not encourage people to gather around him for encouragement. By his speech he repels people. We might say that he is opposite to the personality of Barnabas who was the “son of encouragement” (At 4:36).

2. Cringed by the word: Jeremiah once wrote a message from God to King Jehoiakim. The message was written on a scroll and read before the king. But when Jehoiakim heard the message, he reacted:

So it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns, he [the king] cut it with a penknife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth” (Jr 36:23).

Sometimes, grapefruit disciples are cringed by the word of God, and thus, react to the word in a similar manner as Jehoiakim. The Holy Spirit would say to those who negatively react to God’s word, “*Do not quench the Spirit*” (1 Th 5:19). “*Do not despise prophecies*” (1 Th 5:20).

If they continue on their course of life, grapefruit disciples eventually lose their identity as disciples of Divinity. They do so because they reject that which identifies one as a disciple. If the word of God is rejected, then that which is God’s instructional manual for discipleship can no longer be the guide of the one who poses as a follower of God. The

disciple who despises the word of God, either through lack of study, or just plain rejection of the word, becomes a religionist. He becomes a wolf among the disciples because he does not know the word of God. It would be this person about whom Jesus was possibly thinking when He made the statement: “... *because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth*” (Rv 3:16).

E. Onion disciples:

The response of others when they come into contact with the personality of this disciple is obvious. The onion disciple makes you want to cry. This is the pessimist with pains, and to be sure, he will explain every pain in his life, whether in body or in his relationships with others. This disciple is as someone said of him: “The guy who feels bad when he feels good because he is afraid he will feel worse when he gets to feeling better.”

The onion disciple thinks that every day is “National Frown Day,” and thus he brings a dark cloud of sadness to those he encounters throughout the day. He is like the boy who was given grapes, but complained when he found that they had seeds.

In a hospital there were two patients lying in recovery from their illnesses. When one of the patients was asked how he was feeling, he responded, “I am better today.” When the other patient was asked how he felt, he responded, “I was worse yesterday.” Our personality is

portrayed to others in how we respond to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our personality can be identified by how we would respond to rain. One person might respond, "This rain will make mud." The other would say, "This rain will cause the crops to grow." Our personality is sometimes revealed by what two men said when looking at a bush. One said, "This bush has thorns." The other said, "This bush has a rose." Our personality will determine the quality of our relationships with others.

Paul would say to the onion disciple, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, rejoice!*" (Ph 4:4). We must not allow ourselves to respond in a negative manner to the environment in which we live. One person may be stung by a bee, but still call it a honey bee. But the onion disciple would call the bee a stinging bee. A disciple who is rejoicing always in the Lord will always say, "I am glad that I get to live for Jesus." But the onion disciple is pessimistic. He would say, "I'm sorry that I must die." Pessimism may creep out of us when we react to our environment. We might say, "I am glad that my social environment is not worse." But then we might say, "I'm sorry that it is no better."

The personality of the onion disciple is that his discipleship is mixed with too much negativism, whereas the life of the rejoicing disciple is mixed with just a little sadness that comes his way. Nevertheless, he continues to rejoice in the Lord. He has the personality about which James wrote, "*My brethren, count it all*

joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience" (Js 1:2,3).

F. Carrot disciples:

Carrots are hard and brittle. Because of their nature, they have little taste. Carrots are usually eaten only when mixed with some other food, or when cooked.

There are disciples like uncooked carrots. One might say that they have a stilted personality that is hard and crunchy. They may be suffering from a hardened heart because of past experiences. They are as Pharaoh who hardened his heart against the work of God (See Ex 7:22). Nebuchadnezzar also hardened his heart (Dn 5:20). Those disciples to whom the Hebrew writer was directing his admonition were in danger of hardening their hearts as the rebellious Israelites who came out of Egyptian captivity. The writer admonished, "*Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion*" (Hb 3:8). On the contrary, the Hebrew writer exhorted, "*Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion*" (Hb 3:15).

The carrot disciple must allow himself to be cooked in the aroma of Jesus in order to loosen up. Once loosened up, he is palatable. When one finds himself becoming hardened by the circumstances around him, then he needs to be cooked by Christ. He needs to give himself over to God, and allow God to mold him after His holiness (See 1 Pt 5:5,6).

G. Wild olive disciples:

The first time we tasted an olive directly picked from the tree was the last time we ate an olive directly from the tree. It was so bitter that we could not get its remnants out of our mouth fast enough. It is the *oleuropein* in the olive that is tremendously bitter. Therefore, the olive must be “cured.” It must be soaked in brine, salt or lye, with the added flavoring of wine vinegar, before it is transformed into a delightful food to be eaten. Once processed, olives are just great in a host of foods.

There are some bitter olives in the world. They are as rotten apples, bitter in personality, and just grouchy. They often carry a “chip on their shoulders.” But something great will happen in their lives when they become disciples of Jesus. They can be transformed from a sour and bitter olive into that which is palatable. When one encounters and obeys the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is changed into something that is delightful. Paul wrote of some of these former bitter olives. After explaining their former toxic character, he reminded them,

Now such were some of you. But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God (1 Co 6:11).

These former bitter olives, who “*once behaved in times past in the lusts of our flesh,*” had allowed themselves to be

morphed (transformed) by the renewing of their minds (Rm 12:2). Those who have transformed their thinking are no longer wild olive disciples. They focus their minds on those things that are above, and thus they become the living sacrifices that offer up a sweet fragrance of worship to God.

H. Banana disciples:

One word could be used to describe a banana ... pleasing. It is not hard like a carrot. It is not hot like a radish. It is not bitter like an uncured olive. A banana is simply delightful to eat.

People like to hang around a banana disciple. They are not afraid of something being said that will offend. They are not afraid of offensive words that either embarrass or hurt. This is the disciple who always speaks with grace (Cl 4:6). The reason for this mellow and appealing personality is that the banana disciple has given heed to Paul’s words in Colossians 3:12,13:

Therefore, put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you.

We all come to Christ as wild olives. We are often bitter, being embittered by the world. But the beautiful aroma that comes from the Son of God will mellow us in Christ. We will be

transformed into the living image of Jesus. Our personality changes because our character is changed as the word of Christ richly dwells in us (Cl 3:16).

I. Mango disciples:

Many people in cold climates have not had the privilege of tasting a mango. They have missed out on a little bit of heaven on earth. All we have to say about mango discipleship is that this is what we would be. If you have eaten a mango, you will understand that our characters should be as mangos. Yummy!

Sometimes we use a particular fruit or vegetable in one phrase to explain the character or personality of different people. Ever hear this: “He’s a rotten apple”? Or maybe on the positive side, “She’s a peach.” And then there are those

who are simply “sour grapes.” Or simply, “He’s fruity,” or just “full of beans,” or “nuts.”

The objective of every disciple of Divinity is to allow his or her personality and character to be transformed into the aroma of Christ. This is a lifetime project. It is spiritual growth that takes place over years of constant struggle. We thus study continually the behavior of Jesus in order to be as He is. By being as Him, we draw others closer to Him. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (Ph 1:27). And when our behavior is worthy of the gospel, it is then that the words of Paul are understood in 1 Corinthians 11:1: “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.*”

Chapter 10

MILITANT DISCIPLESHIP

When James said, “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works,*” he essentially said, “I won’t believe what you believe until I see how committed you are in putting your faith into action” (Js 2:18). “Walk the talk” is more than a cliché when applied to Christianity. In reference to the disciples of Jesus, the commonly used phrase is crucial to identify those who are truly disciples of Divinity.

In today’s political use of the word “militant,” people usually cringe with visions of terrorism, guns and bombs. But preachers have been using this term

for centuries in reference to the diligent actions of the disciples of Christ. And before the preachers, there was the Holy Spirit. We do not, therefore, shy away from using the term, especially since the militancy of the disciple of Divinity is almost the entire opposite of the actions of carnal terrorists who kill innocent people.

Both the carnal terrorist and the disciple of Jesus are moved by intense beliefs. However, the outcome of each is entirely different. One reaches for a gun or bomb, but the other reaches for the word of God in order to better his own life and the lives of others. One strikes

fear in the hearts of citizens, but the other generates love. One repels and the other attracts.

The New Testament is loaded with military terms that are used as metaphors to explain the militant zeal of the Christian. The disciple of Jesus understands that the metaphors are simply figures of speech that are used by the Holy Spirit to ignite our faith into action. The metaphors were never given as a motive to implement a carnal military crusade as was typical of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. In fact, the metaphorical meaning of the military terms are opposite to someone generating any carnal warfare based on one nation or faith militarily conquering another. On the contrary, the implementation of the mighty force of Christians makes the world a place of peace, not fear.

The dictionary definition of “militant” would be one who seeks to fight for his faith by engaging in war against the enemy. As a soldier of his commander, the militant maintains a combative character in order to engage the enemy. He is ready and willing to fight for his faith. In reference to the disciple of Divinity, the militant soldier of the cross seeks to engage the enemy of all unrighteousness. And thus, his life as a disciple is constantly in conflict with the powers of evil. Paul explained:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pull-

ing down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Co 10:3-5).

Christians “*put on the whole armor of God so that*” they may be able “*to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). They are willing “*to fight the good fight of the faith*” (1 Tm 6:12). And thus, they are willing to “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Tm 2:3), so at the end of their lives they can say as Paul, “*I have fought the good fight*” (2 Tm 4:7).

The nature of the disciple’s life, therefore, is conducted under the shadow of what Jesus said in Matthew 10:34: “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” Jesus used the word “sword” as a metaphor to indicate that those who would become His disciples would suffer persecution because they, with the “sword” of the word of God, would engage the world of unrighteousness. When the early evangelists went throughout the world preaching the gospel, they taught the new converts “*that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22). When the sword of the Spirit is swung across the world of evil, tribulation will ensue.

The result of the militancy of the early church was amazing. For two thousand years, preachers and Bible teachers have used the example of the New Tes-

tament disciples to illustrate what it means to be a totally committed living sacrifice. While living under harsh oppression, the gospel went forth throughout the Roman Empire. By A.D. 61,62 Paul could write from a Roman prison that the gospel message “*was preached to every creature that is under heaven*” (Cl 1:23). The early disciples “*turned the world upside down*” for Jesus (At 17:6). We today often wonder how they did this, when at first they suffered from the oppression of the Jewish religious establishment, and then by the state opposition of the Roman Empire for over two hundred years. We offer the following reasons for their success:

A. They exalted the one God.

Christianity was born into a world of idolatry. This idolatry was the religion of most people of the world at the time when the early Christians proclaimed that there was only one true and living God. In fact, it could be stated that only the Jews maintained a belief in only one God. The rest of the world was idolatrous.

At one time on one of his mission journeys, Paul went right into one of the seats of idolatry. He went to Athens, Greece. He encountered there the most rigid idolaters of the day, that is, philosophical idolaters. Nevertheless, these idolaters reasoned that for there to be a true God, then this God must be beyond the comprehension of man. The Greek citizenship believed in many gods, but the Greek philosophers reasoned that

there must be out there only one “high” God.

When Paul passed through the streets of Athens, he noticed many idols that had been made to honor the different gods of the Greek’s imagination. But when he stood before the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, he said, “... *as I passed by and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD’*” (At 17:23). These Greek philosophers were wise enough to know that if they could figure out the behavior of the gods that men conceived in their own minds, then they certainly could not conceive the “god of gods” through the reasoning of men. Therefore, Paul said to them, “*The One whom you worship in ignorance, Him I declare to you*” (At 17:23). This statement sparked their interest.

If a disciple of Divinity would be militant for Christ, then there must be no doubt in his mind concerning the existence of the one true and living God (Ep 4:6). This God must be defined by the revelation of His description (the Bible). Any other source of definition will not do. In order to endure the tribulation that comes with bearing the sword of Christ, one must be totally committed to the one God of heaven. One’s faith in God must be the foundation upon which he or she will stand in the heat of any persecution.

B. They believed that Jesus was the only Savior.

The early disciples believed that there was eternal salvation **only** in Jesus

Christ. This was an absolute in their thinking. Peter expressed this belief in the following proclamation before some unbelieving religious leaders: “*And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (At 4:12). In order to be militant for Christ, there can be no compromise in this belief. If Jesus is one of many options, then He is no option at all. The salvation of all men since the cross will be determined by people’s response to the word of Christ (Jn 12:48), for through His word will all men be judged (At 17:30,31).

We live in a world of “acceptable multiple religiosity.” It is the belief of the political liberal to accept all faiths as valid, Christian or non-Christian. This movement is especially true in reference to modern-day democracies around the world. In a democracy, every faith must be respected and accepted, but when approaching God, only the faith that is defined by His word is acceptable to Him. God is no respecter of persons. “*But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:35). It is the responsibility of every man on earth to find this God whom all men must fear and obey.

God accepts all those who manifest their fear of Him through their work of His righteousness. This means that no man has a right to invent his own righteousness by which he would seek to be acceptable to God. Christians are militant to teach the righteousness of God, for they know that “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship*

Him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24).

C. They took ownership of their Christ-ordained jobs.

The early disciples received their job description from what Jesus said in Mark 16:15: “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” This is exactly what they did. “*Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*” (At 8:4).

In order to accomplish their job description, Paul outlined in 1 Corinthians 3:6 what the early disciples did: “*I [Paul] have **planted**, Apollos **watered**, but God gave the **increase**.*”

1. The disciples’ job was to plant.

Paul first planted the seed of the kingdom in Corinth (At 18:5,11). His first message wherever he went was to preach the gospel, which thing he did in Corinth and Achaia (1 Co 15:3,4). The result of his preaching the gospel was that men and women were “*brought you forth through the gospel*” (1 Co 4:15).

After the example of the early disciples, it is our job to preach the gospel to the world. It is about this job that the early Christians were concerned, because they knew that no one could be saved without obedience to the gospel of Jesus. Only He was the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). They knew that Jesus would eventually come “*in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and **who do not obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8). And if

the righteous are scarcely saved through their obedience to the gospel, then there was no hope for those who did not obey the gospel (See 1 Pt 4:18). They believed, therefore, as Paul: “*For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*” (1 Co 9:16).

Since the early Christians knew that there was salvation by no other means other than through Christ, then their commitment to accomplish their job as disciples was expressed in the words of Paul: “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15).

2. *The disciples’ job was to water:*

Apollos encouraged the saints whom Paul had fathered through the preaching of the gospel (At 18:27,28). It was his job as a disciple to build up the body of Christ through teaching (See At 20:28). What was on the mind of every teacher and shepherd of the first century was the thinking of the shepherd who stood up and said before the assembly, “We ain’t what we ought to be, and we ain’t what we’re gonna be, but thank God we ain’t what we used to be.” In realizing this, Barnabas was the “son of encouragement” in action. He, as well as many others, assumed their job of edifying the body of Christ because they were thankful that they were not what they used to be because of the grace of God.

The ministries of the word of God that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:11,12 were for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ. As newborn babes in Christ (1 Pt 2:2), the early teachers of the body built up the body by teaching the word of God (At 20:32). The early church

grew across the Roman Empire because the early disciples assumed their job to build up the body with the word.

3. *They trusted that God would do His job by giving the increase:* Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:6 that it was God, not them, who gave the increase. He said this in the context of some who were trying to take credit for the increase of the church throughout Achaia. These presumptuous leaders, who sought to take glory for Paul’s work, needed to be reminded that it was Paul who planted the seed which came forth in their hearts (See 2 Co 10:11-16). It was Apollos who watered the seed. But it was God’s job to give the increase.

Christians must worry about their jobs, not God’s. Unfortunately, too many Christians do not do their jobs (planting and watering), because they are worried about God doing His job. Therefore, they conclude that they should not do their job because they figure that God will not give an increase to their labors. As disciples of Divinity, we must never forget that we are only the vessels through whom God works to accomplish His job. If there is no planting and watering by the vessels, then God cannot do His job of giving the increase.

Christians should desire to do as Jerry McCaghren once wrote in reference to his ministry in the slums of the inter city:

Some people want to live,
within the sound of church and chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop,
Within a yard of hell.

If no one in our area is obeying the gospel, then there is only one reason why they are not. **The Christians in the area are not doing their jobs of teaching the gospel and edifying the newborn babes in Christ.** We need to have less worry about God doing His job, and more about us not doing ours.

D. They believed that the message of the gospel was not just another religious philosophy of men.

In the 1930s, H. W. Tilman rode a bicycle alone across the middle of Africa from Mombasa, Kenya to the west coast. He encountered several people along the way and had many fantastic experiences with people in the 42-day trek. In 1938, and after he climbed Mount Kenya, he published a book on the adventure that was entitled, *Snow On The Equator*, which book we have in our library and have read twice.

When riding through the French regions of the Congo, Tilman spent one night with a radically committed missionary couple, a Norwegian with a Swiss wife. Tilman related that the couple received him with great hospitality for the one evening he spent with them. He also wrote that at the time of his visit the wife was holding their very frail-looking child. When he asked about the child, the couple told him that they had buried four of their other children “out back.”

As part of the Basel Missions of Africa, this couple was totally dedicated to the message that they were bringing to Africa. They knew their message

would change Africa. And it did. Africa is a better place today because thousands of dedicated missionaries as this buried their children and loved ones “out back.” Their commitment to get the job done changed the entire continent of Africa. Some might question such commitment today. But the missionary Paul would answer,

What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem [and in Africa] for the name of the Lord Jesus (At 21:13).

Paul once walked into Athens with the message of the gospel on his heart. At least this is what the Athenian philosophers perceived, for they said to him, “*May we know what this new teaching is about which you speak? For you bring certain strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean*” (At 17:19,20). The Athenians “*spent their time in nothing else than to tell or to hear some new thing*” (At 17:21). And what Paul was speaking was something they had never before heard. It was new, and to them, it was strange.

If the center of philosophy of the world at the time was Athens, then the world had never before heard something as the message of the gospel. The early disciples believed that the gospel was the sole medium unto salvation (Rm 1:16). And because it was something that they had received directly from God through Jesus, they would never compare it with any philosophy of this world. There were

no philosophies or religious systems of either thought or works that could be substituted for the gospel. Because the early disciples were totally convinced that the gospel was God's power unto salvation, they were totally convicted to preach it to every creature on earth. And for this reason, they had a great number of conversions because of the greatness of their conviction in the saving message of the gospel. They too were willing to bury their children "out back" in foreign soil.

E. They preached the gospel everywhere.

Acts 5:42 explains the daily schedule of the early disciples in fulfilling the requirements of their job description: "*And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*" Acts 8:4 explains the territory into which they journeyed in order to preach that Jesus was the Christ: "*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*" And Acts 8:12 explains the results of their preaching: "*When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*"

We would certainly conclude from their evangelistic life-style that the first Christians were excited about preaching Jesus as the Christ because they were excited about the fruit that God produced from their preaching. God could do His job because they did theirs. And because they migrated across the first century

world, God was able to increase the body of Christ throughout the world.

F. They were loyal to one another as the body of Christ.

One of the most important relational concepts concerning the dynamic of the early church was that everyone was on the same page in their objective to be the one organic body of Christ. "*Now all who believed were together and had all things in common*" (At 2:44).

Peter once addressed a letter to Christians throughout five different provinces of Asia Minor (1 Pt 1:1). In reference to all the Christians in these provinces, he exhorted them to "*love the brotherhood*" (1 Pt 2:17). The early Christians were loyal to one another in a hostile world that was contrary to what they believed. They encouraged one another by being committed to one another as the one church.

All disciples of Divinity compose the worldwide body of Christ, over which Jesus is the only head and center of reference (Ep 1:22,23). Every Christian has been baptized into this one universal body (1 Co 12:13). Since each member was baptized into the one body, and the body is composed of many members, then each member was baptized into a relationship that demands they all work together as one organic body (See Ep 4:11-16).

The church is the called-out assembly of all those throughout the world who have committed their lives to Christ. In committing their lives to Christ, they

have committed themselves to one another. As His body, Jesus has purchased them with His own blood (At 20:28). And thus, He is the Savior of all those who have been baptized into the one body of members (Ep 5:23). Knowing this truth spurred the early members on to bring as many people as possible into this worldwide community.

The early members of the body knew that there was no salvation outside

the body, and thus, they were eager to give everyone an opportunity to be a member of the body that Jesus will save when He comes again. They believed that every soul was a mission field, and this made every member of the body a missionary. For this reason they were willing to bear their crosses for Christ (Lk 9:23,24). They were willing to die for the One who died for them, and if necessary, to bury their children “out back.”

Chapter 11

MULTIPLE DISCIPLESHIP

An English writer was once writhing in a dream. His distortions and slurred speech were so that his wife became quite concerned, so she awoke him. Once the man had come to his senses out of a deep dark dream, he complained to his wife as to why she had awakened him. He told her that he was having a scary dream that would be a great plot for a book. And so it was. From that small spark of an idea in a dream, Robert Louis Stevenson began to write. In 1886, he eventually published the novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Dr. Jekyll was a person of refined qualities who sought to do that which was good. However, when his environment changed into darkness, he became the evil Mr. Hyde. Stevenson’s concept in print has become a part of worldwide literary culture, for we all often confess up that there is a little Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in us.

If we were to ask different people

who we were, we would receive different answers. Depending on the occasion, circumstances, and our company, we are different people. It is the task of the disciple of Divinity to be the same person at all times, and in all circumstances. But this is sometimes quite difficult. The following people would judge us differently according to the situation in which we find ourselves:

A. The Stranger:

When we meet a stranger, we are often different in our first contact than after we get to know that person. Therefore, we should ask the stranger, who might become our friend, what his first impression of us was. Were we focused on him? Were we avoiding direct conversation? Were we shy and introverted? We must keep in mind that a stranger often knows us differently than who we really are.

If we were the stranger being introduced to another person, how would we be judged by the person we met for the first time? One principle is always true in reference to meeting a stranger: First impressions are almost always inaccurate. They are inaccurate because we naturally seek to make a good first impression. But in doing so, we often put on a show. And it is hard to keep up the show. It is a good principle never to judge a person by first impressions.

Since our first contact with someone can be flawed, there is a particular principle to remember. One should not assume that he must trust every word of a stranger. Paul had this in mind when he wrote to Timothy, "*Lay hands hastily on no man*" (1 Tm 5:22). A stranger will judge us according to first impressions, but we should not be so presumptuous to expect him to place his trust in us as we would a lifetime friend. After all, Jesus warned, "*Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing*" (Mt 7:15). It is not that we question every stranger who comes our way. It is simply wise to first "get to know" someone before entrusting ourselves to them.

There were once two of us in a vehicle driving across Africa. One of the common officiating practices of African countries is to have police road blocks at different locations along the roads. So here we were, two preachers, approaching a police road block. We pulled up to the policeman who would check our papers, rolled down the window, but continued our conversation with one another. The first thing the policeman said was,

"Are you two preachers?" Maybe we looked like preachers. Maybe we had a preacher look on our faces. Maybe we talked like preachers. Whatever the case, our first impression by the stranger was that we were preachers. We have tried to look and talk like preachers ever since.

B. The Enemy:

Because of our reaction to our enemies, usually no person is what his enemies think he is. Nevertheless, our enemies judge us to be a particular person. They do so because we have the tendency to react to our enemies, and thus, we are usually not our real selves. Our response to those we think are our enemies is often a distortion of our real personality. Our negative response to the attacks of our enemies sometimes stirs up hatred or prejudice, so much so, that our virtues are hidden behind our reactions.

The evidence of our wrong reactions to our enemy is that we usually feel a sense of guilt after we have encountered our enemy in a manner that is not characteristic of our true self. This was certainly behind the reason why Jesus made the following instructions in Luke 6:27: "*But I say to you who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.*"

Loving one's enemy is an opportunity to be consistent in our response to others. A loving reaction may change the attitude that our enemy has toward us. Though our enemy perceives that we are a certain person, a loving response will usually confuse our enemy, or at least

make him question his impressions of who we really are. At least, a loving response will encourage our enemy to reconsider his relationship with us. The best way to destroy one's enemies is to make them our friends.

C. The Neighbor:

In the Western world our neighbors are often close, but distant. We can live in a house across the street from our neighbor, but the closest we are to our neighbor is a friendly "hello" from a distance, with the wave of a hand. Our neighbor recognizes us as friendly, but not as a close friend. There is the occasional conversation, but no secrets are revealed or commitments made. There is a common courtesy between neighbors that one neighbor will not dump his or her garbage on the other's garden. And when we are in trouble, our neighbor often comes to our aid. Our neighbor is there when we need him. But this is an estranged relationship that we have with our Western neighbor. It is a relationship that does not allow him into the deep recesses of our true self.

D. The Friend:

We confide in our true friends. We trust them. We spend time with them. The result is that our friends usually perceive who we are on a day-to-day basis. Santayana was right when he said, "One's friends are that part of the human race with which one can be human."

Masks fall off in the face of true

friends. If not, then the friends will see hypocrisy, and in a kind manner, will ask us to be "real." When the mask is off, then we can perceive that one is a true friend. When we make our inevitable mistakes, it is then that we will know who our true friends are, for they will still be there for us. True friends always hang around even when all masks are off. And then it might be as someone said of a true friend who really knows us, "When a friend won't loan you \$50, then he's probably a close friend." True friends know who we are. They will stay with one even when all our warts are revealed. We will give to the true friend, but it will usually not be a loan. The gift is simply given without conditions.

It is the function of fellowship among members of the body to move past masks and pretenses. If the function of the body of members does not allow members to know one another as true friends, then there is a dysfunctional relationship among the members. "Church" must function in a way that others can know us as true friends, not just "Sunday morning acquaintances." True discipleship will move us beyond "foyer friendships" to become friends for life. Solomon would conclude, "*A man who has friends must show himself friendly*" (Pv 18:24).

Being friendly comes with a great amount of responsibility in reference to loving one's neighbor as himself. It takes a great deal of work to create a true friend, and it takes even more work to maintain a true friend. So it is sometimes as E. D. McKenzie said, "Some people make en-

emies instead of friends because it is less trouble.”

Jesus’ instructions to start a friendship were expressed in the following words: “*For I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger and you took Me in*” (Mt 25:35). Every person seeks to have those friends who stay with one when the world falls apart. These are people who increase our joy, but also share our grief. These are the friends who know us. Remember the old Russian proverb: “An old friend is better than two new ones.”

E. The Wife/Husband:

Make no mistake on this point, our spouses know who we really are ... usually. Husbands and wives have their individual secrets, especially of those things in their past before they met. However, strangers do not know the person to whom we are married. And certainly, the person our spouses know is different from the perception of our enemies. True friends are close, but our spouses know us when all the shields are down when we are at home alone with them.

One of the assets of a good spouse was mentioned by Peter: “*And above all things have fervent love among yourselves, for love will cover a multitude of sins*” (1 Pt 4:8). This statement was made in reference to the relational function of members of the body with one another. It is a statement of wisdom that is also true in good marriage relationships. Our spouse knows that we have a “mul-

titude of sins.” And yet, our spouses still love us. Relational love keeps spouses together for life. Through all our faults and arguments, a loving spouse will hang in there. Our spouses will stay with us regardless of all they know about us. It is what fervent love does.

F. You:

This may be the person who has the most difficulty in knowing who we really are. This is true because James said that we can “deceive yourselves” (Js 1:22). Jesus had this in mind when He said, “*First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (Mt 7:5). Because of many unfortunate motives, we have great difficulty in extracting that beam. And because we are blinded by that monstrous beam, we reveal to others someone we are not. And truly, Solomon pronounced the correct judgment upon every “beamer”: “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes*” (Pv 21:2). One feels he is right in his own eyes because he cannot see past the beam.

If we are true to ourselves, then we will confess our weaknesses. Discipleship is about reexamining oneself. Self-examination begins first by each one of us not thinking “*of himself more highly than he ought to think*” (Rm 12:3). If one thinks of himself too highly, then he will be guilty of doing what Paul wrote to the Galatian disciples: “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gl 6:3).

If we think too much of ourselves, then we have the tendency to magnify our own virtues while we minimize the virtues of our brother or sister in Christ. We must guard against “*empty conceit*,” Paul wrote, “*but in humility of mind let each esteem others better than themselves*” (Ph 2:3). These are often difficult words for the conceited person to follow. But Paul goes beyond these words: “*Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Ph 2:4).

As a disciple of Divinity, we seek to see ourselves for who we really are. “To our own selves we seek to be true.” We must not be as those who compare themselves with themselves (See 2 Co 10:12). If we compare ourselves with others, then we run the risk that others may be off their spiritual track, and thus, we would lead ourselves astray by trying to stay on their wayward track.

Over half the New Testament is written of Jesus, His teachings and behavior. The Holy Spirit was trying to send a message. Our standard for discipleship must be Jesus. We are to examine ourselves (2 Co 13:5), but our examination must be made according to the measure and stature of Jesus. In doing this, we can discover who we really are, and then, make life corrections according to the standards of Jesus. We must always seek to live up to the description of who we claim to be, that is, “disciples.”

G. God:

God knows us better than we know

ourselves. This is true because of what the Holy Spirit stated in Proverbs 21:2: “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.*” The Spirit continued,

And there is no creature that is hidden from His sight. But all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account (Hb 4:13; see Ps 90:8).

Others may not know the deep demons within us. And we may deceive ourselves into justifying inner unrighteousness with which we struggle to overcome. We may admit to ourselves that we are overcome by those emotions that are not in tune with a Christlike spirit. But we must take comfort in the fact that God knows all these flaws. Regardless of all our emotional inadequacies, we can be assured of one very beautiful reality concerning our walk as a disciple of Divinity. The Holy Spirit wants us to remember our very precious covenant that God has made with us. Paul worded it in the following manner: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

If God so loved us while we were unrighteous in sin (Jn 3:16), and before we signed up as His disciples, **then how much more does He love us as His children**, regardless of our frail humanity? This truth brought amazement in the mind of Paul as he inscribed the following words from our Father:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes, rather who was raised again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Rm 8:31-34).

Since the Son of God died for us

while we were still in sin, He will not let us go as we walk in His cleansing blood (1 Jn 1:7). Even though God knows us better than we know ourselves, He will allow nothing of this world to separate us from Him (Rm 8:35). God loves us regardless of our dysfunctions as His disciples. People around us may at times have difficulty knowing who we are. But God knows who we really are, and at the same time, continues to love us. He is not willing that any of His created creatures should perish (2 Pt 3:9).

Chapter 12

ENVISION THE SUMMIT

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain. And when He sat down, His disciples came to Him” (Mt 5:1).

“And after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves” (Mt 17:1).

In 1942 Felice Benuzzi was gazing intently at Mount Kenya through the barbed-wire fence of a prisoner-of-war camp in Nanyuki, Kenya. He was in the World War II prison camp because of the Allied Forces' conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1941. After the conquest, the Italian population of Abyssinia was rounded up and taken to British prisoner-of-war camps in Kenya.

But there was Benuzzi, gazing at the majestic summit of Mount Kenya. He reminisced of his early years as a young boy who was the child of an Italian man married to an Austrian woman, both being very accomplished mountaineers. He

too became the same as a young man, and thus his hypnotic gaze at Mount Kenya stirred within him childhood memories, and thus he longed to stand on the mountain summit.

Over a period of weeks his infatuation with the mountain became too much. So in the middle of 1942, he made a determined decision to escape and climb. But in order to do this, he first had to escape from a prison camp. He knew that a great deal of preparation was needed, and so for six months Benuzzi prepared to satisfy his urges to escape bondage and find freedom on Mount Kenya.

In the prison at the time, cigarettes

were the units of “monetary exchange.” So he stopped smoking in order to use the camp issued cigarettes to buy supplies and make equipment for the venture. Unbeknownst to the prison guards, Benuzzi orchestrated fellow prisoners into helping him make the necessary ice-axes, crampons, save food, make rucksacks, and collect together all other needed supplies for a team of three prisoners to make a fourteen day excursion up Mount Kenya. During his months of preparation, he also recruited two other daring prisoners to make the adventurous risk with him.

And then on Sunday night, January 24, 1943, Benuzzi and his team left a note for the commander of the prison camp that read, “We’ll be back in 14 days.” He did not disclose where he and his team were headed. The team of three left their identity cards with the note so that the commander would not have to fret about who escaped, but also to relieve the other prisoners from having to “spill the beans” on their three fellow inmates at roll call.

For the first six to seven days, the team could climb only at night, lest they be spotted by someone in the area, or through binoculars by guards at the camp. With their heavily laden rucksacks of food for two weeks, they laboriously trudged through knee-deep marshes, squeezed through bamboo forests that were almost impassible, waded up streams and conquered glaciers. It was an extremely tortuous climb.

They knew of only two or three people who had climbed the mountain before. Their only “map” to scale the moun-

tain was an artist’s drawing on a Kenylon brand meat and vegetable can, and what Benuzzi had mapped out in his mind in his observance of the mountain through binoculars. It was thus a formidable trek of nightly struggle, coupled with unbelievable tenacity, just to get to the treeline. Nevertheless, the team was determined to realize their dream of conquering the summit of Batian, the highest peak of the 17,040 foot mountain.

After establishing their base camp, Benuzzi, with fellow team mate, Giovanni Balletto, would make their assault on the summit. The third member of the team, Enzo Barsotti, remained in the comfort of the base camp. On their attempt to reach the summit of Batian, the two exhausted men eventually called it quits. A relentless snowstorm had broken out on the mountain and subsequently drove them back to base camp. When they finally returned to base camp, they fell to the ground exhausted after an 18-hour day of climbing. Though food supplies were severely low, they determined to try for the sister peak of Lenana the following day, which was unfortunately not the highest peak of the mountain. But the two men had starved themselves for lack of sufficient food, and thus felt they had no strength to make another assault on Batian.

After a day to recuperate from the previous struggle for Batian peak, it was on the ninth day after they had escaped the prison camp, on February 6th at 1:30^{AM}, that Benuzzi and Balletto began another assault, but this time for the summit of Lenana. After hours of laborious

climbing, they reached the summit of Lenana at 10:30^{AM}. The months of preparation, and the days of struggle had paid off as the two men stood victorious on Mount Kenya. They planted the flag of Italy to memorialize their feat. (*No Picnic On Mount Kenya*, 1952, Felice Benuzzi.)

No summits can be reached in our quest to be the best disciples of Divinity that we can be without great struggle and a concentrated effort to mold our lives after our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the message that older disciples gave to new disciples in the first century: ***“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”*** (At 14:22). ***“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”*** (2 Tm 3:12).

In order to stand on spiritual summits, we must bear down and prepare. We must release ourselves from past obstacles that hinder spiritual growth in order to make our way up torturous slopes. Jesus ascended on high in only a few moments. It will take most of us a lifetime of struggle to get there. In our quest, we must remember that we must first escape the prison of our past in order to free ourselves for the future. It is so with our past life of religiosity that was often wrapped in the rags of superficial validation of what we considered discipleship. It was in this context of religiosity that Jesus came with a new vision for His disciples: ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another By this will all men know that you are My***

disciples” (Jn 13:34,35).

Love was not new, but the extent to which the disciples would be called on to love one another would be new. They were to love one another ***“as I have loved you”*** (Jn 13:34). Every time a disciple looks at a cross, he must envision the extent of the new love that he or she must have for other disciples.

Because the commandment is new, Christian discipleship is a paradigm shift in love. It is not something magic that happens in one’s life upon obedience to the gospel. It is something into which one grows. Remember what Jesus said to husbands? ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it”*** (Ep 5:25). This is the summit to which we must stringently aspire. An aged couple who have been married for decades may putter around the house mumbling to one another and manifesting no “jump-up-and-down” excitement about being together. They may not lavish one another with passion and carry on as a couple who have been married for only a week. But they are still there together after decades, after passion has turned to sacrificial love, and when frivolous youthful passions have faded into a distant memory. However, if a stranger would break into their house and threaten the wife, that love “just-as-Christ-also-loved-the-church” would instinctively break forth in the husband to protect his wife at even the cost of his own life.

This is a love that is beyond even a friend dying for a friend. It is beyond loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is a

love that has, over the years, grown into a response that is as natural as scratching an itch. It is into this paradigm of love that disciples of Divinity seek to venture. It is a summit of love that blinds one to the multitude of faults in our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a love with results that have matured over years of constant focus and struggle. It is this love that moves us out of the bondage of the past in order that we reach the peaks of being a true disciple of Divinity.

Unfortunately, the paradigm of the new love into which Jesus calls His disciples is hindered by some skeletons of past religiosity. Our “churchianity” of the past has often bound our efforts to love without shackles as we seek to walk with Jesus as His disciples. So the Hebrew writer exhorted some disciples who had been held up at base camp for too many years:

... let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... (Hb 12:1,2).

Discipleship involves identifying those weights and sins that have come over us and have entangled us in our struggle to scale away obstacles for spiritual growth. We have sought in this book to identify the “weights” and “sins” in order to successfully mature in our efforts to reach the summit of the new love. We must now identify some of the most difficult shackles of bondage that increas-

ingly hold us back from reaching the spiritual peaks with Jesus. These are hindrances to spiritual growth into which we often grow. We find ourselves held up and frustrated at base camp and cannot seem to get beyond stagnation. We see the summit of where Jesus wants us to be. But to get there, we must recognize those areas of religiosity that often hold us back, and are often very deceptive. They are deceptive because we are tempted to excuse behavior that falls far short of the summit we seek to reach. We satisfy ourselves with residence at the base camp when we should be making an assault on the summit.

A. The bondage of base camp:

The base camp is established by mountaineers as the supply depot from which they make their final assault on the summit. The climbers will awake early in the dark hours and begin their final climb to the summit, and then they will return to base camp in the same day.

We have often cursed ourselves with a “base camp” of four walls and a roof in which we have boxed in our discipleship. It is comfortable at this “base camp.” It has pews or benches, and as long as we occupy space on one of these pews or benches once a week, we judge ourselves to be faithful disciples. Outside this “base camp” box, and after a “closing prayer,” we feel free to carry on with our former lives before we entered the “church house” box a little over an hour before. We have conveniently boxed Jesus in there with the “church

house furniture,” and thus, we can leave Him there when the box is locked. And as long as Jesus stays in that box, we are free to behave as we please throughout the week.

Some may feel that we have focused in this book too much on our time in the box. We have for good reasons—and we are not concerned about being redundant. When “leaders” are sanctimonious during the “hour of worship,” but turn into ravenous caged wolves after the “closing prayer” when they meet during the “business meeting,” then we know that something is definitely wrong in our definition of discipleship. When prayers and hymns are characteristic of these “leaders” during the “worship hour,” but power and harm are vented during the “business meeting,” then we must challenge ourselves concerning what we understand discipleship to be.

What a “dichotomous disciple” does is validate his discipleship by what happens in the box. We may validate that we are disciples by what we might call “serial performances” (“the order of worship”). We legally establish for ourselves a series of “acts” that must be performed in order that we be classified as the “scripturally true church.” We would even argue over the “order of worship”—during the business meeting, of course—in order that everyone eventually feels comfortable that the rituals of the assembly have been faithfully performed. In this way we can claim that we are faithful disciples or righteous leaders. Once the performances of the assembly have been successfully conducted, and signed

off with a “closing prayer,” then we can leave the box with the satisfaction that we are faithful disciples of Jesus. We can even enter the “business meeting” and argue at will.

There are others who have trashed any order of assembly by running through Jerusalem to emotional chaos. These are those who seek to generate in the box an emotional euphoria in order to validate their discipleship until another concert is conducted the following Sunday. The attendees of this boxed worship do not focus on a system of legal acts to validate their discipleship. They claim discipleship on the basis that they can unleash an emotional outpouring in a charged assembly of energetic performers who entertain the boxed audience. Unfortunately, while the youth may enjoy this system of validation for their discipleship, the older folks appear to have “lost the Spirit” in their quietness and inability to manifest any exuberant outward appearance of euphoria. They thus show up at the box that is designed for “senior worship.”

When one seeks to use any assembly of disciples as the validation for his discipleship, then he or she will have great difficulty in transitioning into the paradigm of the new love by which Jesus has loved us. When assemblies are focused on us, then they train us to be religious narcissists in the Sunday morning box. What should be worship of God turns into assemblies that are focused on what we want. This is true because our discipleship is being validated by the presence and performance of others, not

by falling to our knees in worship of God. We must be careful about seeking outside influences in order to generate inward worship.

Some churches bring in and prop up a cross in their boxes in order to give a pretense of their “cross-bearing in the box.” But Jesus’ cross was not in a box. It was outside the city on a hill, a place where thieves were crucified. He drug His cross up the slope of Mount Calvary in order to be crucified outside. A boxed in validation of discipleship often loses its power when we walk outside the box doors in order to reach the summit. Disciples cannot lock the cross in a church house. They must drag it daily in their struggle to the summit. Jesus reminded His disciples, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). On another occasion He said to His audience, “*If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23).

It would be axiomatic to say that the more we use our assemblies to validate our discipleship, the less our discipleship reflects that for which Jesus calls. If one feels a sense of release after the “amen” of a “closing prayer,” then he or she should know that something is wrong. When we feel a sense of release and freedom from the “hour of worship,” then we know that something is wrong when we step outside our boxed religiosity. Discipleship is about daily living, not legal assemblies or euphoric performances.

We must be honest with ourselves. If for some unfortunate reason, maybe be-

cause of travel or sickness, we were not able to be in a regular weekly assembly with the saints for several weeks, would our faith grow? Or, would it weaken?

Remember Acts 8:4? “*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*” At the time this migration of disciples happened, **there were no assemblies of the saints “everywhere” they went.** Think about Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (At 13,14). The first part of the journey was at least one year in length. On this journey, the two disciples did not go from one assembly of the saints to another assembly. **There were no assemblies of the saints in the places to which they went!** They were initially alone in towns and cities, as all the other disciples in the Acts 8:4 case who went forth because they were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

The discipleship of Paul and Barnabas was not validated by either a legal performance of assemblies, or by some emotionally charged hysterical euphoria. There was no “two-or-three-gathered-together” in the places to which they went until someone obeyed the gospel. And yet, in being alone in their travels, the faith of these early disciples did not diminish. The results of their evangelistic success proves that their faith actually increased.

If our relationship with Jesus must be validated by some assembly of the saints, then we have not yet stepped into the paradigm of daily discipleship into which Jesus calls us. Christianity is not about assemblies. It is about daily cross-

bearing which means daily discipleship. It is a life-style.

Some will say, "You are discouraging people from attending the assembly." By posing the objection, they have proved the point. They have confessed up to their attendance-oriented definition of discipleship. And this is the problem. We have relegated discipleship to be a check on an attendance chart at "base camp." We have moved from daily discipleship to weekly "hour of worship" discipleship. The assembly of the disciples is a problem only when the disciples make the assembly all there is about being a disciple.

B. The bondage of unrealized preparations:

When some Christians make their assemblies all that there is about being a disciple, then they will seek to establish a theological outline of order by which each assembly is validated as legally correct. When one has walked through the legal performances of the assembly, then his discipleship is confirmed. He can step outside the legal assembly after the "closing prayer" and feel that he is a legally validated disciple, and thus has no responsibility to work for Jesus.

What the legal assemblologist has forgotten is that the assembly of the saints is the **result of our discipleship**. We are disciples of Divinity **before** we show up at any assembly. If the validation of our discipleship were based on assemblies, then we would be forced to establish some theological basis for what would

be a "scriptural" assembly. Once we performed the "scriptural" assembly, then we would feel reassured that we have scripturally proved our discipleship without manifesting our faith through ministry to others (See Js 2:14-26). The result of this thinking has in the past led some into a quagmire of debate as to whose assembly is scripturally correct, regardless of how one behaves outside the "hour of worship."

If discipleship is determined by the doctrinal correctness beyond fundamentals, and in the area of religious opinions, then we are still in the arena of debate because we too often try to sneak into our theology our opinions as fundamental, and then make our opinions a standard by which we determine faithful discipleship. This leads us to make judgments concerning whose opinions are "scriptural," and whose opinions are "false doctrine." And the debates continue endlessly.

Two contexts of discipleship in the New Testament might help settle most of the debate. The first is Acts 2 and the second is the book of Hebrews. In the first, there were about 3000 on the day of Pentecost who were added **by God** to the number of disciples, the number of which was only about 120 at the beginning of the day. But by the end of the day, God had added to this number about 3000 who believed on Jesus as the Son of God and were baptized into His name (At 2:38,41). Their knowledge of "New Testament doctrine," therefore, was quite limited.

The second case scenario is on the

other end of a lifetime of discipleship. These were the Jewish (Hebrew) disciples who had been Christians for many years (See Hb 10:32,33). These disciples were on the verge of forsaking the fundamental truths concerning who the ascended Jesus was and what He now does in the life of the Christian. They were Jewish disciples who were returning to the Levitical system of the Sinai law.

Now compare these two cases. The new disciples in Acts 2 were added to the number of existing disciples upon their belief in what Peter announced on that day for the first time in history, the message of the gospel of the reigning Son of God (At 2:22-36). **They were disciples of Jesus before their first assembly of the saints the following Sunday.** They were added to the church of disciples by God before the church had its first assembly.

Other than their knowledge of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, and what Peter preached in Acts 2:22-36, the 3000 responded and were baptized. After Peter's message, the audience responded to the apostles, "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" (At 2:37). Then came the instructions of Acts 2:38: "*Repent and be baptized.*" And, "*with many other words he testified and exhorted ...*" them on that same day (At 2:40).

Now in a brief time—Peter had to leave room in the day for the actual baptism of 3000 people—these 3000 heard, believed and obeyed, and were subsequently added to the body of disciples (At 2:47). There could not have been

much time for the continued schooling in the truth on that day since 3000 were baptized. It seems that their initial discipleship was not based on a great deal of knowledge in reference to who Jesus is or what the church was.

The point is clear. These initial 3000 disciples had little teaching concerning the new covenant before they were claimed as disciples by God and added to the other disciples (At 2:47). Discipleship does not depend on knowing a complicated outline of "proof-text scriptures." Knowledge of books on "theology" are not necessary to be a disciple of Divinity. No church manuals or books on "church doctrine" are necessary to be a disciple. All that one needs to get started in his or her trek of discipleship can be communicated in a matter of minutes, or at the most, an hour or so, for that was all the time Peter and the apostles had on the day of Pentecost before they started immersing about 3000 people in the same day.

Those who heard the gospel were discipled to Jesus (See Mt 28:19,20). They were subsequently baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In response to what they initially heard to become disciples, was the beginning of their lifetime of discipleship that involved continued study of the word of the One after whom they claimed to be disciples.

Now consider what the Hebrew disciples were changing in the context of the book of Hebrews. These disciples were going back into the bondage of the Sinai law. And in order to do this, they

had to give up the fundamentals of what the disciples on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 had accepted. The reason for their turning back from the One into whose name they had been baptized was that they failed to study as disciples, and thus, grow in the faith (See Hb 5:11; 2 Pt 3:18).

The Acts 2 disciples accepted the fact that Jesus was the prophesied Son of God who was resurrected from the dead and was sitting at the right hand of God (At 2:24-28). They accepted Him as the only Lord over all things (At 2:34). He was the Messiah (Christ) who fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning His coming and priesthood (Lk 24:44; At 2:36). Because of their lack of spiritual growth, the Hebrew disciples were giving up all these things. And for this reason, they were going back into destruction (Hb 10:39).

If one gives up those initial fundamental truths concerning who Jesus is and what He now does, and fails to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18), then he will lose his discipleship. All the 3000 who were baptized on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 were Jews, many of whom were visiting from locations in Asia Minor. The book of Hebrews was written many years later to Jewish Christians. It makes one wonder if many of the 3000 Jews who were baptized in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost failed to continue their growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. At least this was the exhortation of Peter when he wrote to Jewish Christians who were living in different provinces of Asia Minor, some of whom may

have been among the 3000 during the A.D. 30 event (See 2 Pt 3:18).

One may be added to the body of saints upon acceptance of the fundamentals of who Jesus is and His function as our high priest. But if we do not move on from the first principles of the faith (Hb 6:1-3), then we will fall back into our past religious heritage as those to whom the Hebrew writer was addressing his warning. If one does fall back into his old religious heritage, then he will lose his discipleship of Jesus, and thus fall back into destruction (Hb 10:39).

The Acts 2 disciples accepted the fundamental truths concerning who Jesus was. The Hebrew disciples were forsaking these fundamentals. Therefore, our discipleship in reference to belief is based on the fundamentals of who Jesus is and what He presently does in reference to His high priesthood. Our response to who He is generates discipleship by what He does through the continual cleansing of our sins by His blood (1 Jn 1:7).

We begin our journey as His disciples, not because of a knowledge of a complex outline of scriptures on the "identity of the church," but on the fundamental fact of who Jesus is. Once one is discipled to Jesus as the reigning Son of God, he is then baptized into Christ in order to begin his or her life as a studious member of a universal body of disciples who have likewise responded to King Jesus (See Gl 3:26-29). The Holy Spirit's letters of the New Testament were written to help us climb the mountain of discipleship. They were not written to prove that we are disciples of Jesus. Ac-

cording to what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, we are baptized disciples. One is disciplined to Jesus, and then baptized.

We commit ourselves to follow Jesus before we apply His cleansing blood at the point of baptism in order to have our sins washed away (At 22:16). The letters of the New Testament were written in order to give us the road map to continue growing in our discipleship until we reach the summit of where He is on high.

C. The bondage of a past religious heritage:

If one's faithfulness to his religious heritage (traditions) is the validation for his discipleship, then he can identify with the Jews of Jesus' day who had almost 2,000 years of heritage from the day of Abraham. Of course, between Abraham and the Jews who lived at the time Jesus came into the world, a host of traditions had been added to the Jews' heritage. These traditions of their heritage posed a significant obstacle for most Jews in reference to becoming disciples of Jesus.

During one encounter with Jesus, the guardians of the Jewish heritage (the Pharisees and scribes) complained to Jesus about the behavior of Jesus' disciples: "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...*" (Mk 7:5). Jesus' answer was quite unsettling. "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9).

Our traditional religiosity (heritage) has a significant influence on how we

define discipleship. In fact, if our heritage in some way comes into conflict with our relationship with Jesus, then we often display a greater commitment to our religious heritage than we do to Jesus. At least this is what happened in the lives of most of the Jews of the first century.

Our traditions often become a crutch for our discipleship, if not the definition of how we relate to Jesus. However, we must keep in mind that any tradition of our heritage that conflicts with our discipleship of Jesus must be sacrificed in order for us to be the living sacrifice that God desires of us as disciples of Jesus. Discipleship, therefore, often calls on certain necessary sacrifices that must be made in order to become and maintain one's discipleship.

The problem with the traditions of our heritage is that submission to traditions perpetuates our religious heritage. And if our heritage is in some way contrary to the commandments of God, then we are in trouble if we are not willing to sacrifice any conflicting traditions. Without Jesus, our heritage is simply a religion that has been fabricated according to our own traditions. When our religious traditions are the foundation of our faith, we are simply being submissive to the "traditions of our fathers." This was the challenge of the Jews when Jesus walked into their lives.

When submission to Jesus came into conflict with the traditions of the Jewish fathers, the Jews had great difficulty in making the sacrifice that was necessary in order to become disciples of Jesus. But because the initial disciples

of Jesus were willing to exalt Jesus over tradition, the Pharisees and scribes recognized in the disciples' behavior some things that were contrary to the religious practices of their fathers. We would rightly conclude, therefore, that it is not wrong to have traditions, but when those traditions that support our faith are contrary to being a disciple of Jesus, as were some of the traditions of the early Jews, then those traditions must be sacrificed. Any religious traditions of man that would hinder our discipleship must be sacrificed in order to submit totally to Jesus.

Each person comes to Jesus with the baggage of his or her own religious traditions. Any of those traditions that would hinder our discipleship must be

sacrificed in order that we obey the will of God. Only those traditions that are **not** contrary to the will of God may remain, as long as those traditions do not divide disciples from one another. If a particular tradition is used to divide disciples from one another, then that tradition also must be sacrificed. It must be sacrificed in order to maintain unity among the saints.

Each potential disciple, therefore, must sacrifice some religious traditions that were once valuable in maintaining a past religion that was contrary to the will of God. But if one is not willing to make these sacrifices, then he will remain in the bondage of his own religious heritage, as well as infringe on the freedom that we all have in Christ (Gl 5:1).

Chapter 13

VICTORY ON THE SUMMIT

When we were in high school, one of our new school classmates who grew up in the city, and after observing our stout physic, asked my brother and me, "Do you guys work out on weights?" We answered "no," realizing that our father had "grown a gym" on a Kansas farm where he "worked us out" every day. We grew up on a farm just this side of horse-drawn implements—our father had walked behind a horse pulling a plow in his early years. But on our "farm gym," we had 35 kilogram hay bales that we had to deal with from hay cutting time to cattle feeding throughout the winter months. The advantage we had in grow-

ing up on the "farm gym" of our father was that we developed arms and legs for mountains.

My wife, Martha, and I eventually moved to Africa in 1989. In our early years in Africa we climbed our share of mountains, but none as Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro—they are on the bucket list. (Fortunately, I have lost that bucket.) Nevertheless, in our adventure to climb mountains in South Africa, one particular mountain almost did us in.

Knowing that we liked to hike and climb mountains, a good friend of ours studied a particular mountain that she thought would be a challenge for us. So

a team was put together, plans were made, and the day arrived for our assault on a mountain summit in 1992.

It was easy to get to base camp. We drove our cars. (OK, we cheated.) But with a good night's sleep at base camp, we were up at 6:00^{AM}, rucksacks packed, and the team of eight trekked toward what we thought was the summit of a challenging mountain.

Hours went by as we trudged a rocky pathway around the mountain that gradually steepened as we made our way up the south side. The temperature that day at base camp would eventually rise to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). After laboring and sweating in the lower rising heat, we began to climb into the cooler temperatures of higher altitudes. But we were a long way from the "summit" that we could see at our level.

After eight hours of laborious struggle, I looked back at Martha and saw that she was somewhat fatigued, but gallantly trudging on in good spirits. Such could not be said for some of the other team members. Nevertheless, we were all determined to carry on.

The wife of one team member was almost at the end of her endurance. So I offered, as any strong-legged farmer, to carry her rucksack. I placed it on my chest, which balanced out my own rucksack on my back. We continued to climb.

From the lower altitudes, we could see what we all first believed was the summit of the mountain. So onward we encouraged one another to go. Because I was the faster of the lot, I went on be-

fore the team to walk the way up in order to encourage the exhausted mountaineers below that they could make it to the summit. So for about an hour I labored on up the mountain toward the top. But as I neared what we thought was the summit, I realized that it was not the summit at all. It was only a high ridge that hid the real summit that was much further on up. As I neared the summit of that ridge I was amazed at how much higher the actual summit extended into the heavens.

It was a moment of emotional deflation. I was somewhat disheartened about my discovery. I stopped to ponder the predicament of the exhausted team below. I calculated that the rest of the team was nearing the end of their physical abilities, as I was close to mine. I looked back and could not see them beyond a ridge over which I had just climbed. So with my best yell at the top of my voice, I cried out, "Go back! Go back! This is not the summit!" I cried out the command over and over.

I then assured myself that they had all heard my pleas that they return to base camp. Nevertheless, I was determined to conquer the real summit of this mountain. I convinced myself that I could do this mountain. So on I went, up to the "deceptive summit," and then down into a valley that was between the two summits. Fortunately, in the valley there was a small stream of water. I was in desperate need of water because I was at the end of my supply. I drank like a camel and then threw myself on the ground exhausted just to have a moment of recovery. That was a mistake. Cramps set in

and my “farmer legs” stiffened with excruciating pain. I was there alone and surmised that rescuers would eventually find this forty-five year old body sprawled out on the ground with a distorted face lying stiffened by a creek of water.

After some time, however, I recuperated, stood up, and worked out the rest of the pain as my body emptied the toxins that had cramped my belabored leg muscles. I remember, however, having this feeling of peace because I was sure that the team had surely heard my pleas that they return to base camp. I could go in peace alone to the summit, and then make the descent the following day to reunite with them at base camp. Solitude at the time was truly the best company.

It was now about 6:00^{PM}. I finally reached the real summit and celebrated my victory with a cooked can of beans from a camper’s rucksack cooker. I was at peace and exhilarated by the fact that after eleven hours of climbing I was victorious over the mountain. It was now time to sleep a full night in the tranquility that only summits can offer.

So at about 7:00^{PM} I laid my worn and wasted body down with the setting sun for my prayers of the night. During my conversation with God, I heard this still small voice. It was as if it were coming from a great distance away. “Roooooger! Roooooger!” the voice cried out. It raced across my mind, “God, is that You?” And there it was again: “Roooooger! Roooooger!” After I theologically readjusted myself, I perceived that the voice was that of Martha, my beloved wife. What? How in all the world,

I thought, was the voice of Martha making its way up from the base of the mountain to the summit where I had convinced myself that I was alone with God? Had I become delirious in my fatigue?

After coming to my senses and overcoming my shock, I jumped up and headed through the twilight hours back down the trail toward the echo of the pleading voice. After about a half kilometer of hurried walk, I saw in a distance this woman seated calmly on a rock. As I hurriedly drew closer to the “woman on the rock,” I identified her in the twilight as my devoted wife. Thoughts raced through my mind: What in the world is she doing up here? Did she not hear my pleas that the team return to base camp?

But there she was, having trudged on before the other team members, two of whom had to give up the quest and return to base camp. She was somber on that rock. She had neatly combed her hair. She had put on lipstick, straightened her clothing, and sat there calmly on that rock. When I approached her, she had this solemn appearance, being totally exhausted of all emotion and physical strength, but totally ready to give herself over to God. She was at the edge of the agony of defeat.

She later explained to me her mental state of mind at the time, “I knew I was going to die on that mountain. And when the search party found my body, I didn’t want to look bad.”

To say the least, that was the day that I truly understood that there was more in the woman that I married than I thought, more than even she herself

knew. (Mountains have a way of revealing to ourselves who we really are.)

Having not heard my pleas to the team to return to base camp, and because of some marital instinct and independence, she went alone before the remnants of the team and followed her adventurous husband to the summit of a mountain where she was willing to give herself in death that she be by his side. And by his side she was that night on the summit that both of us had conquered. And when darkness eventually crept upon the face of the earth that surreal night, and as we lay cradled in one another's arms under a canopy of eternal stars, both of us had a greater admiration for the other, me more than she, for to this day I still wonder at how she agonized her way alone to her husband and the summit.

Discipleship is about following Jesus unto death. In order to celebrate our victory on the summit, we must lay aside anything that would hinder our quest to get there. And so we remember the Spirit's words:

Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life (Rv 2:10).

All preparations must be made to climb through all the trials that we will incur along the way in our quest to grow as disciples of Jesus. We seek to be aware

of our hindrances in order to change or rearrange, or simply discard unnecessary baggage. Every successful mountaineer has a rucksack full of all those things that are necessary in order to be successful. And because weight is one of the most critical aspects of a successful climb to the summit, it is important to discard any unnecessary articles that would weigh one down in his or her quest.

We must be willing to break out of the bondage of past religiosity. Religiosity must be sacrificed for Christianity. Those things that obscure one's vision of the summit of spiritual growth, must be left behind. Old appendages of religiosity may encumber our growth in Christ. We must be willing, therefore, to make all changes that are necessary in order to establish a greater relationship with King Jesus on our way to the summit. There can be no growth in the knowledge of Jesus if one remains in the bondage of biblical ignorance or laden with fake religiosity (See 2 Pt 3:18).

There is no cheap trek to the peak where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). Some have held up or stalled their accent by claiming to have reached a "personal relationship" with Jesus. This statement is never made in the New Testament, and thus, we need to be cautioned about the use of the phrase lest we deceive ourselves into reaching a spiritual summit that is far short of greater heights above. We may be claiming a victory that is short of what God has offered for us to enjoy. In claiming a "personal relationship" with Jesus, we are

actually weakening the authority of Jesus' word in our lives and His promises that we must experience. And if we do this, we weaken the strength of His word and promises to empower us in spiritual growth (See Hb 4:12).

The claim of a "personal relationship" with Jesus is commonly made in a world of confused religionists who have little knowledge of the Bible, especially those passages that read with the meaning of what Jesus said in John 12:48: "*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him.*" The Judge is Jesus. The standard of judgment is His word. If one uses the phrase "personal relationship" to define his relationship with the Judge, then he must seriously consider a very important point lest he establish for himself a manual on discipleship training that is weak and inactive, and thus will hold one up and stalled on a lower summit. In other words, if one does not consider the word of the Judge authoritative in determining his beliefs and behavior, then certainly he will not respectfully respond to it as the final standard for discipleship training. One's "personal relationship" with Jesus would make Jesus equal with everyone else with whom we have a "personal relationship." Doing this is a similar theological apostasy as the Hebrews who were making Jesus equal with angels, but no greater (See Hb 1).

We have a "personal relationship" with our friends and spouses. In this relationship we are buddies. We are partners. We have one another's back in times of crisis and trials. This definition

of a "personal relationship" with Jesus is usually based only on one's understanding of who Jesus was in His incarnate state with the early disciples who knew Him as they walked down the Galilean pathways. They talked with Him. They conversed, and possibly they played a game or two with Him. They had a "personal relationship" with Jesus **on earth**. Our relationship with Jesus is all this, save for the personal encounter with Him. **But our relationship with Him is far greater.**

On the night of His betrayal, and during His final hours with His disciples, Jesus prepared the disciples for a paradigm shift in their relationship with Him. He said, "*You call Me **Teacher and Lord**. And you are right, for so I am*" (Jn 13:13). During His personal ministry with them, the disciples grew to the point of calling Him Teacher (Rabbi). They had also progressed spiritually to calling Him their Lord. But before making this statement to the disciples, and on the same occasion, Jesus had said to them, "*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. **The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day***" (Jn 12:48). Our friends with whom we have "personal relationships" **would never say this to us**. Spouses, between whom there is a "personal relationship," **would never say this to one another**. Only one who was God could make such a statement, and our relationship with God is far different and greater than our personal relationship with anyone on this earth.

What the disciples of Jesus did not

know at the time when Jesus was personally with them, was that He was about to ascend to the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul later confessed that God “*has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31). It is this Judge who is coming again. And it is with this Judge that we must establish a relationship. But the relationship is beyond simply “personal.”

By the time Paul made the preceding statement, his relationship with Jesus had changed from the time when he thought Christians were only a religious sect of this world. At the time he made the statement, Paul had an **obedient** relationship with the Judge who was King of kings and Lord of Lords. He had this relationship in mind when he wrote,

The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Th 1:7,8).

Now when we use the phrase “personal relationship” in reference to our discipleship of Jesus, it is this Lord Jesus Christ before whom all men will give account of their sins, “*for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Co 5:10). In order to stand before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus, we must have an **obedient** relationship with Him in reference to His word by which we will all be judged (Jn 12:48).

Discipleship of Divinity must move beyond the “personal relationship” that the disciples had with Jesus before He ascended to the right hand of God. Our knowledge of the Lord Jesus must include more than the information provided by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. One must move on to the ascension of Jesus, and then into the epistles wherein it is declared that the Father raised Jesus . . .

. . . from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not in this age, but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet ...” (Ep 1:20-22).

We must not settle for a cheap discipleship that sparks no fear deep in our souls in reference to standing before the Lord Jesus in judgment. Our personal friends may forget a multitude of sins because of their love for us. Our spouses may do the same. But if one is not obediently walking in the light of the word of the Lord Jesus, then His blood will not cleanse him of sin (See 1 Jn 1:7). And if we stand before the Lord Jesus in judgment without His cleansing blood, then we are in serious trouble.

As the first disciples who walked with Jesus moved on from a personal to an obedient relationship with a reigning King, we too must move on as disciples to the summit of our King Jesus (See Ep 1:20-22). This the early disciples did. And because they did, the word of King Jesus empowered them on to higher sum-

mits. This we also must do. Jesus is now the ascended Judge at the right hand of God who is coming to judge the world. It is this Judge with whom we must now have an obedient relationship. When this relationship with Jesus is established, then we too will be able to declare with Paul, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Ph 4:13). And to mountaineers this means, *“We can reach all spiritual summits through the One who empowers us.”*

The early disciples of Jesus made this paradigm shift. Paul explained this transition in the lives of the first disciples: *“Even though we have known Christ [personally] according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more”* (2 Co 5:16). The first disciples had a personal relationship with Jesus when they walked with Him *“according to the flesh”* during His earthly ministry. But that all changed when Jesus ascended on high to the right hand of God. Knowing that the Lord Jesus now has all authority is comforting (Mt 28:18). Knowing that the Lord Jesus is head over all things is empowering (Ep 1:22). Knowing that the Lord Jesus upholds all things by the power of His word is reassuring (Hb 1:3).

Our discipleship with Jesus is based on love, but it is a love about which John wrote: *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”* (1 Jn 3:18). Our love must go into action. We know that we are God’s *“little children,”* therefore, *“when we love God and keep His commandments”* (1 Jn 5:2). *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”* (1 Jn 5:3).

Our discipleship of Divinity is now based on our obedience to the commandments of our Lord. Our obedience is always flawed, but our flaws are covered by His grace. We cannot ignore commandments by focusing on grace, lest we turn the grace of God into a life of disobedience (Jd 4). True disciples of Divinity love God through their love of His commandments. It is for this reason that a true disciple is discovered by his or her obsession with the word of his Lord (See At 17:11). A true disciple seeks to be knowledgeable of the *“climbing manual”* of the Judge before He shows up at the court house for judgment (Hb 9:27).

When the love of God’s commandments reigns in our hearts, fellowship between Bible loving disciples happens. And when the fellowship of obedient Bible lovers happens, then we are brought together in assembly to sing the praises of our Lord and Savior.

Once we clear away all the religiosity that may have been handed down to us through our fathers, we are then on our way to the summit of an unadulterated relationship with the Judge who is seated at the right hand of God. The first disciples transitioned in their relationship with Jesus from personal to the One who reigns as King over all things (At 17:31). If we would have an obedient discipleship relationship with this Lord Jesus, then we too should say as Eli instructed Samuel the next time he heard the still quiet voice from the Lord, *“Speak, Lord, for your servant hears”* (1 Sm 3:9).

Do not forget these words from Jesus: *“Come to Me all you who labor*

and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). When times get tough on “discipleship mountain,” and when you think you have spent your last efforts to scale the slopes, having dressed yourself with Christ, have handy also a comb and some lipstick.



**The author and wife on the summit of Table Mountain,
Cape Town, South Africa
2017**

**This book has been dedicated to evangelists
throughout the world who are sincerely
struggling under harsh conditions
in order to bring
GLORY TO GOD!**