LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Centrality of Christ in Discipleship

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by

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**Introduction**

 (Acts 2:44).It might seem to be an oversimplification, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important message that mankind can receive. God could have chosen any number of ways to reveal Himself to mankind; yet He choses to use men to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and desperate world.

After a person has received salvation by grace, the new believer begins a lifelong journey to serve Jesus as a disciple. Jesus shared in Matt 28:18-20[[1]](#footnote-2)  a charge to His disciples to work to share the gospel and to teach disciples that would obey His commandments. This call to obedience is often overlooked and people choose to comfortably exist with the label of Christian and ignore the duty of the call to obedience as disciples.

This paper will describe the importance of obedience to the commandments of Christ and the three stages of discipleship that are shared in Earley and Dempsey’s book, *Discipleship is…How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*.

**Importance of Obedience**

Earley points out that Jesus did not just ask us to teach others His commandments, but that Jesus asked us to teach others to obey His commandments.[[2]](#footnote-3) This seemingly small difference greatly changes the challenge that we have as disciples. Earley points out that each disciple has to determine if they actually wish to be a disciple. Likewise, Bonhoeffer shared “Jesus’ call broke through all of this and mandated obedience. It was God’s own word. Simple obedience was required.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

Discipleship requires meeting the requirements of the teacher. In the case of being a disciple of Christ, a disciple must choose to apply Jesus’ commands to their life or face the reality that they are not truly a disciple. Knowing God’s commandments is simply not enough to be a disciple of Christ. One key concept that has to be embraced is that Jesus loves us more than we can imagine and His request for obedience is what is best for us. By obeying, disciples are able to like a blessed life and add the blessing of serving others.

Disciples allow the Holy Spirit to guide their lives. Careers are directed by the Spirit and everyday encounters are likewise guided by the Spirit. A disciple’s willingness to engage with others to share their faith or to simple serve others, can be used mightily by God. The time spent each day communing with God allows the disciple to receive the peace of God and direction as to how to engage in ministry each day as they go about their daily tasks. Mathis shares that “The aim is the daily strengthening and sustaining of your soul.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

**Declaration**

A common experience for people that dedicate themselves to a particular discipline is that they thoroughly investigate whether that discipline will be valuable to them. Many college students begin their academic studies focused upon attaining a certain degree, only to find they are more interested in a subject that their studies exposed them to. “Changing majors” is a common experience. In a similar way, individuals must become aware of their need for salvation before they can begin the journey of discipleship. They must come to understand that there is a creator who is God and that He wishes to have a relationship with them. They must also learn about God’s attributes and His love for them.

Once they realize that they have rebelled and sinned against God, they can understand their need to be saved from the death penalty of sin. God’s just nature requires a price to be paid, and His love nature responded by paying the blood price required. Once a person realizes God’s grace, they can accept the free gift of salvation and choose to accept Jesus as the Lord of their live. This decision begins the relationship with God that can lead to a believer becoming a disciple of Christ. Earley refers to this as a “investigation leading to repentance and faith in Jesus.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

**Development**

The next step in becoming a disciple is to invest time and focus in learning the discipline from the master. In an academic format, students progress through a series of courses where they study a curriculum that has been developed by highly trained masters of the discipline. This is a guided process by the masters and the student is expected to diligently apply themselves to learning information and practicing applications of what they learned. The masters test the students to validate that they have internalized the information and are competent with their knowledge and application. The teacher had to place a high value upon development of others. Bob Macrae shared “To be most effective in accomplishing that goal, the life of the teacher is used by God to help turn our students’ hearts toward him.”[[6]](#footnote-7) Development of a Christian disciple includes intense study of God’s Word and explanation from those considered to be “masters” of the Word. Pastors and teachers are raised up within the church to help new believers learn what they will need to be a disciple.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Part of the process requires refinement of the disciple’s thought processes and assumptions. As disciples learns God’s statutes, they realize that some of the behavior they have learned is inappropriate for disciples to participate in. Scripture describes that a new believer is transformed, and their mind is renewed as the Holy Spirit works to sanctify them (Rom 12:2). Sanctification requires a disciple to abandon worldly ways and to adopt God’s ways.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The disciple must also spend time observing their masters and imitating the master’s application of their knowledge. The Bible gives specific instructions to believers and this knowledge must be acted upon. Repeated use of what is learned adds to the confidence that the disciple develops as they continue their education. This apprenticeship learned from those more experienced is vital in the development of a disciple.[[9]](#footnote-10)

**Deployment**

The third stage that is in becoming a disciple is to live a lifestyle of service to other people. This service is motivated by a love for others. A disciple realizes that God loves all men and has chosen to include His disciples in reaching those who do not yet know Him. The study conducted as disciples prepare them to share their faith and to be attractive leaders and mentors to new converts to the faith. Disciples might have vocations outside of the church and as such have the opportunity to interact with others and share their knowledge of God and the truth of His Word. Anywhere a disciple goes is an opportunity for a devotee to Christ to impact the world for Christ. Falwell shared that “The old saying, “Plan your work, then work your plan” applies to growing your faith or any other aspect of your Christian life.”[[10]](#footnote-11) The disciple has to listen to God for direction and then spend pointed time to plan how to live a purposeful life. Some are called to take the Word of God to foreign lands, while others will be called to work in their own hometowns. The key point is to be ready, able and active to share the Word of God with others as the disciple shows that they love others as themselves.

**Conclusion**

This paper has described the need for obedience to motivate disciples to pursue their faith in Jesus Christ. The love that Jesus has shown to believers should cause a love response from the disciple to follow the commandments that Jesus has given. Disciples begin by recognizing that they needed salvation. Once they have come to understand their need, they accept the Lordship of Jesus and turn away from their worldly paradigms. The disciples begin to diligently learn God’s Word through study and listening from the pastors and teachers that God brings into their lives. The disciples work to apply what they learn by actively sharing their love and faith with others. Each day, they commune with God to rest in His presence and to listen for direction for their lives.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. David Earley, and Rod Dempsey*. Discipleship is … How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence,* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*), Fortress Press, 2001, Kindle Edition, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. David Mathis and Jonathan Parnell, *How to Stay a Christian In Seminary,* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. David Earley, David and Rod Dempsey*. Discipleship is … How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence,* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Terry Linhart, ed.. *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation,* (Baker Publishing Group, 2016), Kindle Edition. (Kindle Locations 758-759). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Jerry Falwell, *Building Dynamic Faith,* (Nashville: World Publishing, 2005), Kindle Edition. (Kindle Locations 960-961). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)