

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Volume A1, Issue No. 02 — 1999

THE DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, AND BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS YOU ALSO ARE DOING (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11). JESUS' PRIMARY CALL TO HIS DISCIPLES IS SEEN IN HIS WORDS "COME TO ME" (MATTHEW 11:28) AND "FOLLOW ME" (MATTHEW 4:19). MARK RECORDS: "HE APPOINTED TWELVE, THAT THEY MIGHT BE WITH HIM, AND THAT HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH, AND TO HAVE AUTHORITY TO CAST OUT THE DEMONS" (MARK 3:14, 15). NOTICE THAT JESUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS DISCIPLES PRECEDED HIS ASSIGNMENT TO THEM.

DISCIPLESHIP IS THE INTENSELY PERSONAL ACTIVITY OF TWO OR MORE PERSONS HELPING EACH OTHER EXPERIENCE A GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. DISCIPLESHIP IS BEING BEFORE DOING, MATURITY BEFORE MINISTRY, CHARACTER BEFORE CAREER. EVERY CHRISTIAN, INCLUDING YOU, IS BOTH A DISCIPLE AND A DISCIPLER IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS. YOU HAVE THE AWESOME PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY BOTH TO BE A TEACHER AND A LEARNER OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN CHRIST, WALK IN THE SPIRIT AND LIVE BY FAITH.

YOU MAY HAVE A ROLE IN YOUR FAMILY, CHURCH OR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHICH GIVES YOU SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLINE OTHERS, SUCH AS HUSBAND/FATHER, PASTOR, SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER, ACTIVITY GROUP LEADER, ETC. BUT EVEN AS AN APPOINTED DISCIPLER, YOU ARE NEVER NOT A DISCIPLE WHO IS LEARNING AND GROWING IN CHRIST THROUGH YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. CONVERSELY, YOU MAY NOT HAVE AN "OFFICIAL" RESPONSIBILITY TO DISCIPLE ANYONE, BUT YOU ARE NEVER NOT A DISCIPLER. YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR FRIEND, AND OTHER BELIEVERS GROW IN CHRIST THROUGH YOUR CARING AND COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.

SIMILARLY, EVERY CHRISTIAN IS BOTH A COUNSELOR AND COUNSELEE IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS. A GOOD COUNSELOR SHOULD BE A GOOD DISCIPLER, AND A GOOD DISCIPLER SHOULD BE A GOOD COUNSELOR. BIBLICALLY, THEY ARE THE SAME ROLE. YOUR LEVEL OF MATURITY MAY DICTATE THAT YOU DO A LOT OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING. BUT THERE WILL STILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU NEED TO SEEK OR RECEIVE THE COUNSEL OF OTHER CHRISTIANS. THERE WILL NEVER BE A DAY WHEN WE DON'T NEED EACH OTHER.

MODELING GROWTH

PROVE YOURSELVES DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DELUDE THEMSELVES (JAMES 1:22). I AM LEARNING ABOUT PASTORS AND MISSIONARIES ACROSS THIS COUNTRY WHO ARE PREACHING AGAINST THE VERY SINS THEY ARE COMMITTING THEMSELVES. HIGHLY PLACED CHRISTIAN PERSONALITIES WHO VEHEMENTLY CONDEMN IMMORALITY HAVE THEMSELVES BEEN FOUND TO BE HIDING AN IMMORAL LIFESTYLE.

THOSE OF US WHO ARE CALLED TO PREACH OR TEACH GOD'S WORD MUST PUT IT ON FIRST. WE MUST GET ON OUR KNEES BEFORE GOD AS WE PREPARE THE MESSAGE AND SAY, "GOD, IS THIS SCRIPTURE TRUE IN MY LIFE?"

IF NOT, WE HAD BETTER BE HONEST ENOUGH TO SAY TO THOSE WHO HEAR US, "I WISH I WERE A BETTER EXAMPLE OF THIS PASSAGE THAN I AM, BUT I'M STILL GROWING IN THIS AREA."

TO PROCLAIM THE WORD OF GOD AS IF IT WERE TRUE IN YOUR LIFE WHEN IT'S NOT IS A LIE. THOSE OF US WHO RECEIVE THE WORD ARE ALSO VULNERABLE TO SELF-DECEPTION IF WE FAIL TO PUT IT INTO PRACTICE. WE HEAR A SERMON OR A LESSON AND SAY, "Wow! WHAT A GREAT TRUTH!! AND HURRY OFF TO SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE ELSE WITHOUT PROCESSING IT OURSELVES AND APPLYING IT TO OUR OWN LIVES. JAMES SAID THAT HEARERS OF THE WORD WHO ARE NOT ALSO DOERS OF THE WORD DECEIVE THEMSELVES.

WHY ARE WE AFRAID TO ADMIT IT WHEN OUR LIVES DON'T COMPLETELY MATCH UP TO SCRIPTURE? I BELIEVE IT'S BECAUSE MANY OF US HAVE A PERFECTION COMPLEX. WE THINK WE HAVE TO MODEL PERFECTION AND NOT ADMIT TO SOMETHING LESS. BUT WE CAN'T MODEL PERFECTION. BECAUSE WE'RE NOT PERFECT. WE CAN ONLY MODEL GROWTH.

THE PEOPLE AROUND US NEED TO KNOW THAT WE ARE REAL PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF MATURING. THEY NEED TO SEE HOW WE HANDLE FAILURE AS WELL AS HOW WE HANDLE SUCCESS. WHEN WE MODEL THIS KIND OF HONESTY IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, WE GREATLY REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF THE DECEIVER GAINING A FOOTHOLD.

THE LAWS OF GOD

NOW YOU PHARISEES CLEAN THE OUTSIDE OF THE CUP AND OF THE PLATTER; BUT INSIDE OF YOU, YOU ARE FULL OF ROBBERY AND WICKEDNESS (LUKE 11:39).

THE TALMUD, A COLLECTION OF ANCIENT RABBINIC WRITINGS, RELATES THE STORY OF RABBI AKIBA, WHO WAS IMPRISONED. RABBI JOSHUA BROUGHT HIM SOME WATER, BUT THE GUARD SPILLED HALF OF THE CONTAINER. THERE WAS TOO LITTLE WATER TO BOTH WASH AND DRINK, AND RABBI AKIBA FACED THE POSSIBILITY OF DEATH FOR LACK OF WATER IF HE CHOSE TO USE THE WATER FOR CEREMONIAL WASHING.

HE REASONED, "HE WHO EATS WITH UNWASHED HANDS PERPETUATES A CRIME THAT OUGHT TO BE PUNISHED BY DEATH. BETTER FOR ME TO DIE OF THIRST THAN TO TRANSGRESS THE TRADITIONS OF MY ANCESTORS!" JESUS RESPONDED HARSHLY TO SUCH REASONING: "YOU BLIND GUIDES, WHO STRAIN OUT A GNAT AND SWALLOW A CAMEL!" (MATTHEW 23:24).

THE LORD CAUTIONS THAT THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF THE LAW (SUCH AS JUSTICE AND MERCY) ARE OVERLOOKED WHEN ATTENTION FOCUSES ON STRICT OBSERVANCES OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES. THIS LEADS TO A CORRESPONDING NEGLIGENCE OF THE ETERNAL LAWS OF GOD. JESUS TOLD PEOPLE TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO CLEANSING THEIR HEARTS AND NOT BE LIKE THEIR LEADERS WHO CLEANSE ONLY THEIR HANDS.

THE LAWS OF GOD ARE LIBERATING AND PROTECTIVE. THEY ARE RESTRICTIVE ONLY WHEN THEY PROTECT US FROM THE EVIL ONE. THE RULES OF ANY INSTITUTION SHOULD ENSURE THE FREEDOM OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO REACH HIS OR HER GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL.

THE PULPIT Series — Print, Read and Pass it on to others (2 pages)

THEY SHOULD SERVE AS A GUIDE SO WE DON'T STRAY FROM OUR PURPOSE, AND THEY SHOULD PROTECT US FROM THOSE WHO ABUSE THE SYSTEM.

THE PRINCIPLE THAT JESUS MODELED COULD BE STATED AS FOLLOWS: IF PEOPLE ARE COMMANDED TO FOLLOW A TRADITIONAL PRACTICE THAT MAKES LIFE MORE DIFFICULT AND NO LONGER CONTRIBUTES TO THE PURPOSE OF THE ORGANIZATION, THEN WE MUST NOT PARTICIPATE AS A MATTER OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIENCE. JESUS SIMPLY DIDN'T OBSERVE SUCH TRADITIONS, AND HE DEFENDED HIS DISCIPLES FOR NOT OBSERVING THEM AS WELL.

LIMITING ANXIOUS FEELINGS

CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM [GOD] BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU (1 PETER 5:7 NIV). LET'S ASSUME YOU HAVE SOUGHT GOD'S WILL FOR A CERTAIN DIRECTION, AND YOU BELIEVE THAT HE HAS LED YOU TO MAKE SPECIFIC PLANS. THE PROBLEM IS YOU ARE STILL WORRIED ABOUT WHETHER YOUR PLANS WILL COME ABOUT AS YOU HAVE HOPED. WHEN I'M FACING SUCH SITUATIONS, I TRY TO FOLLOW THE SIX STEPS DESCRIBED BELOW TO LIMIT MY ANXIOUS FEELINGS.

FIRST, STATE THE PROBLEM. A PROBLEM WELL STATED IS HALF SOLVED. IN ANXIOUS STATES OF MIND, PEOPLE CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES. PUT THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE. WILL IT MATTER FOR ETERNITY? THE DANGER AT THIS JUNCTURE IS TO SEEK UNGODLY COUNSEL. THE WORLD IS GLUTTED WITH FALSE PROPHETS AND SORCERERS WHO WILL PROMISE INCREDIBLE RESULTS. THEIR APPEARANCE MAY BE STRIKING. THEIR PERSONALITY MAY BE CHARMING. BUT THEY ARE BANKRUPT OF CHARACTER. AVOID THEM (PSALM 1:1).

SECOND, SEPARATE THE FACTS FROM THE ASSUMPTIONS. SINCE WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW, WE MAKE ASSUMPTIONS, AND WE USUALLY ASSUME THE WORST. IF THE ASSUMPTION IS ACCEPTED AS TRUTH, IT WILL DRIVE YOUR MIND TO ITS ANXIETY LIMITS. THEREFORE, YOU MUST SEPARATE ASSUMPTIONS FROM FACTS.

THIRD, DETERMINE WHAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT OR ABILITY TO CONTROL. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT WHICH YOU CAN CONTROL, AND YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT WHICH YOU CAN'T. DON'T TRY TO CAST YOUR RESPONSIBILITY ONTO CHRIST; HE WILL THROW IT BACK.

FOURTH, LIST EVERYTHING YOU CAN DO WHICH IS RELATED TO THE SITUATION THAT IS UNDER YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. WHEN PEOPLE DON'T ASSUME THEIR RESPONSIBILITY, THEY TURN TO TEMPORARY CURES FOR THEIR ANXIETY, LIKE DRUGS, TV, SEX OR.

FIFTH, ONCE YOU ARE SURE YOU HAVE FULFILLED YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, SEE IF THERE IS ANY WAY YOU CAN HELP OTHERS. TURNING YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM YOUR OWN SELF-ABSORPTION AND ONTO HELPING PEOPLE AROUND YOU IS NOT ONLY THE LOVING THING TO DO, BUT IT ALSO BRINGS A SPECIAL INNER PEACE.

SIXTH, THE REST IS GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY, EXCEPT FOR YOUR PRAYER, ACCORDING TO PHILIPPIANS 4:6-8. SO ASSUME YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, BUT CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON CHRIST.

THE ESSENCE OF TEMPTATION

FOR WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO CANNOT SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN (HEBREWS 4:15). I HAVE FOUND THAT MANY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE WITH THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TEMPTATION AND SIN.

BOMBARDED BY TEMPTING THOUGHTS, THEY CONCLUDE THAT THERE MUST BE SOMETHING PRETTY SICK ABOUT THEM. BUT EVEN JESUS WAS TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE." BUT FINISH THE VERSE: "YET WITHOUT SIN." AS LONG AS WE ARE IN THE WORLD, WE ARE EXPOSED TO TEMPTATION JUST LIKE JESUS WAS. BUT HE DIDN'T SIN, AND WE DON'T HAVE TO SIN EITHER (1 CORINTHIANS 10:13).

THE BASIS FOR TEMPTATION IS LEGITIMATE HUMAN NEEDS. WE WILL EITHER LOOK TO THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL TO HAVE OUR NEEDS MET, OR WE WILL LOOK TO CHRIST WHO PROMISES TO MEET OUR NEEDS (PHILIPPIANS 4:19).

THE ESSENCE OF TEMPTATION IS THE INVITATION TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. THE POWER OF TEMPTATION DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF THE STRONGHOLDS WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED IN OUR MINDS AS WE LEARNED TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD.

IF YOU WERE RAISED IN A CHRISTIAN HOME WHERE MAGAZINES AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS OF QUESTIONABLE MORAL VALUE WERE NOT ALLOWED, THE POWER OF SEXUAL TEMPTATION IN YOUR LIFE WILL NOT BE AS GREAT AS FOR SOMEONE WHO GREW UP EXPOSED TO PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS. WHY? BECAUSE YOUR LEGITIMATE NEED TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED WAS MET BY PARENTS WHO ALSO PROTECTED YOU FROM EXPOSURE TO ILLEGITIMATE MEANS OF MEETING YOUR NEEDS. THE PERSON WHO GREW UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF IMMORALITY MAY EXPERIENCE A GREATER STRUGGLE WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATION SIMPLY BECAUSE THAT STRONGHOLD IN THE MIND WAS WELL-ESTABLISHED BEFORE HE WAS BORN AGAIN.

JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO MEET HIS OWN PHYSICAL NEEDS BY USING HIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTES INDEPENDENTLY OF THE FATHER TO TURN A ROCK INTO BREAD. BUT INSTEAD HE RESPONDED, *"MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD"* (MATTHEW 4:4). WE ALSO MUST RESPOND TO TEMPTATION BY RELYING ON GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS.

A RADICAL, INNER TRANSFORMATION

BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM, AND HIS GRACE TOWARD ME DID NOT PROVE VAIN (1 CORINTHIANS 15:10). IF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE PART LIGHT AND PART DARKNESS, PART SAINT AND PART SINNER, YOU WILL LIVE IN A VERY MEDIOCRE MANNER WITH LITTLE TO DISTINGUISH YOU FROM THE NON-CHRISTIAN. YOU MAY CONFESS YOUR PRONENESS TO SIN AND STRIVE TO DO BETTER, BUT YOU WILL LIVE A CONTINUALLY DEFEATED LIFE BECAUSE YOU PERCEIVE YOURSELF TO BE ONLY A SINNER SAVED BY GRACE WHO IS HANGING ON UNTIL THE RAPTURE.

SATAN KNOWS HE CAN DO NOTHING ABOUT WHO YOU REALLY ARE, BUT IF HE CAN GET YOU TO BELIEVE YOU ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THE NATURAL PERSON, THEN YOU WILL BEHAVE NO DIFFERENTLY FROM THE NATURAL PERSON. WHY DOES THIS PROFILE DESCRIBE SO MANY CHRISTIANS? BECAUSE WE ARE IGNORANT OF OUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST.

GOD'S WORK OF ATONEMENT IN CHANGING SINNERS TO SAINTS IS HIS GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT ON EARTH. THE INNER CHANGE, JUSTIFICATION, IS EFFECTED AT THE MOMENT OF SALVATION. THE OUTER CHANGE IN THE BELIEVER'S DAILY WALK, SANCTIFICATION, CONTINUES THROUGHOUT LIFE. BUT THE PROGRESSIVE WORK OF SANCTIFICATION IS ONLY FULLY EFFECTIVE WHEN THE RADICAL, INNER TRANSFORMATION OF JUSTIFICATION IS REALIZED AND APPROPRIATED BY FAITH.

"BUT DIDN'T I READ SOMEWHERE THAT PAUL REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF OF SINNERS?" YOU MAY WONDER. YES, BUT HE WAS REFERRING TO HIS NATURE BEFORE HIS CONVERSION TO CHRIST (1 TIMOTHY 1:12-16). HE MADE A SIMILAR STATEMENT OF SELF-DEPRECIATION IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:9, BUT CONTINUED BY SAYING: *"BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM, AND HIS GRACE TOWARD ME DID NOT PROVE VAIN"* (VERSE 10).

PAUL KNEW THAT WHO HE WAS BEFORE CHRIST AND WHO HE BECAME IN CHRIST WERE TWO SEPARATE IDENTITIES. IF YOU CLAIM TO BE JUST A SINNER, WHAT WILL YOU DO? YOU WILL SIN! YOU ARE PROFESSING THAT SIN IS AT THE CORE OF YOUR IDENTITY. THAT'S NOT WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES. WHY DON'T WE JUST BELIEVE GOD THAT JESUS IS AT THE CORE OF OUR BEING AND THEN BEGIN TO LIVE LIKE IT BY HIS SPIRIT?

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