

MULTIPLYING LOCAL CHURCHES BY CREATING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2 Timothy 3:10-17 & Romans 15:14

INTRODUCTION

When you read the NT it is impossible to escape the conclusion that when a person trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord his entire identity is changed. It is not simply that we are changed personally and spiritually and morally but our entire way of life and our associations are radically transformed. As we heard in the words of Jesus from Matthew 10, even our relationship to our family is changed. Our primary identification is no longer that we belong to a particular human family but we belong to Jesus. Loyalty to Christ and to his kingdom and his reputation and his agenda in the world supersedes our allegiance to our parents, our siblings, our spouses and our children.

There are many different words and metaphors in the Bible used to describe our new identity. The most common description is that we now belong to the family of God, we are God's children and thus we are brothers and sisters in Christ. It is because of the fact that we are a family in Christ that love for one another is the chief mark of our being Christians as we talked about last week. However, a word and a metaphor that follows closely this emphasis that we are God's family is that we are the disciples of Jesus. The word "disciple" is used over 200 times to describe Christians in the NT.

The word itself derives from the verb which means "to learn." Thus a disciple is a student of Jesus, one who is learning to know and love and obey Jesus. A disciple is a person who has abandoned all hope of finding life in this world and has set his entire hope upon Christ. He or she has come to believe that it is only Jesus who can deliver from sin and death and hell and hopelessness. He or she has discovered that all the pleasures of sin and of this world are like a pile of dung in comparison to the beauty and glory and wonder of Jesus Christ and his salvation. Nothing compares to knowing and being known by this Jesus. Nothing compares to the joy of being like him and of living in obedience to him. Thus a disciple is a person who is enamored with Jesus and delights to learn about him and to learn how to live from him.

While the term "disciple" does not appear in any of the NT letters, yet the concept of following Jesus as his learner, his disciple is woven into the NT outside the gospels. The emphasis is that we learn to follow Jesus by joining in the community of learners which is the church. We learn to follow Christ by learning the gospel and the way of life that corresponds to the gospel from the appointed leaders in the congregation and from one another. There is a mutual edification or building of faith and life among us as each of us grows as a disciple of Jesus and then we help one another to grow.

This idea of being the disciple of Jesus by being immersed in the community of disciples is clearly alluded to in our text this morning. First, in v. 10 Paul states that Timothy has become a faithful follower of Jesus by closely following Paul's teaching and way of life, and etc. Second, in vv. 14-15 Paul reminds Timothy that he has learned the gospel and the way of life associated with it from others, going all the way back to his childhood. The point I am trying to make is that every local church is to be a "school of Christ" where each of us are growing in our knowledge of Jesus and thus in our delight in him and his saving work and thus living more faithfully as his followers, his disciples. The local church is the place where people learn about Christ and learn to live like him. When a local church is a "school of Christ" it will grow not only spiritually but also numerically. I want you to see with me why it is that local churches that are "schools of Christ" will grow and multiply from Paul's second letter to his beloved but timid child in the faith, Timothy.

MAIN POINT

Local churches that are "schools of Christ" grow and multiply because...

I. People imitate those they love and respect (2 Tim 3:10-12 & 14-15)

Paul describes the world in which we live in 3:1-9. These verses are a description of the world from the time that Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father until he comes again. That is the period of time referred to by the phrase “last days” in v. 1. The world of human beings is a world full of people who are lovers of money and lovers of self. We live in a culture that is full of people who are heartless and treacherous and disobedient to their parents. We live in a religious culture that holds to the external forms of godliness but knows nothing of the transforming power of God. We live in culture that is full of religious charlatans: Men who use the cover of religious piety in order to gain power and wealth and take advantage of the weak; men who teach false things about God. It is in such a world that the church, as a community of disciples of Jesus lives.

In v. 10 Paul explains how it is that Timothy does not live like the world. Timothy does not live the way the rest of the world lives because he has followed Paul’s teaching, way of life, etc. Don’t miss the power of the contrast that Paul is setting up here. While we know that God alone saves people and causes them to grow up into Christ, yet God does it through people. Paul is reminding Timothy that the reason he is not a lover of money and brutal and not a false teacher is because he has followed Paul. That word translated “followed” is stronger than the simple verb “to follow.” It means that Timothy has closely observed Paul and has then imitated him. He paid careful attention to Paul’s teaching and has adopted his way of thinking about God and man and salvation as his own. He has carefully watched how Paul has lived his life and he has patterned his own way of life after Paul. He has seen how Paul has stubbornly and single-mindedly pursued his purpose to preach the gospel of God’s grace and Timothy has made that purpose his own. He vigilantly observed Paul’s faith in Christ, his prayerful trust in God to provide and lead and strengthen and Timothy has sought to emulate that faith. He watched Paul patiently instruct and answer questions and correct others and he is seeking to be patient with others in his ministry. He has watched Paul love others by sacrificing his time and money and energy to work for the good of others and he also has embraced a life of suffering love for others. He has watched Paul persevere through all manner of hardships and sufferings and criticisms and persecutions in order to follow Jesus and Timothy has sought to imitate Paul’s perseverance. Timothy came to faith in Christ and has grown as a disciple of Jesus by carefully observing and then following another disciple of Jesus named Paul.

However, it was not only Paul who Timothy has followed. We also learn from vv. 14-15 that Timothy was taught the OT Scriptures from when he was an infant. We know from chapter 1:4-5 that it was his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice who taught him the Bible from his childhood. It is worth noting that Timothy’s father was a non-Christian. Yet Eunice made sure, in spite of her husband’s unbelief, that their son Timothy was taught the OT Scriptures. Thankfully, she had a mother who helped her to make sure this son learned the OT and understood from it God’s plan to save his people by grace through faith. It was because of their believing attention to the Scriptures that when they heard the gospel preached by Paul in their home town of Lystra, they recognized that the Jesus whom Paul preached was the Son of David and Savior. They trusted in Christ and joined with the church in Lystra in spite of the persecution that was rampant in their community.

Timothy became a mature Christian and qualified to be a pastor/elder of a local church because of the fact that he had close personal relationships with disciples of Jesus who were growing in their knowledge of and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to maturity by observing and then imitating others who were imitating Jesus. Everyone who is growing as a disciple of Jesus will be able to tell you about the people whom they have observed and are observing and whom, as a result, they are following as a pattern of Jesus. I came to faith in Christ in my junior year of college. God used a number of other students who identified themselves as Christians to cause me to question the way I was living my life. He used their lives to cause me to see that I needed this Jesus whom they were following. About a month after Christ gave me new life in the spring of 1975, as a 20 year old, I met a man named Jesse James. He worked for Campus Crusade for Christ. He was 29 years old, married and had three children. I met him towards the end of my junior year of college. I remained in Stevens Point that summer and Jesse invited me to his house for dinner during the break between the spring semester and summer school with a couple of other students he knew. I went to his house every night for the next 10 days and stayed until midnight most of those nights. I pummeled him with questions and it was in those

late night discussions that my faith in Christ was confirmed. Jesse left town by the end of May but when he came back the next fall I joined a small group that he led, spent a part of every weekend at his home and met with him almost every week to talk about the Bible or questions I was encountering as I shared the gospel in my dorm. We met with other students together and set up group meetings where he shared the gospel and I watched and then eventually, I shared the gospel and he watched. But mostly, we simply spent time together in my living environment, in his home and together in the church. I learned a great deal about marriage, about parenting, about leadership, about sharing the gospel and about living the Christian life just by being with Jesse in a wide variety of real life settings. The course of my life as a Christian and as a minister of Christ was set in large part by my spending time with Jesse.

People follow people, especially the people they love and respect. This is one of the chief means God uses to bring us to Christ and to cause us to grow up in Christ. The process of becoming a disciple of Jesus and of growing as a disciple of Jesus is intensely relational. It happens to us as we spend time with others who are growing as Christians. The churches in which individuals are growing in their knowledge of and love for Christ are those churches which emphasize and promote Christians being involved in each others lives and in the lives of the non-Christians with whom we live. Those who are older in Christ are to intentionally seek out and relate to those who are not in Christ or new in Christ for the purpose of modeling and teaching the Christian life to them. Every parent is to view themselves in this way in relation to their children. This is the main reason God gave you children; so you can teach and model the gospel to them. Every growing disciple of Jesus is to make it their goal to influence others for the sake of Christ by seeking to develop relationships with others. It is a certainty that if you pursue Christ and spend time with another person you will influence them to pursue Christ because people follow the people they love and respect.

II. It is the transforming word of God that is being taught and learned (2 Tim 3:14-17)

Paul's purpose in writing 2 Timothy is to enable Timothy to stand up and fight the fight of faith in the face of overwhelming opposition. In this letter Paul is calling Timothy to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. He is giving him reasons to do so. In this part of his letter he has told Timothy to remember what he learned from he and from his mother and grandmother. But he ends this section by pointing Timothy to the ultimate foundation upon which he must stand. While the examples of others are necessary, our ultimate loyalty does not lie with people. The greatest motive for standing firm in Christ is not fear of disappointing our parents or our mentors. Rather, as Paul tells Timothy, our ultimate foundation is God's word. The reason that Paul holds himself and Timothy's mom up as examples is because they are living examples of the effect of God's word upon human lives. It is the word of God, which causes the effect, and we dare not see the power as deriving from merely human ability or goodness. The reason Paul, Lois and Eunice lived lives worthy of imitation is because, "All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

It is this transforming word of God that is the subject matter about which the church as a school of Christ is learning. Our whole life together is taken up with seeking to understand this word and to correctly apply it to our lives. We are faithful disciples of Jesus to the degree that this word is correctly understood by us and applied in our lives. I want us to notice how this word is described by Paul. First, in v. 15, Paul reminds Timothy that the Scriptures are holy or sacred. What does that mean? It means that this book is different from every other book in the world. There is no book like it, there are no other "holy books" because there are no other books breathed out by God. This is the only book that comes from the only true and living God who is holy. Thus this book stands above all other books and is the only source of accurate and true knowledge of the holy God. What does this book tell us? It tells us how to be saved. It is the story of how God has been at work from before the creation of the world to rescue and restore his people and his world. It is the story of salvation. However, it is the story of the only salvation that is possible, salvation which comes to individuals through our personal faith in Jesus the Messiah. This book is a description of God's salvation and the means by which he saves his people and his world through Jesus. Thus Jesus and his saving work is the chief thing about which this book speaks and we should expect to see him and hear him when we read and study and listen to this book.

The way the Bible communicates this salvation is first, by teaching us the truth about everything that matters. We do not and cannot know the truth about God and his salvation, his purposes in the world apart from knowing this book. We are ignorant and misinformed and deceived about the nature of everything and it is only by submitting to what this book tells us about God's salvation in Christ that we can trust in Christ and gain the salvation he has purchased. You cannot and will not grow as a Christian without a growing knowledge of the truth contained in this book. One of the chief evidences that you are a growing disciple of Jesus is that what you think is changing. There is no person who thinks and understands the world and God and people in perfect accord with God's way of thinking and thus every true Christian is regularly having their thinking changed by this book. We are always learning new things about God and his salvation as we read and study this book.

But the Bible does not only communicate this salvation by telling us the truth but also by rebuking our sin and error. The Bible refutes the errors we believe and the sinful ways of life we prefer. The better a person knows what this book says the more he or she will be confronted with the wrong ways he thinks and lives. If we are not regularly feeling guilty about our thinking and living when reading or listening to the Bible then either we are not paying attention or we are not hearing the Bible accurately taught. When God tells us about his saving work in Christ he not only informs us of the truth and rebukes us for our sin and error but he also shows us how to make right what we have made wrong. The Bible corrects us, it shows us how to get back up and keep going. Next, this word of the gospel trains us to live in a righteous manner. It forms us into people who love to do righteousness. This book makes us into people who imitate Jesus. Finally, when the Bible teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains us then we are competent, equipped for every good work. The word of God causes us to live like the disciples of Jesus. The word imparts divine life to us by these means and then that life causes us to do good works. Good works are not only or even primarily works of charity but rather living like a disciple of Jesus in my whole life. I work like a disciple. I am a student like a disciple of Jesus. I eat my food like a disciple of Jesus. I spend my money like a disciple of Jesus. I watch TV and read books and use Face Book like a disciple of Jesus. I do good in all that I do, that is, all that I do corresponds to the gospel of Jesus.

When a local church is full of people who are reading and studying and talking about the Bible and how it applies to all of life, then that church is going to be growing as faithful disciples and multiplying because this word is a life giving, life changing word. The message of salvation that this book contains is the most precious and the most glorious message in the universe and so when a group of people is taken up with this message, it performs its transforming work upon them and upon others through them. While it is true that God uses human relationships to do his work, it is not those relationships which are primary but the truth of the gospel which is communicated and shared through those relationships is primary.

III. Every student becomes a teacher (2 Tim 3:14-15 & Romans 15:14)

It is clear from vv. 14-15 that God expects every Christian parent to be a teacher of the gospel to his or her own children. When you do not teach the Bible to your children in your home you are working for their damnation, not their salvation. Teaching the Bible to your children does not guarantee that God will graciously save them but you can know with certainty that God will not save them apart from a knowledge of Christ and his salvation that is only found in the Bible. It is God's will that each parent be the instrument through which the gospel is taught to your children. I beg you, for your sake and for the sake of your children to make your home a center of biblical and theological education. Cause your children, "from infancy to know the sacred writings that are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus." Read the Bible, use the catechism, memorize the Bible, tell the stories around the dinner table, ask your children questions and encourage them to ask you questions. If your spouse won't help, do it anyways, as Eunice did with Timothy in spite of the fact that her husband was an unbeliever. If you do not feel adequate to the task, ask someone for help. In our church you have no excuse because we have a number of parents who are working hard to do this and they can help you.

However, it is not only parents that God expects to be able to teach the gospel. To show this I want you to turn to Romans 15:14. Paul has never been among the Christians living in Rome. However, as chapter 16 shows he

knows at least 28 Christians who are part of the church in Rome. It is because of all the friends he has in this church that he well knows the maturity that exists in it. He declares that the entire church, all the brothers and sisters in the church of Rome are full of goodness. What he means is that the people in this church are living as faithful disciples of Jesus. They delight in doing good to one another and to those outside the church. They are people who are concerned for justice and for the welfare of others. But not only are all of these Christians full of goodness they also are complete in knowledge. That is, they have a full and complete understanding of and faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They understand the gospel, the message of salvation that is contained in the Bible. You might ask if they are so complete in knowledge then why did Paul write this letter to them? If you look at v. 15 you will see his answer. He wrote to remind them of their common faith because this is what God called him to do. So the thing to notice in this is that even if a church is mature or an individual Christian is mature that doesn't mean it or she doesn't need to be continually taught by those whom God has called to be the pastors/elders/teachers in the local body.

Finally, I want you to notice what Paul says at the end of v. 14. He says that due to their maturity in Christ they are able to instruct one another. Paul expects every Christian in this mature church to teach other Christians. Every student is to be a teacher. Every disciples is to make disciples. This is the goal. Our church is to be a "school of Christ" where every member of the school reaches maturity in Jesus and a part of that maturity is the ability to teach others the gospel. God expects that each person in here who considers himself or herself a Christian to so learn the gospel that you are able to teach it to others. What is interesting about the word translated "instruct" at the end of v. 14 is that it is used 8 times in the NT. Four times it is used to describe the teaching ministry of pastors/elders and four times, including here, it is used for all Christians. It is God's will that every local church promote the teaching and modeling and learning of God's word so that each Christian grows up into a faithful, maturing disciple of Jesus that is able to prayerfully speak the word of God into another person's life.

Obviously not everybody is going to do this in the same way or with the same number of people or with the same degree of skill. However, a local church is supposed to be a place where the members are not simply passively learning, as if that were possible, but that every person in the church is growing in their knowledge of Christ, their obedience to Christ and their ability to teach the word of God in appropriate ways and in appropriate contexts to others. Listen to me, if you consider yourself a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, then you are to have as a goal in your life to understand this word of God so well that you are able to teach others the truth it contains. Do you have that as a goal? It is not the only reason you come to church or join a Bible study or attend Foundations in the Faith but it is one reason. The Lord Jesus Christ, who loved you and gave himself for you expects you to be able to teach this gospel to others. If all of us were growing in that ability we would all be growing up as disciples and you can be sure that our church would be multiplying as we teach the sacred Scriptures which are able to make a person wise for salvation through faith in Jesus.

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