

**THE ENGAGING CHURCH:  
(6) ENGAGED IN DISCIPLESHIP**

Philippians 2: 1-5

Jeffrey S. Carlson

October 26, 2008

**PROLOGUE**

Anne Ortlund once said, “Christians can be grouped into two categories—marbles and grapes. Marbles are single units that don't affect each other except in collision. Grapes, on the other hand, mingle juices: each one is a ‘part of the fragrance’ of the church body.”

As followers of Christ , let’s try to be grapes and not marbles!

**PREFACE**

In recent weeks we have been looking at what it means to be an Engaging Church. An Engaging Church is one that engages in what God is doing in the world. As we carry out this work we need to engage our hearts, our minds, our hands and feet. This morning in the sixth installment of this series we shall consider how an Engaging Church engages in Discipleship.

**SCRIPTURE**

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, {2} then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. {3} Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. {4} Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. {5} Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1-5 NIV).

**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus wants people to follow him. He wants you to follow him. A follower of Jesus Christ is called a disciple. The word “disciple” occurs 294 times in the New Testament. In contrast, the word “Christian” occurs only 3 times, and was first introduced to refer to disciples (Acts 11:26).

Today we use the word “Christian” all the time in church but seldom use the word “disciple.” This is unfortunate. A Christian is meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A disciple is one who is learning to become like Jesus. We were created to become like Jesus. The Bible says:

"From the very beginning God decided that those who came to him - and he

knew who would - should become like his Son..." (Rom 8:29 LB).

To become like Jesus does not mean you become a god. Nor does it mean you have to go around in sandals and a tunic speaking Aramaic. Rather it refers to his humanity, his character and his harmonious relationship with God the Father.

This does not happen overnight. Paul says:

"God wants us to grow up...like Christ in everything" (Eph. 4:15 MESSAGE).

It takes time to grow up. It is a process not an event. Unfortunately, some Christians grow older but never seem to grow up. It takes time and effort to become like Jesus.

God can help us become like Jesus and we cannot become like Jesus without God's help. The process of learning to become like Jesus is called Discipleship. If we want to be an Engaging Church we will engage in Discipleship.

### **1. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN DISCIPLESHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN DISCIPLESHIP.**

Brenda Goodine tells about a close friend of hers who decided it was time to talk to her bright four-year-old son, Benji, about receiving Christ. "Benji," she asked quietly, "would you like to have Jesus in your heart?" Benji rolled his eyes and answered seriously, "No. I don't think I want the responsibility."

Of course, having Jesus in your heart is not so much a responsibility as it is an incredibly gracious gift. Jesus wants to reside in our hearts. He says:

"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23 TNIV).

You may have heard about Jesus Christ. You may be familiar with the words of Jesus taught in church. But have you invited him to take up residence in your heart? This is the first step of discipleship.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is not someone who has "made it" or has all the answers or has done something to merit God's love. Quite the opposite, in fact. A disciple is one who, by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, knows that he or she has done nothing to deserve the love of God, but in humility receives the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

But there is a relationship between loving God and keeping his commandments. We obey God

not as a way to earn his love but as a way of thanking God for his amazing love for us. Our motivation to love God springs from appreciating his sacrificial love for us. As Paul says:

"For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all" (2 Cor 5:14 NRSV).

It is God's love for us that makes it possible for us to return that love to him and show that love to others. More than anything else, a disciple is one who wants to increase in the love of God and neighbor.

## **2. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN DISCIPLESHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN DISCIPLESHIP.**

The word in the New Testament that is translated as "disciple" is from a word that means "to learn by experience." A disciple is a student who embraces the discipline of a teacher. Unfortunately, nowadays, we associate discipline with punishment rather than learning from experience.

The little girl sat in her room after her mother had scolded her. Emotionally wounded, she had not yet been broken. The more she thought about the scolding, the madder she got. She finally stormed to her door and screamed out to her mother, "Alright, Mom, I give up! How many times did you tell me not to do it!?!"

A disciple is a student. As students we need to learn what it means to become like Jesus. The most important part of learning to be like Jesus is attitude. Our text says:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5 NIV).

How you view your experiences will often determine what you gain from them. God knows that experience is a great teacher and that our attitude determines what we gain. But some people will complain even when it no longer makes sense to do so.

An Army Airborne Ranger was learning to parachute. The sergeant barked out the orders:

1. Jump when you are told to jump.
2. Count to ten, then pull the ripcord.
3. If the first chute doesn't open, pull the second ripcord.
4. When you land, a truck will take you back to the post.

When the plane got over the drop zone, the soldier jumped when it was his turn. He counted to ten, then pulled the ripcord. Nothing happened. He pulled the second ripcord. Nothing

happened. "Oh great," he complained, "I'll bet the truck won't be waiting for us, either!"

To become like Jesus we need an attitude of trust in the face of adversity. Jesus went through many troubles and trials in his life. One of the clearest examples of this took place the night before he was crucified.

He went to an olive garden called Gethsemane. He asked his disciples, Peter, James and John, to stay with him. (Which, by the way, should teach us that if Jesus needed the fellowship of others, how much more do we!) Terrific stress and anguish came over Jesus and he said:

"The worry in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me" (Mark 14:34).

He was saying, in effect, "I am almost crushed when I think of what's going to happen tomorrow." Have you ever had that feeling like you couldn't make it another day? Jesus knows that feeling. Notice how Jesus responded to trouble:

"Father, everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet, I want your will, not mine!" (Mark 14:36).

If we are going to become like Jesus, we need to learn to trust in God. Now it's okay to say to God, "God I don't like this! Take it away!" But we also need to be like Christ when he said, "Your will be done." We need an attitude of trust.

To become like Jesus we also need an attitude of cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We read again and again in Scripture of the inseparable link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness (Luke 4:1 NRSV).

We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to become like Jesus. It is not all God's job. It is not all our job. It is a joint venture.

Discipleship is godly toil. There is no instant gratification in discipleship. Spiritual growth takes time and this may be the hardest thing for us to grasp when it comes to the subject of discipleship. For, we live in such an instant gratification society. We impatiently want everything right away. We have 10-items or less check out aisles at our grocery stores and nearly blow a gasket if we end up in one of these lines behind someone who is mathematically challenged.

We want elevators to respond to our needs instantly. Have you ever seen anyone impatiently waiting for the elevator and watched them as they respond by pressing the button repeatedly. What are they doing? Somehow they seem to think that the elevator is going to say to itself,

"That guy on the third floor is in a big hurry. I better skip all the other floors and head right down there for him."

And we tend to be just as impatient when it comes to spiritual growth. But discipleship does not happen this way. As Eugene Peterson puts it, it is "a long obedience in the same direction."

Anyone can be prayerful, loving and dedicated for a short time. But Christ calls us to have a consistency in the way we serve him. The decision to follow Christ has 24/7 implications. It is a decision that must be an ongoing part of our everyday life: work, home, school, social and recreational activities. It is a decision that can only be lived out in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Cooperating with the Spirit develops a Christ-like character in us. This is also known as the fruit of the Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23 NIV).

Laura Smith writes:

Our young daughter was learning the fruit of the Spirit, so I asked her to recite them to me. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and remote control!" was her reply.

While some of us probably need a remote control for our self control, all of us need to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. By the way, the word "fruit" is in the singular indicating that all nine qualities make up the fruit. In other words, we cannot pick and choose. I seem to recall an anecdote about C. S. Lewis. He prayed for patience. The subsequent week was so fraught with frustration and disappointment that the next week he asked God for a different virtue! In any case, the Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit works to develop all nine qualities in us, but not without our cooperation.

To become like Jesus we need an attitude of trust, an attitude of cooperation, and an attitude of humility and selflessness. This is the primary reason why Paul wrote about the attitude of Christ. He says:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:3-5 NIV).

Most of us struggle with humility. Pride often gets in the way even when we try to be humble. On the Day of Atonement a rabbi, wanting to express humility and contrition, beat his breast and said in a loud voice, "I am nothing!" Moved by the rabbi's example, the cantor beat his breast and said, "I am nothing!" In the back of the synagogue, the janitor, grieved by his own sinfulness, beat his breast and shouted, "I am nothing!" Whereupon, the rabbi turned to the cantor and said, "Look who thinks he's nothing!"

Biblical humility is not the same as false humility nor does it mean that you neglect your own welfare or the welfare of your family in order to help others. But our concern must be wide enough to include others. We are to treat people the way Jesus would treat them. In everyday, ordinary matters such as food, money, and personal relationships, we are to imitate Christ.

### **3. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN DISCIPLESHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN DISCIPLESHIP.**

For the first disciples this was literally true - they had to engage their feet. Jesus was a peripatetic teacher. (Not pathetic, not paraplegic, but peripatetic!) Peripatetic has to do with "walking." A peripatetic teacher did not have a fixed classroom but traveled from place to place. His students generally walked behind him out of respect and would repeat the lessons until they had them memorized. So when Jesus said, "follow me," he meant it. It was a time-honored way for a teacher to invite someone to become a student.

Today we no longer have the opportunity to walk behind Jesus but we do have the opportunity to engage in the kind of activities he has instructed us to carry out. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" (Mk 1:17). Jesus wants us to fish for people. He was not telling us this so we would try to hook people or throw nets on top of them. Rather, he was using fishing as a metaphor for the work of making new disciples. Matthew tells us:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

This is a command and not a suggestion. It is often referred to as the Great Commission. A commission is a commitment put into action. In this case, the commitment to Jesus Christ is expressed through the action of making disciples. We are to reach out to others with the love of God and invite them to make a personal response to Jesus Christ.

Too often in the church we get a little mixed up when it comes to this fishing ministry. A boy was taking care of his baby sister while his parents went to town shopping. He decided to go

fishing, and he had to take her along. "I'll never do that again!" he told his mother that evening. "I didn't catch a thing!" "Oh, next time I'm sure she'll be quiet and not scare the fish away," his mother said. The boy replied, "It wasn't that. She ate all the bait!"

As followers of Jesus we need to spend more time fishing and less time eating the bait.

Our work is to help others come *to* Christ and to help each other become more *like* Christ. The Christian life was never designed by God to be lived alone. Discipleship is a process that is best worked out from a community of faith.

There are benefits we cannot receive, there is growth we cannot experience, and work we cannot accomplish apart from fellowship with other believers. In Hebrews we read:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24).

“Stirring up” is important for two reasons: 1) Our stirring up of others makes us less selfish. If we make other people our concern then we are less likely to get upset when something does not go our way. 2) We need to be stirred up. Where else but in the church can we challenge and encourage each other on what it means to follow Jesus? Spiritual growth in community is a vital part of God’s plan for our lives. We need each other’s help in order to experience holiness, understand truth, and practice love as God intended.

## **CONCLUSION**

So the question that each of us needs to answer is, “Am I engaged in discipleship?”

In 1543 Nicolas Copernicus caused a cosmological revolution when he stated that the Sun and not the Earth was the center of the Solar System. This disturbed and eventually humbled people who preferred to think that the Earth was the center.

It seems to me that each of us needs to go through a Copernican revolution: Instead of seeing life as revolving around ourselves we need to see life as revolving around the Son - the Son of God. This is the aim of discipleship - to become like Christ.