

A Disciple's Handbook

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Every Believer Becomes a Disciple - Matthew 28:19

As many that have received the gift, minister it to one another,
as good stewards of the manifold Grace of God
1Peter4:10

Learning Christ From PAUL AND THE APOSTOLIC FOUNDATIONS

Disciples Handbook 03

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ISSUES OF DISCIPLESHIP

God has provided that each believer who is born of the Spirit may grow in the Spiritual life. **Learning Christ**, in a general sense is becoming familiar with God not only through His word but also through His presence. As we mature as believers we gain familiarity with His character and personality. We, in the process of time are assured that we may become partakers of His glory and His character. As it is written, we go from *glory to glory* (2Corinthians 3:18,)and *from faith to faith* (Romans 1:17.) We learn to recognize and hearken to the voice of His Spirit and respond according to the way we are directed. This is *learning Christ*. God's model for learning Christ is **imitation** of the first born Son of God, Jesus Christ. We are to imitate his manner of thinking, and acting. We are to imitate his interacting with our "**Heavenly Father**" and his Spirit-directed ministry. The first disciples were provided with a living model but they were only able duplicate his Spiritual behavior after they had received the enabling Baptism of the Holy Spirit. **There were no spiritually empowered Christians until the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost.** It is a popular notion that Jesus' disciples who walked with him in Galilee were Christians. Those who were sent out to evangelize two by two were disciples and followers of those they believed to be the Messiah. The disciples of the Rabbi Yeshua of Nazareth and merely acted under the authority of Jesus who was the true "Son of God." The Christian church, or *ekklesia* (called out ones) was/is a totally new dispensation that followed the endowment of power from on high, thus receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Christians are the new dispensation of Spiritually reborn men and women made possible by Christ's resurrection from the dead.

With Christ's life within us, we submit our egos and wills to him.

Our heart's aim is to become *as he was in this world*. (John 16:16; 1John 4:17)

There is a total spiritual inability of the natural man or woman to do the work of Christ. This is the reason Jesus commanded them to wait until they received the "promise of the Father" the Spirit of Truth, this spiritual enablement transformed the natural, limited disciple into a different kind of being, born of the Spirit. We can not be the light of the world if God's light does not burn within us.

Too many nominal Christians experience a religion that could function just as it is without a resurrection.

We can not be *witnesses* of his resurrection if we have not been touched by the mighty hand of God that raised Jesus from the dead who also made our own darkened spirit come to life. We can not reflect the goodness of God if he has not remade us to be righteous saints who were once reprobates. Our greatest hope as we come into this world is to know God. This is our first calling. Sadly, some come and go from this world not having fulfilled that calling. If we are fortunate to have God reveal himself to us then we must press on to the next stage, that of being a functional witness of the Kingdom of heaven. It is also unfortunate that many are thwarted in this second stage by incomplete or ineffectual teachings of religious tradition. *The reality of the "new creation" changes our motivations and desires and plants the laws of righteous living within our souls.*

As we have noted, the institutional church has either lost sight of, or failed to actualize the provisions of the New Covenant which comprises the Gospel of Salvation through Jesus Christ. Time has eroded true understanding, and spiritual subterfuge authored by an unrelenting adversary has come in to subtly sidetrack our spiritual lives and cause us to rely upon human understanding instead.

What I am sharing in this writing is not a unique revelation but simply a restatement of **the way** that was revealed by Jesus to his servants the apostles following Pentecost, in the beginning of the church age. Any church or teacher (including denominational groups) who are attempting to mentor or direct others into a spiritual life are under divine obligation to be accurate. Private interpretation risks wrong doctrine. Since there is always a danger of deception, it is important that we proceed cautiously, both as teachers and learners. We are obligated to discern all things with the wisdom, the help, and guidance of the *Spirit of Truth* who is the *Holy Spirit*. God has told us through the Word that we may ask for wisdom and for truth to be revealed to us. He further instructs

us to have confidence in this asking, knowing that God is willing. God is willing! God is willing to give *good gifts* which bring fulfillment and blessings and not sorrows. When seeking the revelations which are of God, or *from God*, it is up to the seeker to be on guard against deceptions and to discern the true from the false. In asking for anything from God it is very important to invoke the name of Jesus Christ. This name is the name above every name and above every spiritual entity or authority. This name will consecrate or make pure anything which may transpire. It will guarantee that anything which will be revealed or imparted spiritually will be free of any corrupt or deceptive influence. If you ask in the name of Jesus, *the deceiver* can not work his way so readily into the workings.

Receiving True Gifts and not Counterfeit Ones

Jesus instructs us about receiving gifts from God, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit. He teaches us that the God of heaven gives *good gifts* and not evil, hurtful or perverted ones. Christ also characterizes the fact that there are two kinds of gifts which might be tendered, the true and the false, but God's gifts are good and true. The scripture is found in Matthew 7:8-11 and in Luke 11:11-13: "*For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*" :8; "*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?*" :9; "*Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*" :10; "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*" :11. KJV The two objects which are sought are bread and fish. God gives things which are life-giving and safe (bread, and meat.) Luke chapter eleven restates the same teaching about asking from God the Father but expands the emphasis, toward the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the living gift of God's power and presence: "*If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?*"; "*Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?*" "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*" -- Luke 11:11-13kfv. I have emphasized the word son to emphasize that relationship is the key to receiving from God. There are a whole lot of different kinds of seekers; some sincere and some less sincere. If a dabbler negotiates to receive a spiritual manifestation from God, it is uncertain what may transpire. But God wishes to emphasize that he is for blessing His family. He is the giver of Good gifts. Counterfeit gifts are a peripheral issue. The above reference represents the fact that there is the possibility of receiving a *bad gift*. These kinds of exceptions bear upon the setting

and environment where and with whom the "ministry" occurs and the sincerity of the hearts who seek the gift. We have a common enemy, Satan who is always ready to move in to deflect the gift of God or to substitute a counterfeit. He does not give good gifts, nor does he give valid revelations. His gifts are not life giving, they give neither joy, nor health nor liberty. Yet it is possible that he will try to come in unless you exclude him from any part of the seeking and asking transaction Satan's gift is characterized as a stone instead of bread, as a serpent instead of pure food, something infused with poison instead of food. Jesus has portrayed Satan as the deadly counterfeiter who will insinuate himself into the seekers life subtly and at any opportunity. Forewarned is to be forearmed; for this reason, it is wise to initiate safeguards and precautions as I suggested above in order to keep the deceiver out of your life and out of every spiritual transactions. There was a time when our lives were entirely under his (Satan's) control. We may not think that this was the case but the apostle is very clear about it. A couple of apostolic letters bring attention to the nature of the unredeemed life, which includes each and every life before the renewal *In Christ*. Paul's letter to Ephesus, Chapter 2, verses 2 and 3. *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; Among whom also we all had our conversation (lifestyle) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."* KJV Paul's letter to Collosae, Chapter 1 verse 21. *"And you, that were sometimes (before now) alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled"*The apostle contrasts the previous unredeemed nature our previous lifestyle with the redeemed nature. In the letter to Corinth, Chapter 1 verses 10 and 11, he lists a number of these life styles; *"-Neither - thieves, - - covetous, - - drunkards, - - revilers, - - extortionist, shall inherit the kingdom of God.; And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*

The Foundation of the Apostles

Every Believer Becomes a Disciple " Apostles were first **disciples**. Disciples walked with the Lord in an intimate way. They learned his ways by first hand observation, through hearing his word and knowing his voice. The disciples while they were growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus were also *participants in* the work of Jesus' ministry. It was they who announced, *'the Kingdom of God is at hand.'*" They showed that the Kingdom could be demonstrated by both **the spiritual power and the authority** to

impact the afflicted, the oppressed, the poor and the broken hearted. Disciples were and are called to be partakers of Jesus Christ's ministry. Each of us continues to share the same access to Jesus Christ. We share the same Spirit, we share in the same commission. *"For this reason the son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil."* (1John 3:8) We aspire to attain to the **same unity and inclusiveness** as the original fellowship of disciples. There was no member of the original circle of disciples who was just like another. Yet, there was a unique niche for each of those Jesus called. Each of the first disciples had a divine destiny and an unlimited opportunity for growing up in the fullness of the Lord. Jesus chose the original disciples. He singled them out and called them aside to walk with him and to have a face-to-face relationship with him. Descriptions indicate that each had attributes which could label them as plain **folks** or ordinary people. Some associated with Jesus more intimately than others. Each disciple had unique traits and attributes of character; Matthew a worldly businessman, a publican, a tax collector; Peter a robust, headstrong man who generally spoke without thinking and was always competing to be someone; John a warm, compassionate and trusting youth; Nathaniel innocent and open; Thomas a scientific minded pragmatist who had to have things proven before he could be persuaded and so on. The twelve included men who we might not have chosen, including Judas the deceiver and betrayer who Jesus also called a robber. Outside of the twelve were a multitude of other disciples **including women** who traveled extensively with Jesus though were not part of the inner group of the twelve.

It is possible that those who were reasonably close and connected to Jesus may have been about 500 individuals. The apostles were men with whom Jesus visited, taught and broke bread. He also imparted his life and Spirit into them. After he had risen from the dead, he breathed upon the disciples saying to them, "receive Holy Breath (Gr. *pneuma*)." The word breath and spirit are the same word in the original text. This is the same as to say, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It was this action which imparted Holy life within each disciple this afforded, I believe the new heaven borne experience that we believers today call born again or spiritual renewal. The eleven and Judas Iscariot's replacement Matthias were born from above or conceived as a new spirit being at this time.

The apostle Paul (originally Saul the Pharisee) came on board a short time the church in Jerusalem was started. Saul was called by Jesus in a dramatic and powerful way. He was a chosen vessel to be used for a particular revelation and ministry. Saul of Tarsus was a

Jewish theologian, a Pharisee of the strictest sect of Judaic fundamentalism of the day. Saul was an intellectual of supreme discipline and credentials. The zealous Saul, set out to destroy the disciples of Jesus, persecuting and imprisoning all who preached Jesus as Messiah and the story of the resurrection from the dead. Saul was added as an apostle as one who met Jesus "out of due time."

How did Saul become a disciple and an apostle? Paul recounted and retold his account of the encounter several times, but the original encounter is described in Acts, Chapter 9. God supernaturally intervened in Saul's life, on a journey to Damascus. His travels were interrupted by Jesus appearing to him in a brilliant light. Saul was blinded and knocked him off his mount onto the ground. The voice spoke to him saying, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" Paul answered this voice saying, "*Who are you, Lord?*" and Jesus replied, "*I am Jesus who you are persecuting.*" Jesus then gave Saul brief instructions about who he was to visit to receive further ministry and instruction. Jesus began to tutor a new disciple after this. Jesus did not give Saul any information that he did not need to know at that time, but he told him the first thing to do. Paul was told where to go in Damascus to get further help. God likewise does not give us more information than we need to get started. He does list all of the stages of our journey, including both the trials and the victories. The journey of faith is an hour by hour, day by day program. The journey of discipleship begins with a first step forward into a new life. In the first chapter of his letter to Galatia, Saul who has been given a new name, Paul, to go along with his new nature, accounts how he was taken aside and how he began to be instructed face-to-face, personally by Jesus. For three years in the deserts of Arabia, Paul **learned Christ**. being discipled as one "*out of due time*" a description of his apostolic commissioning found in 1Corinthians 15:5-10.

The Apostles Doctrine

Why should we place an emphasis on the apostles and the disciples? Because we wish to be connected to the same authentic and pure doctrine and the same spirit and the **same manifested spiritual life** that was brought forth in the beginning of the "church". It must breathe the same purity, power and the same divine order. The apostolic teachings have been described as the foundation upon which the house of God is constructed. We who continue to build the Kingdom of God must continue building upon the same foundation which is true and sound. The foundation is the apostle's doctrine. It is based upon the essentials of the true faith. The "promise of the Father" a nation of kings and

priests through Jesus Christ, designated as "the firstborn of many brethren."

Understanding the Apostle's Doctrine

The writings of the apostles constitute practical, uncomplicated, hands-on teaching of how to live a Spiritual life. The Apostles who wrote in the Bible include Peter, James, John, Paul and Luke is generally credited with authoring the Book of acts as well as the Gospel of Luke, Paul is generally credited with writing most of the other epistles. Theologians fine tune and over-process questions of authorship and have vain debates over endless issues of scholarship, but such debates bear little relevance to living the Spiritual life if we merely accept the epistles as true.

The apostle Paul has a unique revelation. There are a number of commonalities that all the apostles share. The original disciples (apostles) received the power to become sons and daughters of God through the Spirit of adoption and the release of the Spirit of God to bear witness that we are the sons of God. The Jews of Jerusalem who believed were prejudiced to the Jewish religious traditions and the establishment of the Kingdom as a Jewish prophetic event.

Paul is given a revelation from Jesus that is directed to **the gentile** audience. The emphasis in Paul's teaching is directed to the entire world, a Gentile world. With the other apostles he enunciates the **power of the crucified and resurrected Jesus**. The Messiah's resurrection is a legacy for all mankind, not just the Jews in Jerusalem, the promise of sonship and new life as a Spiritual Creation *in Christ*. Paul's revelation speaks to a different audience, the gentile world and the concept of the "Church." (Ec-cles-si'-a) Paul goes so far as to call this revelation '**His Gospel**.' The original apostles, while they began outreach beyond Jerusalem, maintained a focus on the Jews and Israel. Messiah's resurrection denoted the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel who would eventually restore the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus as the risen son on God was the corner stone of both group's gospel message consistent with the revelation of Christ's grace shared by Peter, James, John or Luke. It is clear however, that Paul was not taught the Gospel by the apostles in Jerusalem but given unique revelation and instruction by Jesus personally, for 3 years after his conversion on the Damascus road.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE FOUNDATION APOSTOLIC DOCTRINES

From the outset, I do not want to neglect the important foundation of the Christian faith which is its Judaic roots. Jesus, Yeshua, The Messiah came to fulfill all of the ante-types which are portrayed from Genesis to the Prophets and the Psalms. Jesus has fulfilled the

first four appointed feasts of Levitus 23 and shall one day fulfill each unto the last. The apostate position taken by both the Roman church that forbade the recognition of the roots and prophetic future of Judaism as well as the reformers who followed in doing the same pernicious path have separated Christianity from its Jewishness. The Messiah is the Messiah of Israel; the apostles were all Jewish followers of Moses who never discarded the scriptures which were the first and only texts they taught from before the New Testament scriptures came into being. Apostolic foundations merely gave credence to all that was written pertaining to the Son of God who would come into the world to be a light both to the Jew and to the Gentiles.

Jesus Christ, the True Son of God Almighty, Jesus Christ, Virgin born, fulfilling the Messianic Scriptures of the Old Testament, Christ Jesus, crucified, resurrected and alive;

Jesus Christ, the *only* mediator between God and man;

Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, He becomes our Passover;

Jesus Christ, offers Redemption through the blood God's of Lamb (Jesus Christ) the perfect sacrifice;

We are offered the promise of The New Creation in Christ Jesus;

The Holy Spirit provides enablement and reveals truth in Christ Jesus;

The believer is given authority against spiritual powers; Deliverance and discerning of the spiritual world

The potentiality of the children of God. Widely unknown or untaught who we are as children of God.

The law of the Spirit, has bought us liberty and freedom apart from the Law of sin and death

The Church calls for Unity of all believers; All blood bought believers are one in Him, Unity produces synergistic power, peace and potentiality.

All believers must learn to discern matters of the Spiritual life and maintain unceasing vigilance over matters of the common faith;

Believers have been forgiven therefore we must continuing to walk in Love and Forgiveness;

Rebellion and unbelief will be dealt with at the hand of the returning Jesus in divine judgment before & at His second advent;

There is a culmination of the church age; Thereafter, this evil age will also conclude after the false prophet and deceiver are revealed and the deeds of the wicked are met with judgment.

Constant vigilance must be maintained against False doctrines, false messiahs and anti-Christ; Rampaging ferocity of ascendancy of the final anti Christ.

Believers need to be alert to false teachers; and Aware of doctrines of Demons that take believers into bondage

The redemption of Israel becomes a praise in all of the earth; With the second advent Israel will become the head of all nations and Christ will rule in the Holy City.

Paul's Insights into the Gospel

Paul an intellectual's intellectual and a theologian's theologian, set aside his natural credentials when he began to minister the Gospel. Paul presents some of the most powerful insights into the conflict of intellectualism and theology. Paul experienced a total turn around in his life. The features of his traditional achievements were discarded as were the merits of his classical education. Paul declared that the things which he once esteemed and considered meritorious were now no better than "dung". The Holy Spirit drew a line of division in Paul's life. He clarified the difference between the fashion of this world and the world of God. He revealed the matters which pertained to mind and soul and matters of spirit; *the thoughts of the mind* versus *the intents of the heart*. Vanity no longer had a place in his life. Personal pride and striving for status was cast down he was given another job description. A "slave" of Christ.

It is Paul who addresses two points of doctrine which are at times in tension or contrast. First the purely Spiritual nature of the Gospel and the God-connected source of life; and

secondly teachings on leadership, headship and government impacting the long-term course of this entity called "the church," the body of believers. Contradictions have occurred in this respect, that individuals are placed in positions of leadership and authority who do not have spiritual credentials but merely human approval. Spiritual enablements allows the kingdom of God to be manifest according to the apostolic model. Even in the first years of the church age we hear accounts of men like the apostles Paul and John struggling with individuals who have assumed leadership though their motivation were entirely wrong or their doctrine was corrupt. We hear Paul describe associates who tried to undermine or destroy his ministry, or who departed because their hearts turned again to the world; or of the associates who preach for personal gain; or the associates who wanted to be pre eminent and gloried in having control over people. (See 1Timothy 1:19,20 1Timothy 4:14) regarding Alexander the Coppersmith; 2Timothy 4:10 regarding Demas; 3John 1:9 regarding the person of Diotrophes.)

Paul Defines the Apostolic Emphasis In his first letter to Corinth Paul presses a very important foundation point in the first two chapters. This particular emphasis stressed the difference between a Spiritual message contrasted to a conceptual one. In chapter 1 verse 17 he states that his gospel emphasis is not based upon words of human wisdom but in power generated from the cross of Jesus. The cross of crucifixion is where the exchange of righteousness was made. The cross of crucifixion is where the sacrifice was made. The cross of crucifixion is where God paid the price in blood for every sinner. This doctrine of the cross does not end with a man's death but with a divinely-powered resurrection. Thus the doctrine that Paul speaks of includes the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It was Jesus who was crucified, dead, buried and resurrected. The holiday we call Easter concludes three Jewish Festivals; Passover, Unleavened bread and First Fruits speaks of the resurrection. As Jesus became the first fruits of those who have died. (1Cor.15-2) It is truly unfortunate that so few Christians understand **the Jewish roots of Christianity**, including the fact that Yeshua and most all of the first disciples and apostles were Jews. Jesus (Yeshua) rose from the dead, *ascended on high, took captivity captive, and gave gifts to the human race.* Paul's statement of the cross does not address sorrow or loss, it addresses rather, victory, effulgence and power. The resurrection speaks of *the power of an endless life.* It speaks about the Father's plan to extend grace and peace to every man, woman and child. It speaks about the ability to *become a new creation in Christ.*

Kingdom of God Wisdom Versus Human Wisdom Paul going on in his first letter to Corinth, introduces the theme of "wisdom." Paul contrasts human wisdom to divine wisdom. He explains that man who deems himself wise through reasoning, can't accept the wisdom of God. God's wisdom is framed in paradoxes and conundrums. For example the paradox of the least being the greatest; the weak being the strong; the first being last; the wise being foolish; the living being dead; the dead being awakened to live. If these concepts make any sense to you, perhaps God has already opened your eyes in a very significant way. God framed truth in such a way that when they are articulated sound preposterous, unbelievable and irrational. The world says, "Be someone, do your own thing, express your individuality." God says, "Decrease to yourself, take your cross and let the outward "you" be crucified so that the Divine (Christ) can have effective sanctuary and expression in you. The scientific mind requires proof. The eye measures and discerns the things which we call real or reality. Yet Christians are entreated to disregard outward manifestations, the outward world. Neither is the mind the highest organ to lead and direct, **children of God are led by the Spirit**, not by acting purely out of reason. The truth is not determined according to science and rationality. God requires **faith** on our part. Paul, again in the same letter speaks to the matter of making Spiritual realities manifest, *"I did not come teaching and preaching with enticing words of man's wisdom but with demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should not stand upon man's wisdom but upon the power of God.* (1Corinthians 2:4,5) The Spiritual life first begins to manifest, because of the grace of God and secondarily by acting in faith. The gospel states with respect to the Kingdom of God that we are all *pressing into it.* (Luke 16:16) The Lord stands at the door knocking, the action of faith opens that door to him. Again, grace is the initiatory cause, it is God's hand in matters concerning our life, stirring, directing and empowering. Grace is the hand of God outstretched to us, beckoning; he bids us to come forth. We respond to him and we press in to the world of Spiritual life that awaits. The hand of grace is outstretched in love. Grace speaks of loving kindness, compassion and giving. This love is caring and constructive in nature. Love builds the bonds of faith and defines the character and the parameters of the spiritual life. It is not knowledge that defines the spiritual life although there is a knowledge component. Scripture reminds us that knowledge ultimately has the affect of "puffing up" our egos. There is an adverse relationship to our character when knowledge becomes pre eminent in our orientation to God. We will always find "knowledge" being closely linked to "religious systems". It is a realm defined by expertise and expertise is usually defined by knowledge.

How much do we have to *know* before we become Spiritual? I began to describe the Apostle's doctrine by mentioning doctrinal content, followed by emphasizing the power (*Gk. dunamis*) that God provides, through his Spirit, to empower our lives and relationships. The attribute of spiritual relationships may lie closer to the center of Spirituality than any other factor. The apostle's doctrine has fellowship and relationship within the very heart of it. Here is a glimpse into the New Testament church of the Book of Acts, "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread, and with prayer.*" (Acts, Chapter 2:42) The apostles who knew the way of God fully through first hand experience were to guide the novices into the same area of common experience; the community expands, the Kingdom of God is entered by more and more converts. A community is being built and stands in the midst of a world of unbelief, carnality, and unrighteousness. God calls us into a family-like community in which *God is not only glorified but in which God continuously interacts with the community.*

True fellowship is what this community is about. There is a sense of family, it is characterized by the joy of redemption (salvation, the first step in pressing into this community.) This intimate fellowship of believers is the closest thing to heaven God has for us on earth. We share a common mind, a common testimony, a common hope. We are baptized into one Spirit and into a common destiny. This community is redemptive owing to the fact that the smoke and tarnish of this world can not endure in the presence of the Living God, neither can the things which defile the flesh stand in his presence. We come together in this community of faith where we find restoration, strength and edification. We come together in fellowship to repair the bumps, bruises, and blemishes that life in this world inflicts upon those who are "*not of this world.*"

Edification and Ministry as it Pertains to Community

We have been conditioned by a religious world *to go to church* to receive ministry. After all, the church is where the minister is. I believe this is a viewpoint which needs to be reexamined in light of true fellowship and *the question of what true ministry ought to be.* Those to whom *church is a place* to be ministered to, are still conditioned to think in terms of priest (clergy) and laity. In this model which has been the tradition for the past 17 hundred years, we are taught that we need someone else to do our spiritual work for us. We come to the priest; we have him pray for us, teach us, bless us, absolve us. We presume that ministry is what happens in a church (fellowship,) and this kind of ministry is some kind of a "Band-Aid" to help us salve the current bruise. I believe there is an

alternative, apostolic way of viewing the community of fellowship. It is the notion of coming to a place of restoration and strengthening; some have called this a "spiritual filling station." In this setting of fellowship there is rest, repose, and encouragement. There are occasions for teaching but the manner of teaching need not be formalistic. Those who know and who have experience victory in one kind of challenge or another, are able to share and encourage others with less knowledge or experience. Edification can occur without formalized, programmatic services. There is sharing of food and the life of God. Spiritual fellowship provides a redemptive community in which the bond of fellowship is not the bond of obligation but of the heart. Love is true and not an affectation. This kind of fellowship is far less structured, yet there is common motivation which guides everyone to seek first the things which are from God. God is purposely the focus and reason for being of all of the people who gather. God is not necessarily first in the lives of many, but in the right community this **will** change. I do not see this kind of fellowship either taught, practiced or encouraged within the institutional church. Those who come to church for a formalistic program come in unsatisfied and they leave unsatisfied. They come feeling estranged or alienated from God and they leave feeling just as far from him. They can however, pretend to be listening while they sleep; or they can pretend to be praying while they dream of their next adventure with the girl at the office or the guy at the club. The actions of formal ministry can not touch the heart of those who need to have a spiritual heart transplant.

To summarize: Learning Christ according to the Apostles Doctrine requires that we:

Be spiritually renewed by faith in Jesus Christ

Receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit

Renew your mind by studying scripture

Seek personal fellowship of God

Seek the fellowship of God's family - - where you are loved and valued

Imitate those who have mature spirituality

Walk in faith, (the knowledge that God cares for us in our present moment)

Minister to others, the same gifts and wholeness that we have received from God

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

How Much Do We Have to Learn Before We Become Spiritual?

Mentors and Ministries

Part of the spiritual life is to make a connection with those who can supply valuable connections. The joints are connections to individuals in the body of Christ. Fellowship

supplies input to areas of knowledge which will be encouraging, and edifying. When we are born into the kingdom, we must move forward or we will retrograde back to the old life in the world. Here according to most voices of ministry is where one would be encouraged to get connected to a "good" church. This should be a simple fact but it is not. There are few church bodies of believers who hold more than a traditional evangelical viewpoint. Most are adhering to forms and traditions as well as doctrines which do not advance the Spiritual life to a significant level of maturity. Once in a church you are expected to "play by their rules." My best advice is to search for the church and set your sights on particular features which will allow you to be discipled and grow not in tradition but in spirituality. If one does provide "life" move on until you sense that it is where God would have you. In the mean time find a home fellowship where you can grow with others in an informal setting. God does not discriminate against home meetings. They are apostolic! It is how the "Church" began. It is obvious that formalized Christian ministry is everywhere in one form or another. As I have already described a vast majority of these churches or ministries are a manifestation of institutional and traditional religion in which the expectation is at best conformity to the norms of a Saturday or a Sunday ritual. Most offer no more than comfortable routine or ritual and little hope of gaining spiritual knowledge and understanding. Neither can they prepare us to fulfill Christ's gospel in the world. Most churches, which are struggling to maintain membership, interest, or involvement, are extremely jealous of their members going astray or getting involved with meetings or activities which are not sponsored by their own fellowship. There was a time when such unfaithfulness could be met by excommunication, but today the usual rebukes from the pulpit are just admonitions or doctrines created out of hand which indicate an obligation to support the local body. Yet it would seem to be close to a cardinal sin to consider "church hopping" or being active in any outreaches from other congregations. This is, in effect the fruit of division which institutional religion enforces.

The Electronic Church There are many other kinds of ministries that may be accessible to us. Among these are media ministries. Men or women who have some special gift of teaching or evangelism or certain personal *charismas* have been able to share their spiritual understandings and insights with any who will watch or listen. If we appreciate the content of a given message we write to them or request their tape series or perhaps, we think that they have enough clout with God to pray for our special needs. These ministries, sometimes called the "**electronic churches**" are not always highly regarded by pulpit ministries.

We hear all kinds of castigation directed toward the names of such ministries, whether Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuler, Benny Hinn or countless others who fill the airwaves of radio and television and short wave broadcast channels. In view of practical matters of church survival and management, local preachers and church leaders need to maintain membership and viability. 'Grandma Smith' might write a check to a radio or television evangelist and forego giving her five dollar donation to the church collection plate. A pastor might make the following remark to parishioners, "Grandma Smith, if you want to support Reverend So and So on TV maybe you should call them when you need a trip to the doctor; or need someone to pray for you when you are sick; or have them officiate your funeral."

What has the Electronic Church ministry to offer? In some cases they be offer better teaching or preaching than some tradition-bound churches where so many to languish in their pews around the world? Televangelists usually have some unique strengths and certainly the ability to preach and persuade. There are important matters to consider in choosing any ministry to support whether remote or local. However, they do subsist on donations from listeners which at times becomes problematic.

How may media ministries provide value and features that provide edification?

Let's look at some attributes of ministry:

- First and most importantly is the message; Do we hear the correct gospel being taught?
- How much of the appeal of this ministry is performance and dazzling rhetoric which attracts us and how much is a sense of devotion to the truth of the Gospel?
- Does the minister seem to model Jesus Christ? The best mode of discerning a minister or a ministry is to imagine Jesus behaving and saying the things as the evangelist or teacher.
- Is devotion and reverence modeled and portrayed?
- Does the person try to draw attention to themselves through colorful mannerisms?
- Does he seem preoccupied with authority and followings?
- Does the leader indicate as we listen to his messages that he wants influence, control, or worship?
- Does there seem to be more of emphasis on one aspect of the Gospel than another?
- Is it a Gospel of power and wholeness or just continually underscoring sin?

- Is it a Gospel in which we can become partakers of God's life or are we blessed because of our supporting the "Super Ministry of Brother X?" There are some media evangelists who I listen to and support because they have helped to mentor me in understanding the Word of God. I support them because they teach the full Gospel message, (more or less) and believe in the potentialities of becoming children of God, partaking in His Divinity. They teach what we should be taught in the local fellowship or church but are not.
- We need to practice discernment and note any inconsistencies in doctrine which place the teaching outside of norms of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The *Apostles Creed* is recited by many denominations in the context of a worship service, but in spite of this, the content of the Apostle's Creed may hardly be addressed in teaching and preaching in sermons. Based upon denominations which I have belonged to or visited before and after I became a believer, *unbelief and spiritual deadness till characterize most of the churches today even those who recite the Credo!*

Mega-Churches

When a brilliant preacher or evangelist proves his (her) ability to move and edify people they begin to develop a following. People follow spiritual anointings. They follow men or women who have demonstrated their abilities to impact the lives of others. The largest churches today grow around the giftings of a single person. People are searching for a greater revelation of God. When they see God using an individual they naturally are attracted to that person. Nearly every Christian I know has a natural desire to be in the presence of "anointed" preaching. Mega-churches are built around mega-men. I believe there are in America today well over a hundred such mega-churches. I have attended a few and have seen others via telecasts and cable networks.

Positives Associated with Mega-Ministries There are both negatives and positives in following this kind of ministry. A few positives: God shows favor to his servant by anointing him (her) just as God anointed Jesus and the Apostles for ministry. God's favor indicates his approval to bring forth a minister's particular gift or understanding to the body. God's approval indicates that he foreknows that many will be touched and blessed by this individual. God allows a such a man or woman with special abilities to reach more people with a Gospel focus than they would ordinarily hear or be exposed to. Many are born again through the mass media ministers.

Negatives Associated with Mega-Ministries The gifted minister may be persuasive or charismatic in purely human terms, without necessarily walking in a divine anointing.

The media evangelist may be preaching a partial or flawed gospel, a non Christian gospel or simply traditionalism. There is no way for the novice seeker to know whether this person teaches true doctrine or not except by natural reasoning or mental judgment. There is a temptation for the minister to become puffed up in mind and think himself to be great. There is a tendency to focus on money and self promotion. Though there may be a great gift of preaching or imparting information there are serious limitations for body ministry or fellowship. To deal with this home fellowships or satellite congregations are set up to allow blessings of human interaction and loving community. Those who study under any ministry need intimacy and a human touch. *It is not good for man to be alone.* Ultimately the spiritual life is more than the acquisition of information about God.

Those who attend services in a mega church are content to be a mere audience onlooker. This is a terrible loss and limitation.

But the most serious limitation is that individual believers are never really trusted or free to lead when they have received personal testimonies or revelation. Typically, they are told that they must be submitted to a greater ministerial authority who must oversee any sharing by the 'laity'.

An Impression of Mega-churches I have attended worship services in several 'average size' mega-churches with bodies in attendance numbering 2 or 3 thousand. Some great churches have numbers approaching 10 thousand and those with 10 thousand that aspire to 50 thousand. While there may be brilliant teaching and preaching and outstanding musical worship, performance; one could not help but feel that those in attendance came mainly to view the show or to hear the inspired address of the mega-minister. What I saw was an enterprise in which each person was committed to make the mega-church even more of a mega-church. Something was missing. There was little or no contact between the "pastor" and the individual members. Individuals may have known and recognized a handful of people in the auditorium but they did not seek each other out for closeness, sharing, breaking of bread or lingering in the afterglow of God's presence. It seemed that the super Christians who were attending the super church quickly rushed home to resume life in whatever form life that awaited outside of church. If the members who number thousands each give their tithe religiously, one can only imagine the amount of revenue that affords luxury and resources of a personal and ministerial nature.

What is the Glorious Church? The Roman Catholic numbers in tens of millions around the globe. Is this the glorious church?

The issue of a glorious church may well be addressed in the context of the mega-church. There is evidence that many ministries of mega-churches teach an emphasis of the gospel that introduces the concept of a "glorious church." Will the church function as a dynamic economic and political force in the earth as well as a moral power to renovate society as well? For those who judge on externals this may appear to be the case but God does not regard externals. How can the size of a building or the number of people attending a mass or a service have any bearing on Godly glory? Glorious must bear more on the quality of the heart and the sincerity and earnestness that allows the love of God to be shared.

[See the doctrine of Kingdom Theology.](#) In secular societies, Christians have been regarded as the bane of society because of their conservative and fundamental viewpoints but quite the opposite is true. The true Spirit of Christianity is compassion, forgiveness, and understanding. Moral precepts include personal honor and righteousness, integrity and responsibility; kindness, mutual support and family stability. Though the world does not like to recognize sin and unrighteous behavior as anything other than a "choice," Christians see that we humans *all share* alike, having a need for a redeemer along with the essential need of being hopelessly lost until God extends mercy upon our lives. In recent decades, Christians were too long absent and silenced from the counsel of social values and political ideas. In the present hour it is surely appropriate for those who have so much cause to rejoice and give voice to the life-changing testimony in the arena of public opinion. Men and women of integrity need to stand up publicly and politically and exercise their rights on behalf of issues of righteousness.

Yet, I believe that ultimately the glorious church does not extend to exert itself in empire or political power. Why? The spiritual life is essentially a non secular and a non materialistic life. Social or political activism may be a Godly calling in some. Those who follow a leading to become apologists for social and political issues it should be presumed have their own foundations in correct doctrine and not equate activism with the gospel. The emphasis of the Christian life can not be focused too strongly upon the things which are social, political, or economic at the expense of Spiritual relationships. These are not lines that I draw, but lines that the Holy Spirit has drawn. These parameters have been in place since Jesus spoke these words, "My kingdom is not of this world," and "You are not of the world." (*John 18:36; John 15:19*) The nature and operation of the world is contrary to God's ways and I do not look for this situation to change until Jesus returns to set up an unending righteous Kingdom. Just how far into

the future this event will occur is open to debate, there have been hundreds of book titles addressing it but the Bible itself has "sealed up" many of the answers and insights into the "second coming" of Jesus Christ. This is another area of scholarship.

Does this "glory" refer to the size, influence and authority of mega-church to rule upon the earth; does glory refer walking in the knowledge of truth; does it refer to all of the above or none of the above? Is it possible that the glorious church refers to the whole body has among it the faithful remnant who somehow remains separate, pure and faithful in the middle of a reprobate generation of spiritual pretenders and flaccid, Luke warm church goers? Church as empire is not an new idea. It was in fact the goal of the early church since Constantine's day, both in Rome and in Constantinople, where power, influence, authority and might married the political and the religious. For a time church membership and theological belief was forced upon the whole world. A person was then a Christian because of political decree and not by the grace of God and such ordinances do nothing to enhance the life and promises of the Gospel. In such an empire men were exalted who held the power of life and death over others; who acted as spiritual judges over others; who were mediators between God and man and who rewarded themselves with worldly luxuries while being exalted to the point of worship in their offices.

Meanwhile, certain men lust for power, clamoring for recognition and striving to achieve self exaltation. They lift and promote their own names as someone great, "as the great power of God." Acts 8:10) No, I do not think this is the Glorious church. The true glory remains shrouded with humility. This cloud of glory can only be penetrated with meekness, self-effacement and kindly service. Success which comes from such is contrary to the apostolic foundations of the Gospel which we need to follow.

Giving for the Sake of the Gospel If you want to experience anger, dissonance, or heated theological debate this is the topic to broach. Giving is the bread and butter of ministry. It is support for a man and his message. It is the financing of the Gospel to world. It is the support of both the local church missionary outreaches. Because men and women go forth with good intentions and have devoted a large part of their lives to preparing for "ministry" they proceed believing that they are now prepared to live by the Gospel. "*The Lord hath ordained that those preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*" (1Corinthians 9:14)

Professional Ministry The concept of the clergy, professional ministry is a well establish

and unquestioned paradigm. ([See the power of paradigms.](#)) The concept of **Ministry** has been traditionally connected to career or occupation. The concept of clergy as a professional career extends into the dim past of Chrisendom. The traditional church operates in accord with, and is enabled because of **the professional clergy concept**. The question of institutionally accredited, "professional ministry" appointed to churches and church giving is something that I believe each of us has to examine in light of Scripture and draw our best personal conclusion in the light of the Word. It is not my desire to subvert a system that you may believe in for your own best reasons, but rather to encourage each person to strive to know God as fully as possible and to experience the potential of Christ's Gospel, even if it means setting aside certain long held traditions. Every person should support the **Kingdom of God** as we judge it to be **best expressed**. We need to see the life of God as a Divine promise and a human potentiality. We need to see ministers bringing others into this potentiality. Once that criterion is met, we can go on to other matters concerning Giving. It is not my desire to subvert a system that you may believe in for your own best reasons, but rather *to encourage each person to strive to know God as fully as possible* and to experience the potential written of in the Gospel, even if it means setting aside certain long- held traditions. Every person should support the Kingdom of God as we see it best expressed. We need to see the life of God as a potentiality and the people who minister bringing others into it. Once that criterion is met, we can go on to other matters concerning Giving.

Giving: Giving is Blessed by God There should be no laws (rules) for giving in the Kingdom of God. God has set us free from rules including rules about giving. Giving is good. Giving supports the man of God and also supports people who are not necessarily "ministers" of churches but who God wishes to bless through us. Various kinds of worldly commitments which touch upon the Kingdom of God need support, whether it be church buildings, outreach expenses, travel or any of a wide variety of needs which can only be met by others sharing the cost. God wants his will to be done through selfless sharing and contributions of money resources. Yet we need to be able to hear God leading us in these gifts so that it is truly a work of God for the Gospel sake and not just another good sound cause or charity.

Basic principles identified in the Bible shed light on the subject of giving.

It is more blessed to Give than to receive

Give and it shall be given unto you

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven

Those who give to the poor lend to God

The Tithe is the Lord's - (Old covenant principle)

In the measure you give it shall be given to you

Sow sparingly, reap sparing

Give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven

Give as you purpose in your heart, Let no one give out of obligation

God loves a cheerful giver

Next Chapter: [Disciples Handbook 04](#)

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