

Teaching Obedience to Jesus

I. THE JESUS TRADITION

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:18–20 NIV)

A. Jesus left His disciples with a tradition of interpreting the Law and the Prophets

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Lk 24:44–47 NIV)

- ***³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God (Important note: Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 probably best represents the content of Jesus’ discussion about the kingdom of God prior to his ascension). (Ac 1:3 NIV)***
- ***¹⁹ So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Pe 1:19 NRSV)***

B. Jesus vs. the Pharisees

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” ⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” ⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” ⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.” (Mk 7:5–8 NIV)

³⁵ ***One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:*** ³⁶ ***“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*** ³⁷ ***Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*** (Mt 22:35–40 NIV)

II. IMPARTING JESUS TRADITION + IMPLEMENTING TEACHINGS = DISCIPLESHIP

A. Some obstacles to disciple making in the West

1. Wealth insulates from experiencing how urgent life is.
2. Western Christian tendency – hear Jesus’ words on Sunday, agree with them in my heart, do nothing in response, feel ok about it by Tuesday.
3. Following Jesus is primarily (if not exclusively) viewed as not doing bad stuff.
4. The prevailing god of Western Christianity is one who defends our way of life (pursuit of American Dream), our philosophy of life (pragmatism)¹, and our sense of individual entitlement – whether material or spiritual. This leaves little (if any) room for a God who disciplines and, thus, for mature faith.

B. Solution: Being a disciple = obeying Jesus

1. Jesus’ instructions are an invitation to join him in detaching our attention and our concerns from this age, so that we might inherit the next one.

²³ ***Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”*** (Mk 10:23 NIV)

²⁴ ***“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. (Lk 6:24 NIV)***

²⁴ ***“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Mt 6:24 NIV)***

¹ an approach that assesses the truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application.

2. Defining discipleship in terms of obedience actually helps the problems of chronic guilt that Westerners (especially Christians) seem to struggle with.

³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, (1 Jn 5:3 NRSV)

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 Jn 3:16 NIV)

¹⁶ We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 Jn 3:16–22 NASB95)

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love... ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 Jn 4:7–18 NIV)

3. Jesus' commands are primarily about what disciples do (e.g. take up your cross, follow me, love your enemies, etc..) rather than what you do not do. During Jesus day, many of the moral commandments of the Law were already assumed in his teachings. The things that he taught his disciples to do were more aimed at conditioning the heart to remain on the narrow path.

²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be (lit. 'is not able to be') my disciple. (Lk 14:27 NIV)

²³ **Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** ²⁴ **The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! (Mk 10:23–24 NIV)**

III. PRACTICAL AIDS FOR DISCIPLE MAKING

A. Picture of a mature disciple:

1. Committed to obeying Jesus
2. Committed to prayer/fasting
3. Devoted to God with all their heart, soul, and strength.
4. Willing to embrace suffering and discipline from God
5. Evidence of Holy Spirit activity (*miracles, changed heart, desire for growth, dreams/visions, etc...*)

B. Ideas for structuring discipleship meetings: (*the values mentioned above are developed in a controlled environment with you, but must be aimed at sustainability without you.*)

1. **Structure meetings around prayer as best as possible:** model for the disciple how to approach God in relation to the ideas that you are discussing. Pray for grace from God, humbly acknowledge your inability to follow Jesus, thank and acknowledge God’s grace already at work, etc...
2. **Have meetings be dependent upon practical obedience:** after meeting with a disciple, offer to continue meeting only after they have practically obeyed the words of Jesus. Those unwilling to “sell the farm” don’t really want to be disciples. It is not our job to convince them to want to follow Jesus. I think it is important to emphasize obedience to both the words in red and to the voice of the Holy Spirit, but we need to keep the words of Jesus as an anchor for our discipleship. The Spirit is only concerned with teaching us to follow Jesus’ instructions. (*cf. John 14:15-17, 21, 23, 26; 15:13-14*)
3. **Suggest having a schedule to pray and study:** a simple schedule can be a wineskin to help preserve the grace of God active in someone’s life.

4. **Remind young disciples that God will discipline and test in order to develop perseverance in them:** The Holy Spirit has the finish line in view, and so he does not take our word for it. He constantly puts our faith and the work of God to the test through various trials and complicated life circumstances. The discipline of God illustrates some of the unholy things still at work in us, and it also instructs us to place our hope fully in God's coming Kingdom and Resurrection.

C. Some suggested passages to study with disciples:

1. **Matt. 7:13-27** – The concluding passages of the Sermon on the Mount offer several helpful illustrations which highlight the path of life for a disciple. The narrow path illustrates that the path to follow Jesus is difficult and often lonely. The other parables highlight the danger of judging our standing before God on external or arbitrary standards. Obedience to Jesus/doing the will of God should be our barometer.
2. **Luke 8:4-15** – the parable of the sower highlights the need to guard the seed (the Gospel) in our hearts. Faithlessness, hardness of heart (refusing correction/discipline), love of comfort/money will kill the seed in us. To guard the seed we must flee these things!
3. **Luke 14:25-33** – three times in the passage Jesus says, “unless you...you cannot be my disciple.” The actual Greek reading of this says, “you don't have the ability to be my disciple”. This passage highlights the commands of Jesus, even the most difficult ones, are intended to strengthen us to be able to remain his disciples until the end (*or, in the language of the parables in this passage, “finish the tower” and “win the battle”.*)
4. **Matt. 6:19-24** – this passage illustrates the importance of having a single eye. The single eye, is on the Kingdom of God (see v. 33) alone. The man with a divided eye believes that he can live for then and for now. In actuality, you cannot live for both “have two masters”.
5. **Luke 6:20** – this is an important passage because here Jesus talks directly to those who want to be disciples. What follows, known as the “Sermon on the Plain”, is Jesus giving many practical implications of his teachings about the Kingdom of God, its delay, and the authenticity of our faith being tested.