

The Reflector

Disciples Indeed

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31b, NKJV).

A disciple is essentially a learner, pupil, or trainee. In English, "disciple" and "discipline" come from the same root. In the New Testament, it is from *"mathētēs"*, lit., 'a learner' (from *manthanō*, 'to learn,' from a root *math*—, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor)" (W. E. Vine).

However, a disciple is more than a mere learner. He is a learner who *adheres* to the teaching of his mentor. Those who embraced the teachings of John the Baptist, Moses, and the Pharisees were called their "disciples" (Matt. 9:14; 22:16; John 9:28).

So, to be a disciple of Christ one must not only *learn* from Christ, he must *adhere* to that which he learns. Jesus says that those who continue in his word are his "disciples indeed." It is not enough to just be a disciple in name or by mere profession. One must be truly a disciple by continuing in the word of the Lord. From a study of His word we notice that His disciple have certain credentials:

Baptized Into Christ

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you..." (Matt. 28:19,20).

Jesus tells the apostles to make disciples, then he tells them how to go about it. It is done by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things commanded. The construction of the sentence is such that the phrases, "baptizing them..." and "teaching them..." explain the process of making disciples. "Make disciples," "baptizing them" and "teaching them" are not three separate commands, but one command with the last two phrases further explaining the first. So, disciples are made by baptizing folks, and at the same time teaching them to observe all thing commanded of the Lord. It is much like saying, "Go therefore and build houses, laying firm foundations, erecting sound superstructures." The first phrase "build houses" tell what to is to be done, the last two phrases tell how to go about doing it.

One cannot truly be the Lord's disciple without being baptized because disciples are made by baptizing them. Those in the Jerusalem church were said to be "disciples" (Acts 6:1) and they are said to have been baptized. (Acts 2:38,41). Paul was a disciple (Acts 9:26) who had been baptized to have his sins washed away. (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

Total Commitment

We must not allow cult inspired concepts of total commitment like

that of the Crossroads/Boston variety to discourage us from teaching the Scriptural concept of total commitment. We must not dismiss the Lord's teaching concerning "forsaking all" for Him just because of the perverted notion that these folks have of the Lord's teaching.

Jesus did say that "whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (John 14:32). The Lord refuses to play second fiddle to anything or anybody. There can be nothing or nobody that we would allow to stand between us and doing the Lord's will.

It is total commitment to him without pre-conditions and excuses — without any "if's" or but's." (Luke 9:57-62; 14:16-24).

As we noticed above, "teaching them to observe *all* things that I have commanded" is a part of the disciple making process. I do not take that to mean that one must be taught everything the Lord commands before he can become a disciple. There may be many things commanded that he must yet learn — but he is taught in the disciple making process that he will have to "observe all things" commanded. He is taught that he must commit himself to the proposition that he will obey any and every thing that he learns that the Lord has commanded. I fear that in our haste to add more numbers to our list of folks we have baptized that we forget that there is more to making disciples than getting them to submit to baptism. While we are teaching them what they need to know in order to be baptized scripturally, we need to, at the same time, teach them to commit themselves to totally obeying the Lord's commands — no matter what the consequences.

Over the years, I have changed my "personal work" approach somewhat — especially as it pertains to teaching them to observe all things. There was a time when a potential convert

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raised questions about specific things that he might have to give up or specific things he might have to do if he were baptized, that I would try to answer "yes" or "no" to each specific thing he mentioned. I don't do that any more. I simply ask, "If, in your study, you found out that the Lord expected you to give this thing up, would you do it?" Or, "If, in your study, you found out that the Lord expected you to do this thing, would you do it?" If the answer is "no," then I suggest that we study further because the person is not yet willing to forsake all and to obey all things commanded. Until he gets to that point Jesus said he cannot be His disciple.

It may be that, in actual practice, one would not really have to give up the thing he is concerned about. Or, maybe he would not really have to do the thing he asks about. Yet, if it is so

important to him that he is unwilling to give it up in order to serve the Lord; or if he is unwilling to perform some action for the Lord if need be — he is not ready for discipleship.

This approach may not bring folk into our numbers in droves, but those who are brought in will be disciples indeed. True, I may not baptize as many as before, but it seems that a larger percentage of those who are baptized are around a lot longer than before. It may be that we try too hard to accommodate half-hearted commitments in order avoid turning any one off, rather than emphasizing the whole-hearted nature of discipleship.

Bearing Fruit For Christ

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (Matt. 15:8).

One who is truly a disciple, committed to obeying all things com-

mand, willing to forsake all will bear much fruit to the Lord. Such fruit bearing is part and partial of being a disciple indeed.

It is interesting to read through the book of Acts and notice some specific fruit borne by early disciples.

For example, they bore fruit by joining themselves to other disciples in local churches (9:19,26), by helping other disciples (9:23-26), by serving other disciples (9:36), by giving to disciples in need (11:29), by making other disciples (14:21), by strengthening other disciples (14:22) and by worshipping with other disciples (20:7).

Have you been made a disciple? If so, what kind of disciple are you? One in name only or indeed? How committed are you as a disciple? What kind of fruit are you bearing as a the Lord's disciple? —By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Dale Murphy, Baseball And "The Spirit Of The Rule"

In *The Birmingham Post Herald* for May 7, 1990, the sports section had a series of quotes from various professional baseball men. I thought the following item was interesting because it states a principle some people often follow in religion:

Braves outfielder *Dale Murphy* on the major leagues' decision to enforce the rule that gloves be no longer than 12 inches: "Twelve inches is the rule but that's not the spirit of the rule. Now, all of a sudden, 12 3/4 inches isn't acceptable. I don't think baseball handled this real well."

I have been given the impression the Dale Murphy is a clean-cut, non-smoking, non-tobacco chewing, non-cursing, religious athlete which sets him apart from many of his fellow-players. This I admire, but his

attitude toward the rule concerning baseball gloves is completely wrong.

Baseball is to be played by the rules. If the rule-makers say a glove is to be no more than twelve inches long then to make it any longer is to violate the law. The only way one can keep the spirit of the law is to do

what the law says. To add 3/4 of an inch to what the rule said is to break the rule. Murphy is, in religion, a Mormon. Mormons say that while we have the New Testament we also need The Book of Mormon which they call "Christ's Other Testament." Murphy is consistent with his religion. He thinks he can add 3/4 of an inch to the rule about baseball gloves and still keep the spirit of the law. I wonder if he believes that while we have the New Testament, which God says we are neither to add to nor take from, it would be all right to have an additional testament, the Book of Mormon? Can one follow the Book of Mormon and still keep the "spirit" of the New Testament? Of course not. Is not the Book of Mormon that extra 3/4 of an inch? God has not revealed another testament any more than baseball has added another 3/4 of an inch to the gloves.

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In Genesis 6 we learn that God told Noah to build an ark of Gopher wood. According to "Murphy's Law" (!), Noah could have added a little oak and still have kept the spirit of the law. God said to make the ark 300 cubits long but if he had made it 300 cubits plus $\frac{3}{4}$ of cubit he would have been keeping the spirit of the law, as per Murphy! Who can believe it?

In the New Testament we learn that we are to praise God and teach one another through the singing of spiritual songs, Eph. 5:15; Col. 3:16. But, someone may say, "Surely there is no harm in playing a piano in conjunction with the singing. We are doing this sincerely and we certainly want to keep the spirit of the law." Well, piano is, in principle, like adding the $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to the baseball glove. In both cases the law is violated and one cannot keep the spirit of the law while violating the law.

Suppose a parent told a child to go to the store and get a quart of milk and a loaf of bread. The child goes and returns with a quart of milk, a loaf of bread, and an ice cream cone. Did the child keep the spirit of the law. Of course not! The ice cream cone is Murphy's $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. The Law of Christ does not authorize the church to engage in the work of providing recreational activities for its members. Some churches are building "family-life centers" which are gymnasium-type buildings. These things fall in the category of Murphy's $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. These buildings are in violation of the law of Christ and one cannot keep the spirit of the law while violating it.

Read again the quotation from Dale Murphy concerning the rule that a baseball glove should not be more than twelve inches long, that "I don't think baseball handled this real well." Yes, and that is the way many people look at the rules God has given when they want to do things God has not authorized. God forbid that we should ever say, "I know what God's Law says, but God didn't handle that very well!" We are shocked that anyone would think that we would ever say such a thing. We may not say it, but in principle, if we do something God does not authorize we, by our actions, are manifesting this sort of attitude. —By Lynn Headrick via *The Sun Valley Illuminator*.

Peace And Edification: A Much Needed Combination

"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." (Acts 9:31)

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." (Rom. 14:19).

God, in His infinite wisdom, arranged Christians into autonomous local churches for edification and cooperation. A major advantage of this group arrangement is that it allows Christians to mutually edify (teach, support, encourage, comfort, correct and discipline) one another.

Each congregation's effectiveness in the Lord's work greatly depends on a combination of peace and edification. A church may enjoy peace without scriptural edification, but it can have very little effective edification without peace. This is why congregations must diligently eliminate disruptive influences from among them.

A divisive person must be dealt with firmly and swiftly. After the first and second admonition such a one is to be rejected. (Tit. 3:10). It only takes one divisive, pre-eminence seeking, self-willed character like Diotrephes (cf. 3 John 9) to completely destroy the peace of a good church.

False teachers bring in destructive heresies (factions or parties) by causing some to rally around their false doctrine to the detriment of both the purity and peace of churches. (2 Pet. 2:1ff). Such teachers bear the responsibility for much of the strife among churches today.

However, not all strife is caused by those who teach "various and strange doctrines" (Heb. 13:9). Paul spoke of those who "indeed *preach Christ* even from envy and strife" (Phil. 1:15). While endorsing what they preached, even rejoicing in it (Phil. 1:18), he criticized their ulterior designs. Such often use their positions as teach-

ers/preachers of the gospel (sound doctrine) as a means of gaining personal power among their brethren. One cannot fault what they teach. They may be paragons of doctrinal soundness, yet use the respect gained by their strong stand for the truth to rally naive brethren around them personally. They often find ways to discredit any whom they consider to be a threat to their pre-eminence among brethren. Some use the respect that they have gained for their doctrinal soundness as a power base to force the church to bow to their self-willed edicts in all matters of judgment — or face scorn from them and their party of loyal followers. These self-willed tryants are as surely "heretic", "factionous" or "devisive", needing to be rejected by the congregation, as the false teacher who brings in destructive heresies. They needlessly disturb the peace of the church and create a climate that makes much needed edification extremely difficult — if not impossible.

Peace

If a congregation is to grow and function as it should, it needs to maintain a peaceful environment. Jesus Christ is our peace. (Eph. 2:14). All men, Jew and Gentile alike, can be reconciled unto God and each other through Him — so making peace. (Eph. 2:18). Without a peaceful relationship with God, congregational peace is meaningless. That peaceful relationship ("unity of the Spirit") that was established by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18) must be guarded (or kept) by us. (Eph. 4:3). In order to do this we must "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering" (vv. 1,2). This includes "bearing with one another in love" (v. 2). The strong have to bear with the weak. (Rom. 15:1-3). Without gentleness, longsuffering, and bearing with one another, it would be impossible for a group of Christians, all of whom make mistakes, to work together with

any degree of peace. One who is doctrinally sound needs to be sure that his humility, gentleness, longsuffering and forbearance are also in order. Otherwise, he may make havoc of the church and destroy opportunities to save them that hear him.

If a church is to be effective, its meetings need to be conducted in peace rather than confusion. (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33,34). This goes for worship assemblies, bible classes and business meetings. Too often, these meetings are turned into a forum for every radical to sound off — to the tearing down rather than building up of the church. Such continual wrangling will kill the morale of a church and drive good brethren away from a congregation. Sometimes serious differences may need to be aired in such meetings, but they should be done in a calm and brotherly fashion rather than the contentious spirit that is so often the case.

Edification

As suggested earlier, peace alone will not make a congregation truly effective in the Lord's work. A church must receive good edification. A lack of peace is an immeasurable hindrance to edification, but a church may be at perfect peace with itself and be in shambles spiritually.

There are certain things that the Bible says edifies brethren, individually and collectively. Members of any congregation would do well to pursue these things.

Sound doctrine edifies. (Eph. 4:11-16). Sound teaching such as was done by apostles and prophets and continues to be done by faithful evangelists, pastors, and teachers keep brethren from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine and results in the edification of the body. (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-4:5; Tit. 1:9-13). All of us have a responsibility, in keeping with our ability, to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1-8). Such will edify the church.

Pure speech edifies. (Eph. 4:29). Wholesome words that reflect and promote a high standard of morality, ethics, courtesy, and spirituality serve to edify one another. Our speech should always be the truth, whether it is the truth of the gospel or the truth about every day events in our lives.

Error and lying tear down rather than edify.

Love edifies. (1 Cor. 1:8). When Paul says that knowledge puffs up, he is not discouraging or degrading knowledge. However, knowledge alone, untempered by love, tends to puff one up. Without love, one knowledgeable of his lawful rights in Christ may run rough shod over his good, but weaker, brethren who have not yet reached his level of knowledge.

Some things that are lawful do not edify under some circumstances. (1 Cor. 10:23). There are two kinds of lawful things — things *required* and things *permitted* by law. Those things required by law always edify. They must always be done. Things permitted by law may not always edify. Paul is discussing things permitted by law — specifically, eating meats offered to idols. Under some circumstances they could be eaten without harm but under other circumstances they would not edify but tear down. Love would cause the brother, knowing his right under the law of Christ to each such meats, but not being required by law to eat them, not to eat them under circumstances that would hinder the edification of his brethren.

Love of brethren takes precedent over mere rights (not obligations) under the gospel. We may need to yield certain rights for the sake of peace and edification. (1 Cor. 9). To promote peace and edification, we may need to yield personal judgment calls to the judgment of others. To preserve peace and advance edification we may need to be extra patient with certain scruples of others, especially if the thing in question is a matter of indifference to us. (cf. Rom. 15:1,2).

It takes effort to build one another up in the faith. To do so each needs to follow things that make for peace and that edify each others.

It takes all the help, teaching, and encouragement we can get to make it. We need to work to keep the congregation, of which we are members, in a position to give such help by promoting edification and preserving peace. We all need to take advantage of what the congregational arrangement, as God ordained, has to offer.

—By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Schedule of Services

Sundays:

Bible Classes . . . 9:45 a.m.

Worship 10:45 a.m.

Worship 6:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Bible Classes . . . 7:30 p.m.

Fultondale Church of Christ

2005 Elkwood Drive

Fultondale, Alabama

The Reflector

Vol. 30 June 1990 No. 6

Published Monthly by
The Fultondale Church of Christ
Meeting at 2005 Elkwood Drive,
Fultondale, AL 35068.

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.
Editor

Second Class Postage Paid
at Fultondale, AL 35068
USPS 606-140

Address all correspondence to 3004
Brakefield Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068.

POSTMASTER: Send change of address
forms to **The Reflector**, 3004 Brakefield
Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068.