

DISCIPLESHIP
What Is the End of Discipleship?
Colossians 1:24-29

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The real purpose of Christianity is to change lives. Without changed lives, people are only fooling themselves and have fallen into dead orthodoxy. Warren Webster, a missionary to Pakistan, said,

If I had my life to live over again, I would live it to change the lives of men, because you haven't changed anything until you have changed the lives of men.

- B. The challenge of discipleship is to change men. NOTE: A very interesting fact is that most of our Lord's disciples were young men in their twenties and early thirties; perhaps John was a teenager. God is after men of all ages to change their lives, but those who are young are more flexible and teachable. God is certainly after men and women in the vigor of youth to challenge them to a life of dedication to Jesus Christ.

II. THE GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP (1:28): ". . . **that we may present every man perfect (mature) in Christ Jesus; . . .**"

- A. The ultimate goal of discipleship is spiritual maturity for every true believer. Christians must be constantly asking themselves about their goals, for if they aim at nothing they will hit nothing. What goals are we trying to reach in our own lives and in the lives of others to whom we are ministering? NOTE: The Apostle Paul's goal was to win men to Christ and to mature men in Christ, for in doing so, he was making disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20).
- B. The word "present" is a military word and meant to stand at attention. In the military, when doing close order drill, the men must be brought to attention before they are given any other commands. NOTE: The Apostle Paul's task was to get every Christian strong enough in the Lord so as to stand at attention before God. At attention, the Christian is ready to take orders and ready to move in whatever direction God desires.
- C. The word "perfect" means mature. What then is a mature Christian? In this context, it is understanding and acting upon the truth that Christ is our life (Col. 1:27). Christ dwells in every true believer and this is his assured hope of eternal salvation in glory, but the mature Christian lives in dependence on the principle that Christ is his life, depending, acting, thinking, working, living, responding to the Christ who lives in him. Christ now becomes his authority for life (Col. 3:23). NOTE: The Christian's principle for living is not an external, man-made law, but the living Christ within.

The immature man acts and operates on the basis of the Law. He has an external code that coerces him into obedience. He is doing things for Christ, and living for Christ, and being obedient to Christ out of a sense of duty. Paul says that the Law is for the immature. It's necessary for the person that doesn't understand that Christ is our life. But the mature man doesn't need the Law; he operates on the basis of grace. Not that he is lawless but that Jesus Christ himself lives out through his life the righteous requirements of the Law. The mature man allows a living Lord to meet the demands of righteousness in his life.

The effects or the results of Christian maturity are many: One begins to teach others, take in deep doctrine, apply doctrine to experience and discern good from evil (Heb. 5:11-14). NOTE: The mature disciple is in a conscious attitude that Christ is his life. He is dependent on Jesus Christ and not

upon an external law, a church or other Christians (except as they are needed for fellowship within the body of Christ). Christ becomes the sole principle for action. NOTE: The mature man has the mind of Christ (Phil. 3:9-10, cf. 3:12). The mature man wants to know Christ; he wants Christ to live through him, and he wants self to be reckoned dead. He desires maturity for himself and for others. POINT: The ministry is not to build buildings or to perpetuate church organization but to present men mature in Christ. The end of discipleship is that "Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4; 19). (David Roper)

III. THE METHOD TO DISCIPLESHIP (1:28a): ***". . . Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; . . ."***

- A. The method for maturity is the written Word of God, the Bible. Paul was a minister to make the Word of God fully known (Col. 1:25). He desires to preach the whole counsel of God to men (Acts 20:27). NOTE: The only Christ we know is the Christ of Scripture and the Scriptures take us to Christ. The Bible tells us about eternal life, but Christ is eternal life; therefore, Paul preached the Christ of Scripture to men, "whom we preach." The Bible leads men to Christ (John 5:39).
- B. Maturity comes through "warning" and "teaching" from the Word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17). "Warning" is admonition with correction in view, and "teaching" deals with instruction from the Word which will build one's faith (Rom. 10:17). There is no other way to bring men into maturity than through the truth of the Word of God because it is the written Word that relates man to the Living Word (II Tim. 4:1-4). NOTE: The Apostle Paul clearly instructed the elders at the Church of Ephesus that only the Word of God could build them up (Acts 20: 32). The Word was all that they needed. They had the Lord of the Word and the Word of the Lord and that was sufficient for Christian maturity.
- C. Warning and teaching is to be done in wisdom. They are to be done with scholarship and tact.

IV. THE LABOR IN DISCIPLESHIP (1:29): ***". . . Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."***

- A. Paul labored at his ministry of presenting every Christian man (disciple) mature in Christ. The word "labor" means to work to the point of exhaustion. Presenting men mature in Christ is hard work and an exhausting assignment. It often drains one's physical and spiritual strength, for it takes time to make mature disciples.
- B. Paul also struggled or agonized (striving) in this ministry, for it was a constant battle to be faithful in the maturing of Christians. There is a tendency to get discouraged in the ministry of maturing men because there is not much glory in it, and it is a slow process. NOTE: There is much more glory in being an evangelist than in being a faithful teacher to instruct the saints and bring them to maturity. When instructing the saints, a teacher must deal with various personalities and problems and bring these into conformity to the Word of God. The teaching ministry changes men, and it is hard work.
- C. Paul labored and agonized, not in his own strength but in Christ's power. This could be translated ***"all of his energy which he mightily inspires within me."*** Power in the ministry is from Christ, not man (1 Cor. 15:10), for the power to serve is provided supernaturally by the indwelling Christ (Phil. 4:13). NOTE: When we are tempted to give way to fear and boredom (because the process of presenting men mature in Christ is not always exciting) there is, by faith, Christ's strength and supernatural energy to accomplish the task.