

KEYNOTE

MAKE DISCIPLES (PART 2): IT TAKES A FAMILY

by Douglas Sukhia

In the first article on this topic¹ I made the point that the making of disciples is the primary mission of the church. The Lord's great commission (Matt. 28:19-20) could be paraphrased: "Going to the people groups of this world, evangelizing them, baptizing them, teaching them everything I've taught you—*make them into true disciples.*" A disciple is the finished product of the church's activity. We are in the disciple making business.

We also concluded that a disciple is a "totally dedicated, mature, well rounded, Christ-like believer." This paper will focus on how to go about producing disciples. I think one of the best ways to understand this process is by using the family as the model for optimum growth in grace.

THE FAMILY MODEL

The Christian life is most often presented in scripture using analogies associated with the family. We are "born again,"² start out as "newborn babies,"³ "grow" to be children,⁴ and eventually reach full maturity.⁵ We have spiritual parents,⁶ and are in a "family" of believers.⁷ The same kinds of things necessary for a baby to grow to maturity in the physical realm are essential in the process of growing spiritually mature disciples.

A HEALTHY BABY

The first question to a new father making the calls from the hospital is "How did it go? Are the mother and the baby OK?" The basic health of the newborn is foundational for all the growth to maturity envisioned. It is the same with newborn babes in Christ. The convert must truly be "born again" (John 3:6-7). He has to be regenerated by the Spirit of God (Eph. 2:4-5). He must have the new nature implanted in him or he will never grow to spiritual maturity.

When a person is truly born again he will have a God implanted "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). His goal will be to please God (2 Cor. 5:9), and seek "His Kingdom" (Matt. 6:33). He will have a natural desire for the Word of God (1 Pet. 2:2) and an attraction to the people of God (1 John 3:14). This will lead naturally to a commitment to Christ and the "means of grace." Those converted on Pentecost "*devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."⁸

Healthy newborns will crave mother's milk, affection, and the protection provided by the family. Healthy newborn babes in Christ will instinctively seek to grow in him. If a so-called "convert" has no interest in pleasing God, learning His Word, crying to Him in prayer, or joining with others in worship, then we have to conclude that they are not truly born again. Furthermore, all attempts at discipleship will fail because the

raw material isn't there. "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" and you can't make a disciple out of an unconverted "natural man" (Rom. 8:7)!

So the first step in discipleship is to be as sure as possible the person has truly repented and trusted in Christ alone for salvation. Furthermore, when there is persistent apathy and resistance to spiritual disciplines in so-called "converts", they may not really be born again!⁹

DEVOTED PARENTS

Babies and little children cannot survive, let alone thrive, without someone older to feed, protect, train and mentor them. The best scenario is two loving, devoted, and committed parents. Likewise, the discipleship process requires some mature believers who consider it their responsibility to care for and nurture new babes in Christ as a parent cares for his or her child.

Jesus viewed the twelve disciples as his "children" (John 13:33). Paul and John used the same terminology referring to those they were responsible for in the Lord.¹⁰ Jesus also viewed Himself as the shepherd and all disciples as His sheep (John 10:11-16). He commissioned Peter to feed the sheep and the lambs (John 21:15-17). Elders are overseers (bishops) expected to "feed the church of God."¹¹ Paul described his ministry to the Thessalonians as a mother sacrificially devoted to her children (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

For Christians to grow to maturity they must have spiritual parents that are devoted to them and who have a sense of responsibility for them. These people

must sacrificially give themselves to protect, guide, feed and train these new babes. The pastor/teachers and elders are specially commissioned to do this;¹² but all believers who have reached a level of maturity should see themselves as responsible for the younger siblings in the family (Col. 3:16).

Furthermore, there are many one-on-one mentoring relationships described in the Bible, as Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, and Barnabas and Mark. These apprenticeships accelerate growth just as a personal coach, trainer, or devoted teacher does. All mature Christians should see it as their responsibility to be training and discipling less mature believers. New believers need "parents" to grow to maturity!

THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE

A functional family is a place where each member is respected, protected, loved and welcomed. "Family" is where you are fully known yet fully loved. You can "be yourself," "let your hair down," and relax because there is a strong, loving commitment to one another. You feel secure because you belong to the family.

The first New Testament believers instinctively banded together into one big family. Luke writes:

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continue to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:44-46).

The general epistles assume a close-knit community of believers in Corinth, Philippi, etc. The apostles emphasize unity, love, forgiveness, acceptance, peace—all the virtues necessary for a functional, healthy family.¹³ The “one another” passages¹⁴ and the “body” analogy¹⁵ also reinforce the need for family type interdependence and love for spiritual growth to occur.

The best atmosphere for spiritual growth is the warm, loving, safe atmosphere of a committed community of believers. We must remove the toxic air of bitterness, suspicion, censorious judging, backbiting and cold heartedness. We must proactively develop the attitude of welcoming inclusion, respect and forbearance so that new believers will feel free to be themselves. We should not expect dysfunctional church families to produce healthy, spiritual adults (Ga. 5:15)!

INTIMATE COMMUNITY

Families live together in close proximity. The effective training of children involves modeling by the parent and older siblings in the context of shared life experience (Deut. 6:6-9). Most of the things we learn about life in our families are “caught not taught.”

The Master’s “plan of discipleship” was to include the “twelve” in His life and ministry in an intimate way (Mark 3:14). They heard Him teach, saw Him heal, and watched Him respond to notorious sinners, curious seekers, and hostile enemies. They learned about salvation, God the Father, what it is to love, and how to minister to people by obser-

vation and close interaction with Him.

The first groups of believers were in regular daily, intimate contact, sharing their lives and their resources. “Every day they continued to meet together...broke bread in their homes and ate together.”¹⁶ This was communal living that led to genuine “community.”

“In this remarkable relationship, Christians shared each other’s hurts, weaknesses, personal problems, material needs, aspirations, prayer concerns, and victories. They associated in a climate of acceptance, openness, encouragement, assistance, support, and trust. They became more truly brothers and sisters than if they had been born of the same human parents. It was as though their lives were welded together.”¹⁷

As churches were established believers assembled regularly in homes.¹⁸ These “house churches” were probably small groups that met for encouragement, training, sharing, prayer and fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25). Paul’s ministry included a public and “house to house” exhortation and training (Acts 20:20). He also opened his heart and shared his own soul with those he ministered to.¹⁹ The fellowship (*koinonia*) of the first century church involved committed, Christ-centered communion and honest communication. “True community is when the ‘masks’ come off, conversation gets deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited and tenderness flows.”²⁰

Small groups provide the context where believers can express loving care, model godliness, and use their spiritual gifts to build up the body (Eph. 4:16).

Bringing Christians to maturity requires that they intentionally commit themselves to consistent fellowship in some kind of intimate group, where they can be vulnerable, accountable, and encouraged in the Christian life. This experience of genuine community is the quality most often missing in the contemporary fundamental church. Joe Ellis states:

“Church activities are often so formally arranged that relationships go no deeper than human civility. Functions become a kind of religious art form for the exercise of musical talent, oratory, and ritual. People fulfill their responsibilities as Christians by the simple fact of attending. Members know each other only casually, maintaining “white-glove” distance, which consists of polite greetings and small talk.”²¹

We must take seriously this weakness, and restructure the modern church in order to provide this important element of discipleship—intimate community.

TRUTH IS COMMUNICATED

It is in a family that most of the core values and convictions about life are communicated. Domestic and social skills, attitudes towards work and others, and a basic worldview are all passed on in the family.

In the family of God the values and truths about life come from the Scriptures. Disciples are learners and the core curriculum is Scripture. Jesus was known as “the Teacher” because He was constantly communicating the truths of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23). He commissioned

the apostles to make disciples by “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:20).

The Pentecost converts “continued steadfastly in the apostle’s *doctrine*” (Acts 2:41). Teaching and praying was the primary function of the apostles (Acts 4:2; 6:4). Paul preached and taught the Word of God wherever he went (Acts 11:26; 14:1; etc.). He urges elders to *teach* (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2) older women to *teach* the younger (Titus 2:4), pastors to *teach* and preach (Titus 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:2) and all believers to *teach* one another (Col. 3:16). Furthermore, Paul’s constant warnings about false doctrine and false teachers show how critical pure Bible doctrine is in the development of disciples.²² Perverted, toxic doctrine leads to defective, deceived and diseased disciples.²³

To produce Christ-like disciples the “*pure milk of the word*” must be fed to them (1 Pet. 2:2). The “rules of the house” in the family of God must be based on the standards of Scripture (Rom. 16:17). One of the marks of a true disciple is continuance in Christ’s word (John 8:31). They must be taught pure doctrine in order to continue in it! Correct doctrine is the skeleton, the backbone of a true disciple.

DISCIPLINE PRACTICED

Every effective family unit holds family members accountable to certain standards of behavior. Disobedience, misbehavior and irresponsibility are rebuked and/or punished.²⁴

Jesus gave instructions about disci-

plining unrepentant siblings in the church (Matt. 18:16-17). Paul also assumed that the church at Corinth had the right, and capacity, to “judge those inside” the church (1 Cor. 5:12). Pastors and elders are called “bishops” with the authority to “oversee” the flock.²⁵

In order for there to be discipline in the church there must be some kind of “membership” in the church. Parents don’t usually discipline other people’s kids. You can’t remove from the church one who is not officially in it. Shepherds are only responsible to oversee their *own* flock not all random wandering sheep. Discipleship demands there be discipline, that is, the holding of people accountable to certain standards. This requires that a disciple submit to the discipline of the church by joining the church. You can’t fire someone who doesn’t work for you; you can’t be “thrown out of the synagogue” unless you’re a member (John 12:41), and you can’t be disciplined unless you join the church.

Discipline, in the sense of accountability to a smaller group of believers, is also an important aspect of discipleship. To agree to certain standards of study, attendance, and homework, usually it is necessary to motivate people to complete a course. In the realm of discipleship a person usually will grow in knowledge and godliness according to his willingness to be held accountable to use the means of grace. Growth to maturity is impossible without discipline.

FAMILY CELEBRATION

All families have celebrations where people express their love, participate in

certain rituals and just enjoy each other and the blessings of God. These include birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, reunions, and marriages, as well as family meals, family devotions, and family outings. These promote a sense of belonging and a bonding based on shared experience.

The New Testament church assembled regularly for worship, the celebration of Christ’s work, and fellowship. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.²⁶ New Testament believers worshiped God according to the pattern of Christ (Luke 4:16) and Old Testament believers by keeping the Sabbath and other holy days (Acts 5:12). Gathering as a body was a means of grace to them as well as a way of elevating Christ and His work.²⁷ They collectively encouraged and built each other up when they gathered for public worship: “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26 NASB). Since all believers collectively comprise the temple of God,²⁸ it is reasonable to assume God is especially present in the public worship of the saints. Matthew Henry writes: “So then let every saint praise Him, but especially the congregation of the saints; when they come together, let them join in praising God. The more the better; it is the more like heaven.”²⁹

In public worship God is glorified and pleased (John 4:23), and saints are built up. These holy convocations are the family celebrations that bond us together, refocus our minds, and challenge us to

faithfulness. Public Worship is a “means of grace” that disciples must not neglect.

TIME COMMITMENT

It takes humans longer to mature than any other creature. It takes eighteen to twenty years and a tremendous amount of effort, prayer, money and care to bring a human being to maturity. The plant analogies used to depict the Christian life underscore the slow process of discipleship. Christians are like fruit bearing trees (Matt. 7:17), mustard plants (Matt. 13:32), and crops with a hundred-fold yield (Matt. 13:8). All plants, especially trees, require lots of time in order to be productive. After sowing, cultivating, fertilizing, and many months, (sometimes many seasons in the case of fruit trees) finally there is a harvest.

It takes time to grow disciples. They require constant care by doting spiritual farmers over a long period of time to mature. Disciples should not be discouraged by the slow progress and seemingly endless toil required in the discipling process. “In due season we shall reap if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). We must be patient as the farmer who waits for the crop (Jas. 5:7)!

Faithful parents sign up for the long haul. Disciples should be aware of the length of this process. Conversely, the disciple should not expect instant maturity either. Sinful habits sometimes require a lifetime to break (Eph. 4:22-24). Maturing takes time!

CONCLUSION

All of us who are responsible for

the nurture of souls should critically examine what we are doing to produce disciples in our churches. I challenge you to use this family model as a grid and place it over your church. Do you have spiritual guardians devoted to nurturing souls? Are you providing an environment of love, respect and acceptance best suited to incubating disciples? Are people involved in true community? Is pure doctrine being taught and believed? Is discipline being practiced? Are worship celebrations being attended? Are you patient and committed for the long, hard task of discipleship? Making disciples is our Master’s commission; so let’s seriously consider how we’re doing.



¹ “Make Disciples,” *WRS Journal* 8:2 (Aug. 2001), 1-5.

² John 1:35; 3:6; 1 Pet. 1:23.

³ 1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:2.

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:14; 1 John 2:1.

⁵ Eph. 4:15; Heb. 6:1.

⁶ 1 Cor. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:2.

⁷ Gal. 6:10.

⁸ Acts 2:41-42 (NIV).

⁹ John 8:31; 13:35; 15:8.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 6:13; Gal. 4:19; 1 John 2:1.

¹¹ Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3.

¹² 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17.

¹³ E.g., Eph. 4:2-3, 29-32; Rom. 14:1, etc.

¹⁴ Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 15:7, 14; Gal. 5:13, etc.

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 2:19.

¹⁶ Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34.

¹⁷ Joe S. Ellis, *The Church on Purpose* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 1982), p. 67.

¹⁸ Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; etc.

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 6:11; 1 Thess. 2:8.

²⁰ James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p.110.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²² Acts 20:29; 2 Cor. 11:13; Gal. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:3-4; etc.

²³ Matt. 23:15; 2 Tim. 2:17; 2 Pet. 2:1-2.

²⁴ Prov. 22:15; Heb. 12:8.

²⁵ Acts 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5-7; Heb. 13:17.

²⁶ Acts 2:46 NIV.

²⁷ Heb. 10:24-25; 12:22-24.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22.

²⁹ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 3/339.

“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

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters— yes, even his own life— he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:26-27

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.”

Acts 9:36

“Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

Matthew 12:49-50

EXEGESIS

COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP IN THE FIRST TESTAMENT by Chris Lensch

IN THE BEGINNING: THE FAMILY

The Bible teaches that there are three main spheres of authority in the world: the family, the church, and the state. While these divine institutions are separate jurisdictions, their interests often overlap in carrying out God's revealed will. Not surprisingly, the origins of these spheres are intertwined.

The family, of course, came first. God placed a man and wife in paradise where they would enjoy the highest spiritual felicity in the presence of their loving Maker. Even before the fall of Adam, he and his wife were promised children who should share in the same blessings. The first family constituted a religious commonwealth of which Adam was the head. The religious connotation is clear from the first family's regular fellowship with God and from God's provision of the two sacramental trees in the garden; the first family's Sabbath rest based on God's example implies the same. The magisterial connotation is clear from God's giving to Adam authority over the lower creation, and, of course, it is implied in Adam's bearing the image of his Maker. Adam was God's viceroy on earth, and as such he served as a prophet, priest, and king. These three offices subsume, and almost parallel, the three spheres over which God's crown of creation was given authority.

By design the family is the church,¹ a body of believers in covenant relation to God. While Adam did exercise magisterial duties, as would also the later patriarchs, the state appears to be a development after paradise. As the first family grew into clans and tribes it became the state. But the family originally was the church. The family was the source of the state, but it is the essence of the church.

GRACE TO RETURN TO GOD

The fall of mankind alienated the race from the life that is in God. Mercifully God gave promises of restoration for those who would walk with Him. These promises always included the children of the faithful. Early evidences of this truth are found in the family of Noah and especially in the family of Abraham. The family more than ever became the vehicle for training future generations in the lost knowledge of the true God.

The family is God's ordained society for teaching hope in God's grace and subjection to His law. The fact that subjection itself must be taught implies that humans by nature are lawless. Biblical theology and history prove this. As an antidote to our inherent antinomianism, God intends the home to be the training ground for His moral government. Parents have the God-given duty of instilling a sense of personal accountability in their own children, to nurture them in it, and to discipline them when their immature consciences lead them to think they are less than accountable.

What institution other than the family could be used of God to mold stubborn wills at odds with God's law of life? God gives children nigh 20 years of judicious parental oversight. In teaching subjection to God's law, a parent's duty is not to break his child's will, but to teach him to control his own will. A great Presbyterian pastor summarizes: "The great mystery of Grace is, how to recover that enslaved and depraved will, and to bring it again into harmony with the will of the Supreme, without contravening the spontaneity of their own determinations."²

The state cannot do what the family can. The state's response to infractions of the law is largely penal. The role of the family (and the church) is entirely different: the object is not punishment, but correction. God gave the home and the spiritual family of the church as gracious instruments of discipline for its members.

So important is the sphere of the family in laying the first stones of social structure, that all other society would be impossible without the first society of the family.

"The old theory of the social compact [promoted by humanists Locke and Rousseau] is historically untrue and intrinsically absurd. Apart from other difficulties, it is perfectly clear that no government could be framed strong enough to subdue and control a thousand imperious wills. Even now, with all their training under government and law, men could never be held in check if consolidated in masses. We should be compelled to fall back upon some device like that of the Family for the purposes of discipline. We must invent the Family, if we did not already have it."³

God's design in promoting His universal moral government begins with the "compact domestic empire" known as the family.

The government of the home enforces the concept of law, but God intends it to be a gracious government. The law calls for order and obedience in the home, while the natural affection of the parents tempers discipline, allowing for forgiveness and restoration. By God's design, law and grace work together in the family.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God's promises are to the faithful and their households. While this pattern of family deliverance flows through both testaments, the clearest early statement is in the Abrahamic covenant: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7).

That's quite a promise, especially considering the waywardness of the heart of man. God, however, established the means as well as the end of this covenant relationship. God says that the future of the church hangs upon the covenant fidelity of believers in discipling their children: "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Gen. 18:19).

Abraham's training his children in the fear of God was essential to his re-

ceiving the promises in the previous verse: that he would become a great nation, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him.⁴ In Abraham and his offspring, God uses the means of parental faithfulness to bring about the covenant of grace whereby Abraham's Seed, the Messiah,⁵ brings God's greatest blessing to all the children of the Abrahamic covenant.⁶ While God's knowing/choosing Abraham (Gen. 18:19) is determinative,

“God establishes His covenant with parents not only for their assurance as to what He will do, but also for their strengthening for what they must do. God has clothed parents with a holy authority and responsibility. There are the years when the will of the child is to a great extent in the parents' hands when loving exercise of parental authority will have a mighty influence. God expects this influence to serve the ends of the covenant, and He blesses the parent who faithfully exercises this influence in the interests of the covenant fulfillment.”⁷

PRIMITIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

What if there was parental negligence in child rearing or outright rebellion against the terms of God's covenant? Then action enforced by the spiritual community (the OT church) moved beyond discipling to discipline. The ultimate action was to “cut off” willful covenant breakers. Beginning with the Abrahamic covenant,⁸ copious instances follow in Exodus and Leviticus for which a covenant member could be excommunicated from the community. The language of ex-

communication, to “cut off” someone, is not unintentional. It is the fulfillment of the curse threatened in the covenant sign of circumcision.

FAMILY DISCIPLING AFTER ABRAHAM

The Mosaic covenant carried the same emphasis on parental fidelity propagating the fear of the Lord. Moses' last will as he ascended the mountain to meet his Maker was “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.”⁹

By the time God made His covenant with David to build a house (dynasty) for him, David's generation still carried the same charge of training their children. The classic Bible passage is Psalm 78:1-8:

“Give ear, O my people, *to* my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide *them* from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know *them*, The children *who* would be born, *That* they may arise and declare *them* to their children, That they may set their hope

in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments; And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation *that* did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

The perspective of this Psalm covers at least four generations of theological training.

“This covenant instruction which is passed on from generation to generation is the means whereby each succeeding generation learns to set its hope in God and keep His commandments. That is, God has ordained that He will save His people in the line of generations and that the means whereby this salvation will be reserved in the line of generations is instruction in the mighty works of God and in His law.”¹⁰

PROVERBS: THE DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

The Proverbs of Solomon put great stress on training covenant children. In fact, the book of Proverbs was Israel’s official manual for adding to the wise and subtracting from the number of fools in their society.

The Book of Proverbs follows the biblical anthropology that portrays human nature as corrupt, even in children: “foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child,” and “a child left to himself brings his mother to shame.”¹¹ Therefore the Hebrews worked to counteract rebellion in young fools by training their children in the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7).

A key proverb for parents in training their children is Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Significantly, the Bible enjoins parents to train their children, not just teach them. Teaching engages the intellect, but training in true religion involves the mind as well as the will. Some interpreters¹² understand this verse as a warning: “Train a child in the way he *would* go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” In other words, if parental training follows the path of least resistance in giving the child his head, the willful child will grow into a stubborn adult. In this sense the verse is taken ironically: “Go ahead and follow the child’s own training manual if you care not how he turns out.” Few Bible translations, however, follow this ironic understanding. While the Geneva Bible of 1597 implied this interpretation,¹³ all others have stressed the positive charge of training a child. The Hebrew literally commands to “train” or even “dedicate” the child upon the beginning (“entrance”) of his way.

CONCLUSION

The first promise of hope to humanity after sin and death entered the world was not just to one man. It was to him and to his posterity. God’s promises offered a future based on deliverance from the curse and a corrupt nature. “Sin in conquering Adam, had conquered the race. The parental relation became the very instrument of sin’s universal perpetuation.”¹⁴ Sin may be perpetuated from generation to generation, but so may grace.¹⁵ Children, by nature and by environment, are involved in the sin and guilt of their parents. By God’s gracious cov-

enant, children of believers are partakers of the divine promises given their parents.

God gives the promises of life to those most dear to believers, to their offspring. With His promises, He also gives the means to establish these children in the way of life—through the influence of loving, godly parents.

“When God restores the parental relation it then becomes the very instrument of His grace. The relation that perpetuated the sinful nature now becomes the instrument for perpetuating the redemption of God. . . . The parental relation had been sin’s mightiest ally, the very instrument by which sin had acquired universal dominion. This principle is rescued from the power of sin, adopted into the covenant of grace, and now made subservient to the establishment of redeemed families.”¹⁶

The godly family has always been a church in miniature, and the church is a large spiritual family. In God’s design, the family not only is an incubator for spiritual nurturing, but it is a place of worship that brings families to the threshold of heaven in preparation for glory. 

¹ Consider how the church and family mirror each other: “I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:14,15). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* captures this Bible teaching: “The visible Church Catholic consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children [as] the house and family

of God” (25:2).

² *The Family in Its Civil and Churchly Aspects* by B. M. Palmer, p. 18.

³ Palmer, pp. 11-12.

⁴ “...Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (Gen. 18:18).

⁵ Mt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16.

⁶ Gal. 3:8, 9, 14, 29.

⁷ D. H. Small, *The Biblical Basis for Infant Baptism*, p. 53, emphasis added.

⁸ “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (Gen. 17:14).

⁹ Deut. 32:46.

¹⁰ Herman Hanko, *We and Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, p. 53.

¹¹ Prov. 22:15, 10:1.

¹² As Jay Adams and Bruce Ray.

¹³ Geneva version of Proverbs 22:6:

“Teache a childe in the trade of his way, and when he is olde, he shall not depart from it.”

¹⁴ Small, p. 51.

¹⁵ Exodus 34:6,7

¹⁶ Small, pp. 51-52.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24

NEW TESTAMENT SUPPORT FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

by John A. Battle

NEW TESTAMENT METHODS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Church discipline has three major purposes: “to vindicate the honor of Christ, to promote the purity of his Church, and to reclaim the offender.”¹ All three of these worthy goals are found in the New Testament; they are bound up together. When an offender is brought to repentance and restoration, the church is blessed and Christ’s name is honored. And even if an offender refuses to repent, still the church’s purity is maintained, and the name of Christ again is honored.

Some may object that the church has no right to discipline offenders, since we all are sinners. We realize that no church is perfect. We cannot see the heart, and all our hearts are sinful. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* puts it, “The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.”² However, this fact does not force us to give up the attempt to seek the purity of the church through biblical church discipline. We can see a parallel in the case of an individual Christian. While he is never free from sin in this life, he is commanded to hate sin and turn from it, “perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”³

God himself desires the purity of his church. Christ died to make the church his pure bride: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” And this also was Paul’s prayer for his churches.⁴

The following Scriptural methods for obtaining church purity are listed in the general order of severity, it being preferable to exercise church discipline as mildly as possible to bring about the needed repentance or change.

Preaching of the word and prayer.—The ministry of the word itself to the congregation or to individuals is used by God to bring conviction of sin, conversion, and increasing sanctification. Likewise, God answers the prayers of the minister, elders, and people for one another’s spiritual needs.

This should be the normal mode of church discipling and discipline. By preaching on subjects which are related to the life of the church, the minister prevents many potential problems from arising in the first place.

Church discipline in receiving members.—Those who do not give an acceptable profession of salvation are not to be allowed to join the church. An acceptable profession includes the absence of open, scandalous sin, an acceptance of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, and a profession of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament adults were not admitted into the church by baptism until they had confessed their faith in Christ. Churches were to be built using genuine materials.⁵

Church discipline in matters of

life.—Church members who live in open and scandalous sin are to be disciplined, and if necessary, put out of the church. Indolent members were rebuked and suspended from the Lord’s Supper.⁶ A member engaged in open immorality was to be put out of the church.⁷ Paul taught that if one so put out should repent, he should be forgiven and restored to the fellowship.⁸ We note in these cases, as in others, the progressive stages of discipline: admonition, rebuke, suspension, excommunication.

Jesus himself taught the necessity of church discipline for those who offend, and especially for those who subsequently rebel against the Lord’s discipline:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Mt. 18:15-20)

Note that Jesus did not specify the nature of the person’s offense; it is called simply a “sin” or a “fault.” The person sinned against is to confront that person, then if necessary take one or two witnesses, and finally, if necessary again, take it to “the church,” which would be

the elders of the church. It is assumed that if the person is found to be innocent of the charge, or if the person is found guilty and repents, that the case will be settled satisfactorily. However, if the person refuses to recognize the authority of the church exercising Christ’s discipline, then that person is guilty of the sin of rebellion, and is to be excommunicated (to be considered as “a pagan or a tax collector”).

Church discipline in matters of doctrine.—Those who teach false doctrine should not be allowed to teach or lead in the church. Those who deny essential Christian doctrine are not to be permitted to be members of the church, but are to be publicly exposed and opposed. Any church member espousing such heretical doctrines should be led to repentance, and, failing that, should be put out of the church.

There are frequent warnings against false teachers in the NT.⁹ Likewise, there are many examples of apostolic warnings and actions against false teachers.¹⁰ It is because conservative Presbyterians and others did not carry out this duty nearly a hundred years ago that most mainline denominations have been taken over by theological liberals.

It is important that the doctrines involved in these examples touched the vitals of Christian faith. The apostles allowed much latitude in secondary or questionable issues. The Christian needs a balance of toleration for differences among Bible-believing Christians, and intolerance for deviations from orthodoxy springing from unbelief of Scripture.

Church separation as a last resort.—

If a church has deteriorated to the extent that it is disobedient to Christ in doctrine or life, and it refuses to allow discipline to correct the error, that church has forsaken Christ as its head. If that error is fundamental to Christianity, that church ceases to be a true church of Jesus Christ, even if it maintains an outward appearance to be such. It is the duty of Christians in such a case to separate from that apostate body and to form or join with a true church of Christ.

The visible church began with a separation, when God called Abraham to leave his country and his family.¹¹ Israel in the OT was to separate from the ungodly nations around them.¹² In Leviticus 18:3-5 and 19:2, the concept of “holy” is “set apart,” “separated to a sacred purpose”; this was the position of the church in the OT.

The church in the NT, likewise, must separate from bodies which deny the true faith. Note the example of Paul’s practice and teaching:

Paul’s practice	Paul’s teaching
in Corinth: Acts 18:7	2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1; 11:2
in Ephesus: Acts 19:9	Eph. 5:25-27

In both cases Paul made the Christians separate from a synagogue which denied the apostolic doctrines. And in both cases Paul compared the relation of the church to Christ with that of a pure bride to her husband, which illustration fits well the reality (as in Rev. 19:6-9).¹³

The authority of the church to exercise discipline comes from Jesus Christ, the head of the church. In the passage already quoted (Mt. 18:15-12), Jesus commanded his disciples to carry out this discipline under his authority. In Jesus’ day this duty was performed by the synagogues, with appeals being made to the local and national sanhedrins. This pattern was retained in the NT times, with elders of particular churches acting together in presbyteries and in a general synod.¹⁴

It is important that Jesus identified the authority of the church in these matters. He made three promises regarding the obedient exercise of church discipline. He said he will be present by the Holy Spirit (“there am I with them”), he will positively answer the prayers of the church court for direction and God’s blessing (“anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven”), and he will guide the church court in coming to a proper verdict (“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”). This last point is made clear by the Greek tenses in Jesus’ statement. Both verbs are used in the periphrastic future perfect tense.¹⁵ Therefore, this verse could be more literally translated, “Whatever things you may bind upon the earth will have (already) been bound in heaven, and whatever things you may loose upon the earth will have (already) been loosed in heaven.” This shows us that the church does not decide what God will do, but rather that God will guide the church to confirm on earth what he has already determined in

heaven.

A similar passage is John 20:23, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Once again, the verbs are in the plural, indicating that this directive is given to the church at large. And once again, the verbs indicate that the church does not determine one’s forgiveness, but only recognizes what God has already done. In this case the terms “they are forgiven” and “they are not forgiven” are passive participles in the perfect tense.¹⁶ The action of forgiveness (or non-forgiveness) has already taken place, and the consequent state is in existence at the time when the church makes its judgment. The forgiveness offered by the church is external, allowing fellowship in the visible church. The forgiveness granted by God is internal and spiritual, bringing the sinner into fellowship with God.

In another passage Jesus addressed Peter in particular:

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt. 16:18-19)

This passage is somewhat different from Jesus’ statement in Matthew 18:18. There he was speaking to all the disciples, and the verbs “whatever you will bind” and “whatever you will loose” are in the plural number. In this passage the same verbs are used, but they are in the singular, addressed particularly to Peter. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that this

primacy of Peter and his possessing of the keys places the papacy at the head of the church.¹⁷ It is most important that, as in Matthew 18, the verbs “shall be bound” and “shall be loosed” are periphrastic perfects—“shall (already) have been bound” and “shall (already) have been loosed.” In this statement, Jesus was telling Peter the same thing he later told all the apostles, that they would be guided by the Holy Spirit to recognize what God had already done. Jesus did not say that Peter or the other apostles had the authority to decide what God would do.

Protestant churches have recognized that the power of the visible church on the earth is only “ministerial and declarative.”¹⁸ Christ has given the church authority to minister his word, his sacraments, and his discipline. In all cases, the church only declares what God has done; its authority is that of God, derived from Scripture; it does not reside in the church itself. 

¹ *Book of Discipline* of the Bible Presbyterian Church, 1:2.

² *WCF* 25:5.

³ 2 Cor. 7:1.

⁴ Eph. 5:25-27; 3:14-21.

⁵ 1 Cor. 3:10.

⁶ 2 Thess. 3:6-15.

⁷ 1 Cor. 5:1-8, 9-13.

⁸ 2 Cor. 2:5-11.

⁹ E.g., Mt. 7:15; Acts 20:28-31.

¹⁰ Rom. 16:17-18; Gal. 1:8-9; 5:7-12; Tit. 3:10; 2 Jn. 9-11.

¹¹ Gen. 12:1; 17:1.

¹² Ex. 19:5-6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9.

¹³ For a good development of this theme, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church Before the Watching World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity

Press, 1971), esp. ch. 2, “Adultery and Apostasy—the Bride and Bridegroom Theme”; see also Gary Cohen, *Biblical Separation Defended* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966); the entire issue of the *WRS Journal* 4/1 (Feb. ’97) is related to this matter.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 15; 16:4.

¹⁵ The verbs use the future of *eimi* (*eimi*, “to be”) with the perfect participle: *eṣtai dedemeha* (*estai dedemena*, “will have been bound”), and *eṣtai lelumeha* (*estai lelumena*, “will have been loosed”).

¹⁶ *afelwntai* (*apheontai*, “are forgiven”) and *kekrahtntai* (*kekratentai*, “are retained”).

¹⁷ E.G., see article by G. H. Joyce, “Keys, Power of the,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910), 8:631-633; and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #551-553.

¹⁸ *Form of Government* of the Bible Presbyterian Church, 1:7.

“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.’”

Luke 8:25

“Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the

eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.’”

Luke 10:23-24

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.’”

Luke 12:22

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Luke 18:1

“This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

John 2:11

APPLICATION & PERSPECTIVE

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN LIGHT OF THE SCRIPTURES: A CRITIQUE

by Leonard Pine

A review of “Church Membership: Option or Command?” by Mark Brown, *New Horizons*, October 1996, pp. 4-5.

Church membership is one of those topics that people love to argue about. After all, say many, the Bible does not command membership according to the current, traditional understanding (a list of names of those who have committed themselves to a local body for the purposes of mutual edification and accountability to Christ and one another). For Presbyterians and others who love order in the Church, the idea of free-floating individuals flitting from congregation to congregation without accountability or responsibility is downright horrifying. Membership falls under the rubric of what Hodge called “Christian prudence,” which amounts to practical wisdom in implementing biblical principle. Still, it can be a challenge to justify our current system to those who love proof-texts. Rev. Mark Brown’s article “Church Membership: Option or Command?” is helpful because Pastor Brown covers most of the usual arguments (ten in all) for membership. His goals are admirable: he is trying to fight against the independence of our age. In some points, he does well. In others, he is reaching, in my view. By evaluating his arguments I hope to demonstrate the truth is that membership

really is a matter of *discipleship*.

TEN REASONS SUMMARIZED

Rev. Brown’s reasons for church membership may be summarized as follows:

1. *Christ commands it.* The command Rev. Brown refers to is Matthew 28:19.
2. *The Old Testament set the pattern.* The covenant bond was the issue for an Israelite, not his genes.
3. *The New Testament assumes it.* “Conversion included being added to the body of disciples (Acts 2:42, 47; 11:25-26; 14:21, 23).” See also Ephesians 3:6.
4. *The analogy in society at large demonstrates its legitimacy.* In any organization, if you don’t have a list of members, you have no distinct group. This is clearly the weakest of Rev. Brown’s arguments. Distinctions that are no deeper than a list do not deserve to be given any credence.
5. *The nature of salvation demands it.* Salvation is both personal and public in the Bible.
6. *The organization of the church requires it.* Our God ordained officers and requirements for admission and continuance in the church. What is the point of all of that without members? It’s like a teacher saying that school would be great if it weren’t for the students!
7. *Membership is prerequisite to complete obedience to Scriptural practice.*

Admission to the Lord's Supper, baptism, loving and serving the brethren, honoring ordained leadership are all the actions of publicly committed members.

8. *Discipline is impossible without it.* "Pastoral care and oversight is exercised over the gathered church." This is simply a matter of logical and practical necessity.

9. *Church order demands it.* The business matters of the church – voting, calling pastors and electing officers, adopting budgets, buying property, etc. – are impossible without distinct and accountable membership. I wouldn't say impossible as Rev. Brown does, but it certainly makes it much more prone to confusion and vice.

10. *Evangelism is impossible without it.* Evangelism is not complete until converts are joined to the church. In other words, there is no redemption without submission unto sanctification.

Since several of these principles overlap to some degree, I shall attempt to deal with them as a whole in the comments that follow.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Rev. Brown begins his article clarifying what he means by "church." First, he notes, "From God's perspective, the church involves all the saints of all ages (2 Tim. 2:19). From man's perspective, it involves *visible, local* assemblies of believers (and their children) who confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and submit to his Word." It is this visible and local quality of the church that he has in mind in his arguments. So far, so good. Strangely, though, Rev. Brown does not define "membership" in his opening remarks,

which seems to me to be the primary weakness of his whole argument. The average reader is left to understand membership in terms of *what we do now* in bringing people into the visible body. The temptation to then eisegete the passages he refers to as the article unfolds becomes great. Indeed, it is this reading back into the Scriptures our current practice that is the Achilles heel of traditional arguments in favor of membership. Please understand: I strongly advocate formal church membership in the local assembly – I am only seeking to establish that advocacy upon firmer, more consistent ground. The challenge is that the Scriptures do not stipulate how membership as such is to be implemented. Rev. Brown is to be commended in not attempting to add to God's Word. However, neither does he labor to stress that he is not necessarily talking about our current practice. The result is inevitable: readers left to themselves cannot help but think in terms of their own current practice, and the integrity of the argument is compromised accordingly. When he does address a firmer definition later on, the damage is already done, and his correct assessment is mentally attached to, and equated with, our current practice *carte blanche*.

MEMBERSHIP AS COVENANT

Rev. Brown's declares his first stated reason, "Christ in his Word commands church membership," to be the most important. Certainly, if Christ had issued such a command, we could find no fault with its ultimate priority. In fact, all the other arguments would be unnecessary. But did Christ really have church membership in mind when he states, "I will build my church," or when he commands the disciples to "make disciples, baptiz-

ing and teaching them”?” Rev. Brown concludes, “The Great Commission *demand*s church membership.”

He says so because he rightly sees baptism as the initiatory rite through which people become associated with the visible church. Since Christ commands that we be baptized, that means he commands us to be visibly identified with the local assembly. But how is that visible identification manifested? What does Brown mean by “church membership”? The closest he gets to a definition is this: “Membership in the church – sharing in its privileges and responsibilities – is part of my initial commitment as a disciple of Christ.” True, but he does not close the independency door with this statement at all. Does Christ intend that this visible identification mean what we desperately want it to mean – that people are to formally commit themselves to the service, and submit themselves to the discipline, of a local body comprised of officers and members? Later on in the article (reason five) he finally states what he should have said in the opening paragraph, “Uniting with a church does not mean signing a piece of paper to get our name on a roll. It means making a covenant with God that involves public vows of profession before God and his church. To be a Christian is to be a part of the body of Christ (Rom. 14:7; 15:7; 1 Cor. 12:27). We are to serve Christ as a living member of his body, not in isolation.”

Now he is getting somewhere. Covenant discipling and discipleship are the issues here. Brown is right when he stipulates that a church is not, ultimately, a “voluntary society,” at least as far as Christ is concerned. We may legitimately recognize the voluntary nature of any

given local assembly, but the biblical picture consistently reveals that every believer is connected *organically* and *organizationally* to other believers. This truth Rev. Brown repeatedly stresses, citing such passages as Genesis 17:7, 10; Romans 11:17-20; Acts 2:41-42; 11:25-26; 14:21, 23; 16:30; and Ephesians 4:11. Nevertheless, his statement that in the NT “there were no spiritual drifters or permanent adherents ... there was no such person who was a Christian, yet not a church member” is troubling. What is the difference between a “permanent adherent” and a “church member”? It appears that Rev. Brown has current practice in mind. While I have no problem with arguing against “spiritual drifters,” there is no biblical evidence that I know of that anything like a membership role was kept in the early church (though there were such lists in synagogues). People who gathered into the church became a homogenous group because of their common bond in Christ that demanded of them service, obedience, accountability, giving, and participation. What I am concerned about is equating “Christ commands a covenant bond” with “Christ commands church membership [as we know it].”

Still, the points four and six through nine must be considered. Our God does things “decently, and in order,” and much of the work of the church requires some degree of organization to prevent chaos and injustice. But Rev. Brown’s reasoning at times tends to be somewhat circular: you can’t do certain things without formal membership, so you have to have membership to do certain things because you can’t do those things without a membership list. For example, in point six he makes membership the foundation of or-

ganization and then states, “Without organization you could have no seminaries, no home or foreign missions.” I agree with his scruples, but his argument falls flat. Anyone can start a seminary or preach at home or abroad. Many do these things all the time without regard for any membership obligations at all. In point seven, though it is true that “the Lord’s Table is open only to those who are baptized members of a church,” many evangelicals today do not see the link between membership and the Lord’s supper, inviting anyone who names the name of Christ to partake at the table without constraint. I lost four families from my own church on one occasion because I refused to baptize an individual who had no intention of joining with the local church – ours or anyone else’s! While such thinking ignores biblical principle, Rev. Brown’s solution of declaring formal membership to be the grounds of obedience is not the answer.

I believe the main problem with Rev. Brown’s argument is that he attempts to make too much ride on formal church membership *as we know it*, instead of allowing Christ’s principles to carry his argument completely. Christ’s principles of mutual obligation to one another and to the Lord, regular fellowship with the body, submission to ordained leadership, edifying ministry to one another, accountability for our actions unto the Lord under the oversight of the church, and frequent, thoughtful participation in the ordinances of the church are what we should argue for. Membership as we practice is simply a tool to help us accomplish those ends. Certainly, anyone who refuses to join (through whatever means that body deems appropriate before the Lord) a local church formally should be questioned

concerning their reasons, and confronted concerning their lack of desire to be visibly knit to the kingdom of Christ. If people are submissive to Christ’s principles, they will have no trouble formally attaching themselves to a faithful local assembly, in my opinion.

You see, the trouble most of us have with discipleship (that is, others discipling us) boils down to the fallen soul’s hatred for authority and oversight. Rev. Brown’s remarks on this point are insightful:

There is a spirit of independency prevalent today that despises and rejects authority (2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 8). It is impossible to obey the scriptural commands to “respect those over you in the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:12) and to “obey your leaders” (Heb. 13:17) unless you have promised to submit to them – joined the church of which they are overseers.

If you are a believer, your ruler is Christ: who, in turn, has appointed men to stand before him as officers in his church. He did not save you as an individual only; he saved you as a part of the body, an integral member of an organism and an organization. In other words, Jesus came to save a people, not just persons. No believer can feel free to worship and serve the Lord autonomously from the church, Christ’s visible kingdom. The visible church is the means through which our Lord chiefly administers his word (Romans 10:14). As a believer, you are under the Lord’s authority – and his visible representatives – whether you like it or not. The question is whether or not you are in submission to Christ. The prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34, “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD” has not yet been ultimately fulfilled. In your

covenant bond with Christ and his people, you must be taught, disciplined, encouraged, helped, confronted – in short, you are accountable. This is why church membership, however implemented, is important. Additionally, your formal, visible connection with others in the same body places you in a position to edify them in the same ways in which they minister to you.

CONCLUSION

I appreciate Rev. Brown's commitment to the covenant nature of the church. Though I would question a few of his applications, his basic principles are sound. If we fall back upon the corporate nature of Christ's body and remain there, we will have no hesitancy about being visibly united with the church. It is truly a matter of being a faithful disciple who is seen of men, a city set on a hill where it will not be hidden. "Let your (plural!) light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). 

“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

John 6:66

“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’”

John 8:31

CHURCH AND FAMILY—PARTNERS IN DISCIPLESHIP

by Tito Lyro

For centuries Christians have quoted Matthew 28:16-20 as the Great Commission to evangelize the world. While it does call us to evangelism, it is not the only call issued there. If evangelism is the only thing we see in Mathew 28:16-20, then we are missing the discipleship boat. In our Savior's Great Commission, evangelism is just the beginning of the story. The whole story is about making disciples. Look at Matthew 28:19-20. It says, "Go [better translated 'having gone' perhaps meaning 'after you leave this place'] therefore and make disciples [only finite verb of the Greek sentence; thus, main verb] of all the nations¹, baptizing² them in [Greek *into*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching³ them to observe⁴ all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen."⁵ As you see, the Great Commission is not a call to gather thousands of people into a stadium in order to tell them that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives and then send them on their merry way. No, the Great Commission is a command to make followers of Christ through the teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ assigned the job of making disciples to His Church. However, the Church cannot disciple the world and neglect to disciple the ones of the household of faith. In other words, a Christian cannot disciple the world without discipling his own family. Thus, the church and the family need to work as partners in discipleship. However, before

discussing how the local church and the family can work together in discipling adults and children, I would like to talk about the power of discipleship and what is involved in discipleship.

As the disciples left that mountain in Galilee and later on were baptized by the Holy Spirit, they went from ‘Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth’⁶ fulfilling the commission given to them. These twelve men (including Paul) were not necessarily the smartest, wealthiest, or most important men in the world. As a matter of fact, most of them were very common people: a hated tax-collector (Matthew), two quick-tempered brothers (John and James, the Sons of Thunder), a couple of fishermen (Peter and Andrew), a right wing extremist (Simon the Zealot), and a doubter (Thomas). Yet, this group of ordinary men “turned the world upside down”⁷ by teaching the nations to observe all that Jesus had commanded them. They went from house to house ministering the Word of God to the people of God.⁸ The spreading of Christianity that we see in the book of Acts is due, in part, to the power of biblical discipleship. We too must realize that biblical discipleship is powerful. We must realize that our Sovereign Lord, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, has chosen to use ordinary men to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry”⁹ through their discipling of God’s people.

Discipleship is only powerful, however, if done properly. According to Matthew 28:19-20, there are two actions involved in making disciples: baptizing and teaching. When our Lord says we are to baptize in order to make disciples, He is not in any way teaching that baptism

saves a person. Rather, He is referring to the place of evangelism in discipleship. Notice that in the original language verse 20 reads, “baptizing them **into**¹⁰ the name of the Father...” Thus, what our Lord is saying is that we are to bring those who are going to be disciples into fellowship with the Triune God. In this passage, then, baptism is used to represent (not to cause) the salvation of those that will be discipled. The other aspect of discipleship according to Matthew 28:20 is teaching. The content of this teaching is to be everything Jesus has commanded us. Since Jesus is the very Word and Revealer of God, all things that he has commanded us include not what is recorded in the gospels, but the whole counsel of God. Therefore, intrinsic to discipleship is the systematic teaching of God’s Word.

Now, there is one question that still needs to be answered: who should be making disciples? We all would agree that the church should be discipling its people. However, if we stop here, we have demonstrated that we fail to see the covenantal aspect of discipleship. It is easy to understand that the local church, through its session, is supposed to disciple its people. Everybody expects the church to train the people of God through preaching, teaching, Bible studies, ladies fellowship, and a myriad of other ministries. All these expectations are proper. However, we cannot forget that a church is made of families, and that the family needs to be involved in its own discipleship. The key, then, for biblical discipleship is to find the proper balance between the family and the local church where they are working together toward the common goal of glorifying and enjoying God. This can be done by training the husband/fathers (single mothers too!) on how to minister

to their family and by coordinating the ministry at home with the ministry at church.

Training the husbands/fathers¹¹ is the first step toward covenantal discipleship. Christian men need to understand that they are the spiritual leaders in the home. The Bible portrays the husband as the high priest for his family¹². He is the one who should lead the family in performing all spiritual duties. Therefore, he is the one who should lead the family in discipleship. Yet, it has been my experience that the men in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are not fulfilling their leadership duty in the area of discipleship. There are two reasons why Christian men have been derelict of their Church and Family— One is ignorance of what they are supposed to do and the other is their capitulating to the pressures of society.¹³ In either case thorough training on what the Bible requires of a Christian man would go a long way in correcting their thinking. This training should be done from the pulpit,¹⁴ but should also include Bible study in smaller settings. A good place to start this training would be with a study of Ephesians 5:25-33 where Paul describes the responsibilities of the husband to his wife. Then, the study would logically flow into chapter 6 with the father's responsibility to raise his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.¹⁵

In addition to training the family leaders, the church can work together with the family toward the common goal of discipleship by coordinating what goes on at church with what goes on at home. A good way to start would be by letting the families in the church know ahead of time what next week's sermon's topic will

be, including the text.¹⁶ Then, the husband/father could prepare his family for worship on the next Lord's Day by going over the passage(s) during family worship/devotions. Also, giving a detailed outline of the Sunday School lesson and of the sermons to the congregation would help the spiritual leader in the home to review with his family what was studied and preached on the Lord's Day. Another simple thing that can be done to coordinate efforts in discipling the family is having a written, church wide prayer list. You might think that this is too simple of an idea. Yet, if you are trying to teach your 5 year old daughter that she should be praying for others as well as for herself, the prayer list gives you a concrete tool to show her that other people have needs too.

Besides training the family leaders and coordinating efforts, the church can help the family in discipleship by assigning homework. For example, at my church we have a Wednesday evening program for elementary school age children called Kids Club. Every Wednesday the children take home a list of things that they need to do that includes memorizing Scripture, doing chores around the house, praying for special needs, and witnessing to the neighbors. The parents are also required to work with the children on that homework. So, the homework helps the family to focus on one area that they can work together.

These practical suggestions should be used to help the church and the family to work together in fulfilling the commission that our Lord has given them. Through a biblical practice of discipleship, the Church will be blessed. More importantly yet, the Lord Jesus Christ will

be glorified.

¹ The covenantal promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed comes to mind here – Gen. 12:3.

² One of the requirements for making disciples.

³ Second requirement for making disciples.

⁴ This is the content of the teaching.

⁵ All Scriptures are from the The Holy Bible, New King James Version, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

⁶ Acts 1:8.

⁷ Acts 17:6.

⁸ Acts 2:46.

⁹ Ephesians 4:11.

¹⁰ Interestingly *ei j* is used instead of the expected *en*.

¹¹ I will be referring to husbands/fathers because they are the spiritual leader of the family. However, the number of single mothers in the church is increasing and will continue to increase due to the society we live in. It is important that we don't neglect them when it comes to training single mothers in the area of family discipleship.

¹² The high-priesthood of the husband/father is well depicted in Job's offering sacrifices on behalf of his children – Job 1:5.

¹³ Society dictates that man and woman are equal in roles. Thus, neither male nor female is the stated leader of the family. Christian men have bought into this idea because it is convenient. It relieves them from their God-assigned responsibility and gives them more time for football.

¹⁴ This implies that the leaders of the church are thoroughly convinced of the scriptural teaching on this subject.

¹⁵ Remember that, somehow, we have to minister to the single mothers also in this area.

¹⁶ This would also help pastor to stay on track and not procrastinate.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”

John 8:31

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:35

“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

John 15:8

“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

Acts 11:26

“The disciples . . . decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.”

Acts 11:29

“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 13:52

BOOKS

Rediscovering Catechism: The Art of Equipping Covenant Children

by Donald Van Dyken.

Published by P & R Publishing,

Phillipsburg, NJ, 2000; 146 pages.

Reviewed by Elder Tim Hart.

Developed societies are characterized by their clamor for temporal satisfaction. Fallen man either is consumed by the quest for personal fulfillment and/or is frantically escaping reality. We must ask ourselves: Is the church also caught in these downward patterns? Reverend Donald Van Dyken emphasizes that the hope offered from the truths of the Bible is the church's only hope. He says, "the world outside and the old man inside attack us daily, wear down our hope, and slow down our efforts. Only when God realigns our hearts to these grand eternal truths are we strong again."

How does catechizing with Biblical creeds fit into this picture? The past provides an answer. Van Dyken writes:

The situation at the time of the Reformation was similar to ours. Ignorance was rampant, the truths of Scripture were unknown or neglected, and the result was confusion of mind and ungodliness of life. Scottish preacher John J. Murray said: "We believe it is the discontinuance of the practice [of catechizing] that we can trace much of the doctrinal ignorance, confusion and instability so characteristic of modern Christianity."

Has the Church lost its potency in the equipping of the Christian family? Van Dyken answers:

The contemporary situation mirrors what the prophet Hosea saw: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Perhaps we can understand how an anti-intellectual, anti-doctrinal atmosphere has found acceptance. Christians have watched brilliant theologians mutilate, twist, and pervert the Word of God. Disgusted with these ways of turning the truth of God into a lie, some Christians have eschewed learning itself, whether past and present. "Away with theology!" they cry. "Give me the simple gospel!" But is ignorance better than falsehood? Can the great God and Creator whose mighty acts and wondrous character confront us on every page of Scripture be reduced to a scant few beliefs?

Van Dyken directs this work to those who are charged with the scriptural and spiritual nourishment of the covenant children of the flock of Jesus Christ but have not used this valuable tool for the training of these children. As he writes:

Covenant children are those whom God has given to believing parents. Those parents came to be believers as God spoke to them through His Word. Through His Word and Spirit He created saving faith in their hearts. Their response to His Word

and Spirit was to answer, "Yes, Lord, we believe. We believe what your church has confessed about Your Word."

Rediscovering Catechism: The Art of Equipping Covenant Children gives the reader the biblical mandate, historical precedent, and the logical argument for catechizing the children of the Church. The author says,

At the outset we are confronted with an obvious question: Isn't it a mistake to add man-written books to what God has written? This question deserves serious thought. . . . G. I. Williamson offers that, "The catechism is something like a map. We could ask: Why bother to study a map? Why not just go out and study the surface of the earth instead? The answer, of course, is that one is wise to begin with a study of maps. After all, life is short and the world is very big. . . . It is much the same with the Bible. The Bible contains a great wealth of information. It isn't easy to master it all—in fact, no one has ever mastered it completely. . . . That is why we have creeds. . . . They are a kind of spiritual 'road map' of the teaching of the Bible, already worked out and proved by others before us." The apostle Paul admonished the Corinthian church that they "all speak the same thing" and to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind" (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul is saying, "get your act together! Get unified on what you are going to say about Christ and the gospel!"

A few of the main topics that are ef-

ficiently covered in this manual for ministers, lay leaders, and heads of families are the importance of catechism, the history of catechism, how we should teach catechism, and who should teach catechism. The author gives many practical training suggestions that he has successfully employed over twenty years of catechizing covenant children.

Van Dyken challenges the teacher by declaring that "teaching is not merely telling the truth but also causing another to know the truth. Augustine testified that the wise catechism teacher labored to make sure that his students knew and understood the truth, not merely heard it." His challenge is seriously to undertake the formal catechetical training of the covenant children of our church families. When accomplished, the duty will have been seized with great passion and persistence. He writes, "Although some readers may disagree with Richard Baxter when he said, 'I must say that I think is it an easier matter by far to compose and preach a good sermon,' we must allow that the proper catechizing of God's children presents a far more formidable challenge than many people realize."

To equip the covenant children of our church families is God's command. The spiritual battle lies ahead of them. As Van Dyken writes:

Conquest is what our Lord's command is all about. We do not take our children through the training ground of the wilderness merely to leave their bleached bones on the border of Canaan or have them whimper on the banks of Jordan. Instead send them into the land of

wickedness, of giants and castles, for “‘they shall be dust beneath your feet,’ says the Almighty.” . . .

John J. Murray, who quoted Baxter in his article on catechizing, concluded, “What a blow was actually given in the days when this Scriptural practice held its place in the Church. And as the true Church of Christ goes forth to battle in our day, as she seeks to storm the strongholds of sin and error, we pray that she may once again be constrained to take up this mighty weapon.”

As we faithfully endeavor to keep this duty to God and the Church we must always remember God’s promise:

And all your children shall be taught
by the Lord,
And great shall be the peace
of your children.

Isaiah 54:13



“The Bible confirms the importance of the man who catechizes; church history solemnly enjoins this ministry upon office bearers; love for Christ compels us to join Peter in listening to our Savior’s command, ‘Feed My lambs!’”

Donald Van Dyken

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
on Christian Disciplines in the Home
and Church

Christian Living in the Home by Jay E. Adams (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing).

Author Adams has the rare gift of making theology practical for daily living. The Bible, indeed, is a practical book. God has “...given us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

In a generation when the church is being feminized and the nuclear family is being attacked by culture and government, this book is sorely needed by Christian families. Adams lays out the biblical roles of husbands and wives with the duties of Christian parents in rearing their children. His whole thesis is the beauty of a Christ-centered home.

This book should be required reading for all newly-weds.

The Family in Its Civil and Churchly Aspects by B. M. Palmer (reprinted by Sprinkle Publications).

This book is of such value in developing God’s purpose for the family that Baptist publisher Lloyd Sprinkle says it had to come back into print despite its Presbyterian treatment of children in the covenant. Written in the mid-1800s, this work beautifully captures the freshness of the first family in paradise, a paradigm for all families.

Besides laying out the biblical theology of the family and how God preserves His chosen people through the

generations, Palmer also has chapters on the inter-relations of members of the family, as well as subordinates to superiors.

This reprinted gem includes a bonus in the second half of the volume: J.W. Alexander's *Thoughts on Family Worship*.

Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church by Wayne Mack and David Swavely (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing).

Rather than one more book addressed to church leaders, Mack and Swavely have geared their message for communicant church members. As such *Life in the Father's House* makes a good manual for church membership classes.

An early chapter develops the rarely addressed subject of the biblical necessity of church membership as opposed to the trend of permanent "adherence" without commitment. This is followed by a balanced treatment of submission to Christ's leaders in the church, as well as the roles of men and women in the church.

Besides exposition of the obligations of worship, fellowship, and service, the authors are careful to develop the doctrine of "confronting one another in love," a theme in keeping with the book's title.

The Training of the Twelve by A.B. Bruce (reprinted by Kregel Publications).

This classic work on discipleship long has been a textbook at Western Reformed Seminary. For the best counsel on how to be a disciple of Christ, read this paradigm on how Jesus trained those nearest to Him.

The WRS Journal, 9:2, August, 2002

The Lost Art of Disciple Making by Leroy Eims (Zondervan and NavPress).

This popular work promoted by the Navigators puts as much emphasis on how to disciple others as it does on defining discipleship. It is a useful book for reminding modern evangelicals that the Great Commission is more than winning souls—it is "making disciples."

Biblical Church Discipline by Daniel Wray (Banner of Truth).

This handy booklet marshals the Scripture passages for the basis, necessity, levels, and objects of church discipline. In an age of "I'm OK, you're OK," this work is valuable for its final section that answers objections to church discipline.

Handbook of Church Discipline by Jay Adams (Zondervan).

Dr. Adams carefully develops the basis and process for dealing with willful sinners in the church. Church leaders must deal with them to protect the honor of Christ and to keep the leaven of open sin from spreading. Hopefully, remedial discipline with prayer will have the desired result of restoring a wayward brother or sister (Gal. 6:1,2; James 5:19,20).

Churches that will not police themselves (in preventative and remedial ways) really are no churches because they refuse to make a distinction between the practices of the church and the world.

This is a thorough work on an important subject. 

NOTES

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