

Conversations in Discipleship & Evangelism



An initiative of the
Discipleship and Evangelism
Commission of the
Assembly of Confessing Congregations

A Study Guide

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We are empowered and commanded to participate in the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:25). This participation involves a prayerful and willful 'putting to death the things of the flesh' by the Spirit (Rom 8:13) and 'reckoning of the new people we have become in Christ'. It involves a growing into Christ where each part does its work in building the whole body up in love. It involves living in the resurrection power of Christ who has freed us from our enemies of the law, sin and death and a straining forward to what lies ahead for us, always holding fast to what we have already attained (Phil 3:10, 13, 16).

The church will guide us to what this may mean practically but it may best be summed up in the word 'Love'. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Putting this together with the 2 Corinthians 5 passage we can say, "We love (and are called to do so) because Christ first loved us" (and His love continues to be the motivating power behind our love).

Discipline:

It means we can preach the gospel to each other and stand firm on the truth of that gospel knowing that our work is not in vain, because Christ is present and reigning.

Worship:

Like prayer our worship is done in Christ who is the one true worshipper of the Father. All we offer is in Christ and as our great high priest He offers it to the Father in our name and on our behalf.

Evangelism:

Evangelism is an expression of the love of the reigning Christ in us not some external compulsion.

Discipleship is not an end in itself

It is interesting to note that the word disciple or discipleship is not found in the epistles. This does not mean that following Jesus' ascension it was not taught in the early church. Rather, the compulsion to follow Christ in the epistles is a focus on Christ and not on some external challenge. It is helpful to note a pattern in the epistles which can be summed up by the phrase: 'Indicative before the imperative'. In others words, with few exceptions the letters will begin by reminding us who Christ is and what has become of us and the creation in Him and conclude with instructions about what that means for the way we live.

Discipleship is more about knowing Christ and being, than it is about doing. It is more about recognizing the Father's eternal plan for new creation in Jesus, (personally as well as for the whole of creation), and knowing the Holy Spirit in us who draws us deeper into that wonderful reality. The call to discipleship is a transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the context of the suffering and joy that it is to be a renewed human being in a groaning creation (Rom 8:18-27).

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Disciples are called

Study 1

Read Mark 1:14 –20

“There’s something about Jesus that gets disciples up to follow Him”. What is it about God’s call on your life that has led you to follow Him?

Sometimes our discipleship becomes overwhelmed by ‘law’, that is, the things we need to do (or think we need to do) to be a disciple, rather than an experience of the living Christ. How have you noticed this issue in your life?

Read Phil 3: 1-11. Paul renounces all self-accomplished goodness as rubbish, saying, “I want to know Christ....” How does ‘knowing Christ’ put aside our natural inclination toward ‘religious discipleship’ or of being preoccupied with ourselves?

Paul was struck that, though he was the least of all the saints, grace and power from God was given to the church to reveal this plan to everyone. This revelation was so that all the powerful forces that operate in this world might know that the Christ has come and is bringing this plan to fulfillment. How does Christ do that? Through the Church! The wisdom of God is being made known through the church. What is that wisdom? The wisdom is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:22-24).

We may be as equally dumfounded as Paul!

It means that we are called to be single minded in our hope. We are united to Christ. In fact Paul tells us we have died and we no longer live but Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). While we may still physically live, our accountability before God and our ability to bring about fruit for his Kingdom rests in the faithfulness of God who sent Jesus not only to die in my place but also to live and work in my place. This is what he is doing now. There is a working of the Spirit of Jesus in Christians now that will assure us that our work will not be in vain (1 Cor 15:58). This assurance does not call for passivity. On the contrary, Paul says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them-yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Cor 15:10). For He takes what we offer Him in loving obedience and He transforms it according to the great project of reconciliation.

This understanding will affect everything:

Prayer:

Our prayer is freed up and empowered because we know that Christ Himself intercedes for us and with us through the Holy Spirit. He takes our prayers, imperfect as they are, and transforms them to perfection.

We need not worry about that though. That is in his hands. He simply calls us to get on with the fun of the building. Such is the gift of discipleship. We don't even really know what the final project will look like. But we know we share in the Father's delight in making all things new through his Son. The work is not in our own name but in Jesus Christ's, however it does have our distinctive mark in it. In fact, Jesus even offers it up to the Father in our name so that the joy of pleasing the Father may be ours.

Discipleship means we share in Jesus' own ministry to his Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ministry is a work based on the Father's love for the creation. Jesus can fulfill it because He knows the Father's plan, loves the Father and loves what the Father loves. Only He knows these things and He makes them known to us because He is in us revealing them to us. We are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to know the Father too and also share in this ministry of love with the Son, Jesus. In fact, knowing the Father through Jesus as children makes us his followers. In Christ we have the freedom to do, like Christ - whatever it takes - to join in Christ's reconciling work and to build for the kingdom of God.

So what does all this mean in terms of our Christian discipleship? What does all this 'theology' have to do with the real work of getting on with evangelism, spiritual practices, attending church, confession and proclamation, the sacraments, doing acts of service and love in the world? In Ephesians 3:8-12 the Apostle Paul writes, "Though I am the very least of all the saints, grace was given me, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."

What difference does it make to us if we are called, compared with if we choose to volunteer?

Read John 15: 1-8. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." It is clear that remaining in Him (as He is the vine) is central to being disciples. What does it look like in our lives as we remain in Him rather than draw on our own resources?

Discipleship, "is what I want to do because God sold Himself out for me..." Isn't it truly amazing that our discipleship is to a God Who has given His all for us?

Disciples are Sent Study 2

Read Matthew 28:16-20

What difference does it make to us being sent when we consider that Christ is presently alive and ruling with all authority on heaven and earth?

What does it mean to know that He has (already) conquered all death, evil and sin and He has done all that as a Man?

Discipleship and evangelism cannot be separated because a disciple has a vocation or calling. How has this calling happened for you in a spontaneous or natural way as you came to know Christ?

Whether it is new efforts at personal devotions; a mission program done through the church; the leaders attempt to bring congregational alignment to a strategic plan or works of justice; the renewal of the creation (which includes persons being made new); they all rely upon Jesus and his covenant will and action. These other activities may have a place in Christian discipleship however in themselves they cannot do anything. Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers build in vain.

Our necessary discipleship is reliant upon the real ongoing activity of Christ, our ascended Lord, representing us to the Father and pouring his favor upon us. He is *the* worker in salvation and reconciliation. Our hope and the hope of all creation is that God Himself is on a mission - to us and through us. As the Good Samaritan did what he could do, so we do what we can, but our doing is a sharing in the ultimate doing that Jesus does on our behalf.

This statement might sound a little complicated. Perhaps the best way of understanding this is by picturing Jesus as the chief worker in a workshop and we stand with Him as apprentices. He has the blueprint of the Father. As the 'Master Builder', who has the joy and ability of the Father to fulfill his plans, the ultimate success of the project remains with Him. What is the project? The Father's plan of new creation; a new heaven and new earth; of remaking something holy, good and useful out of that which was broken and wrecked by sin. The main work has been done already. Jesus did that work while we dozed off in the lunch hour! Now He calls and equips us to share in building the new creation by pouring his own Spirit into us. He allows us even to put our own slant on the work. It gives Him great joy to see us creatively contributing, all the while making sure that our contributions align to the Father's plan.

Union with Jesus: The Foundation to Discipleship by *Simon Dent*

After the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus told his followers, "Go and Do likewise". It is a story about a traveler who has been beaten up by robbers and is avoided by all the so-called respectable people, only to be shown practical grace and love by one who did not fit the existing religious model of a "righteous person". It is a story about discipleship: How to live as one of God's servants. Ultimately however it is not just a story about a good man from Samaria. Jesus himself says "no one is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19). It is not just a story about a good man but *the* good man. It is not just a story told by Jesus, it is also a story about Jesus. It is a story about Jesus, as *the* Good Samaritan, coming to bind the wounds of a humanity beaten up by sin and death when all the religious systems in the world could only contribute to the problem. Jesus actually does something about the lostness of humanity in his death, resurrection and ascension on our behalf. He does something for humanity that no religious system can do. That is to bring real healing, reconciliation and life. So when Jesus says, "Go and do likewise", it has a far deeper significance than mere good actions. Jesus is saying to his followers, "Be like me". In me, be grace in action, bring reconciliation to the world, and serve the Father for the sake of the world. In all you do bear the hallmark of love.

It's a pretty big ask isn't it. Well, yes if Jesus has gone off to heaven leaving us to get on with it. Fortunately He hasn't. He remains the ultimate Saviour and worker of the Father through the Holy Spirit. Being his disciple or living like Jesus lived means we dare not rely on our own religious programs to bring God's salvation plan into action but on Him whose work is effective and redemptive. Our actions can never be good enough. Jesus has to show up!

Read John 20: 19-23. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.." The Father's call on Jesus was dynamic, active and full of life. Do we see Jesus sending us in the same way?

We could never be disciples without the Holy Spirit. As Jesus sent the disciples, He breathed the Holy Spirit on them (Read also Acts 1: 8). And yet with His empowerment we can be effective and productive. God is doing something and we are coworkers in that, (not contractors). It is worth thinking deeply on this!

As we are filled with the living water of God, there is a natural over-spill. The living water flows from the Father, through the Son to us by the Spirit, and then flows out through us to the world (see John 4: 13-14, Psa 36: 7-9, Jer 2: 13, 20: 8-9). You can't put a cap on Christians who have this life in them.... Read Eph 5: 18-21 and pray for a fresh infilling/overflowing of the Spirit in your life.

Disciples Participate in Christ's Ministry Study 3

Read 2 Peter 1:3-11

Peter tells us that we participate in the Divine Nature. When we are called to be disciples, we are not called to a mission on our own. Actually we join in the mission of God and He is with us at every moment of that mission. What difference does this make to you?

Read Phil 1: 21, Gal 2: 20 and Rom 6: 5-8. It is not that we are doing everything for Christ, but rather that He actually lives in us, and we are joined to Him. How might this understanding help us when we are feeling as though we are getting nowhere in life and ministry?

If He is working through us, then we should expect things to happen through our life, ministry and witness. Do you expect your life to bear fruit as you live in Him? What does this expectation mean for your boldness and confidence?

The Gospel is not an abstract message, or a piece of knowledge. It makes connections with real life. It addresses the problems of our loneliness, alienation, guilt, shame and the darkness of the conscience. How do we ensure that we make connections as we speak the Gospel?

Read 2 Cor 5: 14-15. The disciple of Christ is compelled (or constrained) by the love of Christ. We are fully convinced that He died for all, and that we no longer live for ourselves but for Him. How do you experience the constraint of Christ's love in your life?

It all comes out of the great love of God. All praise and glory be to Him forever, amen. May we live lives worthy of the calling His love has placed on our lives. Pray that this might be so.

Disciples of the Gospel

Study 5

Read 1 Corinthians 2:2

In essence the Gospel (or Good News) is what God has done for us in Christ. God has reached into the depths of our humanity including our conscience and our evil. In Christ He has dealt with this fully, and we are set free. What has God done for you?

There is nothing else on earth that can deal with the reality of our human condition. God in Christ actually changes places with us, and inherits all of our wickedness in such a way that He brings us to responsibility for our actions. How have you known this change in your life?

It is not enough for us simply to have our sinfulness forgotten or put aside. If we are to have any freedom, this evil must be dealt with fully. We need atonement; we need to know that the penalty for our sin has been dealt with until it is no more. As we know this love of God, we are put in the incredible place where we can change our minds (repent). Consider the completeness of God's work in our lives through the words of Jesus, "It is finished!" (John 19: 30).

Have you ever asked, "Does God really need me?", or, "Am I of any use to God?" What difference does it make that God chooses to need us, and that He chooses not to do anything without including us in what He is doing?

Jesus tells the church in Ephesus that they have 'forgotten their first love', (Rev 2: 4). It is easy at times when we are 'dry' to try to whip ourselves up, (or do the same to others around us), and get our faith going. This motivation is so different from focusing again on how much Christ has loved us. Consider the difference!

Read again 2 Pet 1: 5-9. Do we often link ineffectiveness and unproductiveness with forgetting that we have been cleansed from our sins? How might you as a disciple remain focused on His goodness to you, rather than on your ability to work for Him?

Read Luke 14:25-35

Bonhoeffer said, “Instead of following Christ, we want to enjoy the consolations...cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves...”

It is easy to preach Christianity with regard to the benefits and not the costs. How do you preach/live in this way?

It is costly to follow the leading of the Spirit. It means submitting to the fact that there is One in authority over us and that we are not free to choose our own way. In what ways are Christianity described more as self-fulfillment rather than radical obedience?

Can you say with Paul (Gal 2: 20), I’m glad my past has been crucified, I’m glad to have Christ living through me and this is the way I want to live?

Grace must be seen as costly—it cost Him His own dear Son. Legalistic grace turns the things of God to our own ends. As followers of Christ we must surely share in His sufferings as we share in His glory (Rom 8: 17). In what ways have you become self-centred in your Christian lives?

Read John 6: 60-68. It is easy to think that everyone who heard Jesus willingly and immediately followed Him. And yet Jesus gives us a firm promise: that all who follow Him will be persecuted (Matt 10: 16-23). This promise is coupled with the promise that He will always be with us. How does it help you to bear witness, in a sometimes hostile world, knowing that He alone has the words of eternal life?

Christians are ‘undistracted learners’. To be effective as disciples we will give ourselves to learn, to receive the word of God, and to put our lives in order. How are you active in this work of discipleship?