

Basics for Discipleship

By Nathaniel Pringle

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, November 1, 2022

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, it's wonderful to be here on a Tuesday evening and open God's word with you, and I'd invite you to turn to Matthew 28 this evening. Matthew, 28, and we'll be looking at verses 16 through 20 to start out this evening. The content of tonight's study is actually an overflow and overlap from our last leadership class back in October, and we're running up to the next one here a week from Saturday, November the 12th, and Dane and Andrew encouraged me to put this together in a format for Tuesday night study. So that's what I'm doing. I'm obeying my elders. We're coming back and reviewing some of these principles of discipleship that we looked at and preparing for what will be a kind of a run up to the next leadership class in a couple of weeks and looking forward to that time also.

Tonight, what the theme that we're going to look at from a 30,000-foot view and it's important to keep that in mind because there's a number of things that we'll look at, a number of passages that we'll look at and principles that will lay out of which much more could be said. And so keep in mind that we're looking at this from a 30,000-foot overview of some of the basics of discipleship, what does it mean to make disciples, how do we do that and how do we do that effectively as a church, what are some things that we have to watch out for, what our influence is within the culture even within conservative evangelicalism that would go counter to what Christ's intention is as we seek to make disciples. Those are some of the things that we're going to consider this evening, again, in kind of a 30,000-foot overview manner as we build a description of disciple making this evening. And I'm looking forward to it. I love discipleship stuff. It's kind of been the marrow of my life for the last 20 years really, back in an institutional setting working with college aged men and grad school aged men at a university and on into pastoral ministry. This is something I could talk about for 180 minutes. I'll try not to do that tonight. I hope that just the thrill of talking about something that Jesus has told us to do and looking at it from a broad scriptural perspective will encourage us in the Lord, encourage us as the body of Christ as we obey and work out our salvation with fear and trembling and disciple one another and make disciples of those who we are constantly holding forth Christ to and offering Christ, that they would find life in Christ.

So with those words of introduction kind of what we're doing this evening, let's read verses 16 through 20 of Matthew 28. Typically this is a passage where you are familiar with verses 18 through 20, but verses 16 and 17 are important. Matthew 28:16, after Jesus has risen,

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

That's a wonderful passage and verse 17 is an important introduction to what Jesus says. When the disciples see Jesus, they worship him but some doubted. Some doubted. And the word "doubted" is a word that doesn't indicate they're questioning who he is, the word indicates more of a hesitation. They're hesitant. Some worshiped, but others were hesitant.

Now, why would they be hesitant? Well, have you ever seen someone rise from the dead and then come and speak to you? You would probably be hesitant too. This is a passage we're familiar with it, we know the story, we know what happens after the cross, we know what happens after Jesus is buried. He rises. He appears to his disciples. They're shocked. How do you relate to someone who died and was buried for three days and is now risen and talking to you? How do you worship him appropriately? How do you respond to this man? And what we have in the Great Commission is a response to that hesitation. They're worshiping him but there's some hesitation. How do we relate to the risen Christ? Well, he's going to clarify that. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." That's the first point of clarity, as the resurrected Messiah and Son of God, he is the authority over all things in heaven and earth. And based on that, then, now he tells his disciples, "Here's how you worship me while you're on this earth. Here's how you respond to me, the one to whom all authority belongs. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age." It's a command to be witnesses for Christ. It's a command to go forth under the authority of Christ and to call others under the authority of Christ. Christ gives a command to make disciples, and Christ gives direction to make disciples. And really, it wouldn't make any sense, would it, if Christ commanded us to make disciples and then left us on our own to figure out what that looked like? Scripture is sufficient for telling us what to do, and scripture is sufficient for telling us how to do it.

So Jesus in a nutshell, in this Commission, he tells his disciples, and by extension to all followers of Christ, "Go under Christ's authority. All authority is given to me. Go make disciples." And making disciples involves calling others to come under the authority of Christ, to turn to Christ for justification, turn to Christ for forgiveness of sins, to come under the authority of the risen and returning King of kings. And so what we have in the book of Acts is a record of the disciples doing that. They go and preach the gospel. They preach the good news. The good news is you are a slave of sin, you are dead in your trespasses and sins, but there is one who came from God, the God-man who came to earth and fulfilled all righteousness and died in your place to redeem you from sin and in Christ

you have forgiveness of sins, you're justified, you're declared righteous before God the Father, and you are at liberty now to serve God, you're at liberty to serve Jesus Christ, you're at liberty to take the yoke of Christ upon you which is an easy and well-fitting yoke. This is discipleship. It's calling others to faith in Christ, to come under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Now historically in recent history, evangelism and discipleship have been dichotomized or separated, and often the idea is, you know, we need to evangelize people in this sense, we need to get people to pray a prayer, we need to get people to agree to the facts of the gospel and we just need to get them saved, and if they get disciplined or don't get disciplined, you know, whatever. We've just got to get people saved. Well, that thinking is an unbiblical paradigm, an unbiblical pattern that has arisen from the error of easy-believeism, or non-lordship salvation. Right, it's the idea that if you just assent to the facts of who Christ is and pray a prayer and accept Jesus, then you're saved. Then you're saved and it really doesn't matter how you live. You're saved now. Now I'm going to move on to the next person and try to get them saved. But in that thinking, it denies the reality that a call to Christ and turning to Christ, being converted is to be made a new creature. It is to have Christ as your Lord. When you turn to Christ, you are no longer a slave of sin but Paul says in Romans 6, you are a slave now to righteousness. John says that we ought to obey Christ, we're obligated to obey Christ as new creatures in Christ. No, we don't have to do anything but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, but believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is a turning away, it's having been made alive by the Holy Spirit and turning away from the life of sin, turning away from the godlessness and the darkness of my life, and turning with allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ believing wholly that he has forgiven me and living my life, reorienting my life entirely for him.

This is the essence of making disciples, we call people to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we call people to the risen Lord, and so when we think about discipleship and what does it mean to make disciples and to teach disciples "to observe all that I have commanded you," right within that Commission is an indication that the preaching of Christ is calling people to reorient their lives according to Christ's commands to walk in obedience to Christ. There are two terms, two biblical but unpopular terms that describe discipleship that I want to introduce here for us tonight, and this would kind of answer the question what are disciples? Biblically speaking, what are some terms that describe disciples? And those two terms are a slave and a sacrifice. A slave and a sacrifice.

Turn over to Romans 6, Romans 6. Paul is laying out for us the keys of the gospel, the key doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in Romans 6, just to summarize the argument, he's setting forth the reality that because we've been justified by faith in Christ, because we have peace with God, Romans 5, that we're united with Christ and that we reckon ourselves united with Christ in all aspects of who Christ is in the work that he has done and setting us free from sin. And based on that reality, based on the reality of the new creature that we are in Christ, we're liberated from sin and the law, we're liberated from the dominion of sin and the law and we're liberated now to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And he puts it in strong terms. Look at verse 17. In verse 17 Paul writes, "But

thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Do you see the contrast that he's making? Verse 17, "You were once slaves of sin, you heard the preaching of the word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. You heard the preaching. You responded. And so you who once were slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching, to the doctrine to which you are committed, and as a result, you've been set free from sin and now you've become slaves of righteousness." And throughout the epistles the apostles identify themselves as bondservants of the Lord Jesus Christ, as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. One biblical description of discipleship is that we are slaves. Followers of Christ are slaves no longer of sin, hallelujah, but now of Jesus Christ our Savior.

A little bit further in the book of Romans in chapter 12, you think of Romans in two sections, chapters 1 through 11, Paul lays out the great doctrines of the gospel, and then in chapter 12 through 16, he lays out our response to the gospel. He clarifies the gospel and then he helps us construct Christlike thinking and affections based on our new life in the gospel. And in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12, Paul writes as he transitions from the great doctrines of the gospel now to our response to the gospel, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." And we could say that those two verses are the all-encompassing response to the gospel that then beginning in verse 3 and following he fleshes out in more specific ways in our relationships to one another in the church, our use of gifts, and then our general relationships and how life works out in society. But the way that he instructs us to respond to the gospel is by appealing to us, by urging us by the mercies of God to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice.

Now what Paul was thinking of as sacrifice, there are many Old Testament pictures of sacrifices that come to mind. Those animals that were laid on an altar, they were entirely devoted, they were entirely devoted to God as a sacrifice, as an offering. And we're living sacrifices. We're living sacrifices, but the idea is that as a living sacrifice, because of what God has done for us in Christ, because of the new life that we have in Christ because we've been redeemed from the life of sin and darkness and all of the awful things of living under the bondage of sin, that we now yield our body to the worship of God and instead of constantly pursuing self-gratification, which Paul says in Ephesians 4 is what the Gentiles are skilled at doing, they're skilled at pursuing self-gratification, instead of pursuing self-gratification and self-indulgence, we sacrifice ourselves for the purposes, for the priorities of our God, living life to the glory of God, living life that we might declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into the marvelous light. A slave and a sacrifice. A slave is someone completely dominated by the will of another, and that doesn't go over very well in our Democratic Republic. As a Christian, this is what God calls you to be, a slave of Christ and a sacrifice well-pleasing to God.

In a little book by a Scottish pastor by the name of William Still, a little book by about 120 pages called "The Work of the Pastor," in the first page of that book on the first chapter he writes, "Israel's sheep were reared, fed, tended, retrieved, healed, and restored for sacrifice on the altar of God. This end of all pastoral work must never be forgotten, that its ultimate aim is to lead God's people to offer themselves up to him in total devotion of worship and service."

Two pictures of discipleship: a slave and a sacrifice. And that shouldn't surprise us. If we're following Jesus Christ, what did the life of Jesus look like? Well, the life of Jesus was a life that was dominated by the will of his Father. He came to carry out the will of his Father. And at the end of his earthly ministry in John 17 he can testify that he carried out everything the Father wanted him to do. Everything perfectly without sin. He didn't come to do his own will. He didn't speak according to his own will. He was dominated by the will of his heavenly Father. And he gave himself up as a sacrifice. He laid down his life for the sheep. He gave himself as a sacrifice for our redemption. And so, of course it makes sense that if we're followers of Christ, if we're disciples of Christ, that he would call us for our lives to look like his life, for our lives to be characterized as being slaves of Christ, as being dominated by the will of God, and giving up ourselves for the purposes of God. We give ourselves up as a sacrifice in grateful response for what Jesus has done for us to redeem us from the slave market of sin.

We're getting to this point in Mark but if you would turn to chapter 8, Mark, 8, we see this ingrained in Jesus' call to discipleship. This is at a critical point in Mark's gospel after Peter confesses Jesus Christ and Jesus immediately teaches that as the Messiah he must go to the cross. That does not set well with Peter because his mind is still engaged in thinking that there's going to be a political deliverance, and he rebukes Christ. Christ turns and says, "Get behind me, Satan, because you're not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man." And then in verse 34, Mark 8:34, Jesus calls the crowd to him with his disciples and he says this, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Jesus' call to discipleship is a call that if you will follow Christ, if you'll be a disciple of Christ, if you're someone who is learning what he has taught, taking in the commands of Christ, that looks like denying yourself, taking up the cross, taking up the instrument of torture and death, sacrifice, taking up your cross and following the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he sets in contrast the alternative. "You want to go after the world, you want to save your life? You'll ultimately lose it. You want to deny me before this adulterous generation? You'll be denied when it matters. No, take up your cross and follow me." Discipleship is a call to being a slave of Christ and a sacrifice in response to the great work of salvation the Lord has done.

So let me just pause for a moment and try to summarize what I've established thus far. Biblical discipleship carries out Christ's command. Matthew 28. Biblical discipleship carries out Christ's command with the goal that disciples learn to be slaves of Christ and sacrifice their body for Christ as a reasonable act of worship. That's as we call people to Christ, as we pursue Christ, as we seek to be disciples and make disciples, being a slave and being a sacrifice is inherent within that.

Now I want to move to a second question: how do we do discipleship? If our goal is to be a slave of Christ and a sacrifice for Christ, how do we do discipleship? And I want to transition to that answer by way of three popular, I guess you could say, philosophies of discipleship that have infiltrated even conservative evangelicalism, and just more more than anything, identify them and point out some of the inherent weaknesses so that we can think, "Okay, well, what does a biblical model look like? What does scripture tell us?" So these are rather generic titles and probably a bit too rigid in category but, again, we're just trying to identify some things to be aware of as we ask and answer the question how do we do discipleship?

So one philosophy we could put it in this way: a share and care or small group or care group or any other title label that is often used in conservative popular evangelicalism. And the idea is that in a church you need to have groups established because everyone needs someone with similar experience to help carry their burden. So we have all the people with one kind of burden here and all the people with one kind of burden here, and all the people with another kind of burden here, and we're kind of administrators of groups for a share and care opportunity. Now, the danger of that, and again, there's a lot that could be said about each of these that I'm going to bring up, the danger in that kind of thinking, again, if we're thinking about we need to be a slave and we need to be a sacrifice, the danger is that a victim mentality can be cultivated, and instead of exhorting and edifying one another, we can be endorsing of sinful attitudes. Now are we called to carry one another's burdens? Absolutely. Absolutely. Are we called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep? 100%. And within the body of Christ as God brings people together in a local body, there's just a wonderful providential working out of how he brings people together in organic ways to carry one another's burdens in a way that gives comfort while at the same time, while at the same time encouraging us within that trial to maintain the priorities of being a slave of righteousness and a sacrifice for the Lord.

Turn to Galatians 6. Galatians 6 in verses 1 and 2. Galatians is one of those books that clarifies the gospel in the first four chapters or so, and then in chapters 5 and 6 helps construct Christ-like thinking and affections based on the clarification of the gospel. Verse 2 is often a very popular verse that, you know, there's a number of verses in scripture that it's easy to like, pull out and you know leave the ligaments dangling from the context and Galatians 6:2 is one of those passages where you jump in and say, "Bear one another's burdens." Yes, bear one another's burdens but what's the context? Well, let's back up all the way to chapter 5, verse 24. After the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited,

provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." What's the context here? Well, the context is that Paul has clarified the gospel and now he's calling people in the Galatian church saying, "Look, live out the gospel by crucifying your flesh with its passions and desires by walking in the Spirit and by interacting with one another in such a way that if one of you is caught in a transgression, those around that person can restore that person with a spirit of gentleness. Bear one another's burdens in that way."

And so the call to bear one another's burdens is a call to walk as a slave and as a living sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, that we're engaged in the brokenness and in the messiness of our lives, which all of us have broken and messy lives. All of us are dealing with the temptations of the flesh. And he says, you know, "If you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Well, who's spiritual? What does it mean to be spiritual? Walk in the Spirit. So who's walking in the Spirit? That's the person that's spiritual and sometimes it's going to be you, and sometimes it's going to be me. There's a reason that Paul commands us to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh because our tendency is to walk in the flesh and we're called to obey Christ by walking in the Spirit, by submitting ourselves to the word of God that the Spirit of God wrote, and by depending on the Spirit of God that indwells every believer to carry out the obedience of being a slave to Christ and a living sacrifice to Christ. And there are times that I'm not walking in the Spirit and by God's grace there's a brother in Christ that says, "Hey, brother, are you caught in a transgression? Walk in the Spirit. Repent. Restore the joy of your salvation." Right, this is the kind of bearing one another's burdens that Paul is talking about and it requires the whole body of Christ to consistently be examining ourselves so that we can repent of the fleshly patterns of our life that so easily creep in, so that that we can then be a blessing to one another as we interact and carry one another's burdens in that way.

Notice at the end of verse 1, as you restore that one, "Keep watch on yourself lest you be tempted." We walk in humility, but the beauty of this Paul isn't saying you have to be perfect to engage with one another and carrying one another's burdens and calling one another and helping one another when you're caught in transgressions. Bear one another's burdens in that way. And so, in the organic fellowship of the body of Christ as we know one another and sit under the preaching of the word of God, the preaching of the word of God that's designed to convict us, that's designed to call us to repent, that's designed to draw us closer to Christ as we collectively sit under the preaching of the word of God, we then engage in that way with one another. And so often, sadly, the artificial siloing of different groups has the unfortunate effect of removing that design from the body of Christ. When we're called to love one another, to love our neighbor, it's not that we endorse one another, it's that we seek to facilitate each other loving God. The best way I can love you, the best way you can love me is that we're helping one another love God because that's the greatest commandment, and we carry out the second greatest commandment by helping one another toward the greatest commandment of loving God.

Well, another fad term that is often thrown around in relationship to discipleship, I have an unintended pun here, is relational authenticity. Relational authenticity or relational priority and discipleship. And often the way that comes out is in an assumption that personal relationships validate true discipleship. Personal relationships validate true discipleship. In other words, I need to have a relationship in order to be discipled. And there are some places where that is such a priority that people are encouraged to have discipleship meetings instead of hearing the preaching of the word, which is a travesty. But the danger of that kind of thinking, again, relationships are important, not denying that, but the danger of an assumption that personal relationships validate true discipleship is that everything becomes subjective. At what point is their relational authenticity enough or is the relationship authentic enough now to deal with difficult truth. See if relational authenticity is the benchmark, when the time comes to have a conversation that confronts sin, then the "out" can often be, "Well, we just don't have that kind of relationship for you to tell me what I need to be working on in my life." And everything becomes subjective. When we're dealing with being a slave and being a sacrifice and bearing one another's burdens, restoring one another in a spirit of gentleness, the benchmark isn't some moving target of relational authenticity, the benchmark is what does God say? What does God say and how are you responding to what God says? And the emphasis of relational authenticity often undermines the authority of the word of God.

A third popular aspect that's often related to discipleship is counseling, counseling in the sense of having a siloed ministry and what I mean by siloed is kind of like a standalone ministry where we have a counseling ministry as part of the church. Now the idea of biblical counseling just to give us a little bit of background, is something that was popularized by a man named Jay Adams back in the late part of last century and the early part of this century. And there were a lot of good things that came from it. A lot of good material, helpful material. But it grew out of a response to the so-called integrational theology where Christians would take psychotherapy and then try to marry it with Christian principles, and the problem with that is psychotherapy is rooted in a view that man is essentially good. Well, if you try to take a philosophy that says man is essentially good and marry it with the scripture that says man is not good, all right, it doesn't work. It doesn't work. And biblical counseling was an attempt at correcting that integrationist perspective and the premise of biblical counseling, of counseling could be stated in this sense that some people need individual sessions and tailored assignments to navigate broken relationships and dominating sins. And the idea is, you know, my situation is so bad, my sin is so bad I need special attention and a special course in order to get over this and to overcome this and to put it together, put my life back together.

Now I want to make one caveat statement: sin is destructive. The flesh is destructive. And there are times and seasons in believers' lives that are excruciating. Our body often confirms the choices of our heart and a pattern of sinful choices can have devastating long-term effects on the body. There are times when there are extreme bodily physical issues where the spiritual response that affect our ability to respond spiritually and we work through those things. So I want to in just a brief statement recognize the fact that there are some extreme situations. There are times when we do need intense help to work through what God has put upon us to grow us. But the assumption that counseling is the

answer has a number of inherent weaknesses to it. And there are four weaknesses that a siloed counseling perspective carries with it.

First of all, it can tend to build unrealistic expectations. What do I mean by that? Well, it's a mindset that says, "You know what? If I just can get counseling, then I'll be able to set my life right." It kind of has a silver bullet idea to it. It can build unrealistic expectations.

A second weakness is that it can dilute the priority of the pulpit ministry. It dilutes the priority of the pulpit ministry. God has ordained preaching to be the primary vehicle of instructing in the word of God, and our response to the preaching of the word is the primary means of coming to repentance and of dealing with the issues in our lives, and if we have an emphasis on counseling, a ministry that emphasizes counseling, then often one of the side effects is that preaching is good but I need to go over here and get counseling. And it dilutes the priority of the pulpit ministry. And Don has said this multiple times that the preaching of the word, part of the desire as we preach the word, is that we are counseling from the pulpit. Here's what God says. Here's how we need to respond to it. Here's the gospel. Here's Jesus Christ. Be encouraged. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so counseling can have that unintended weakness of diluting the pulpit ministry.

A third inherent weakness is that it can feed a consumer mindset, can feed a consumer mindset. You know, when someone goes to a psychologist, they're paying. They're paying someone to listen to them and help them feel good. And that mindset can very easily carry over into a counseling. I'm going to go to someone for counsel and the mindset is I'm a consumer and I'll take what I want and leave what I don't. And when we think about what it is to give true biblical counsel, true biblical admonition, folks, we don't have that option, do we? We don't have the option to take what I want, take what feels good and leave what I don't like or what I disagree with. Right, there's an authoritative nature. There should be an authoritative nature to true biblical admonition that says, "This is what God says and whether I like it or not, I'm called to obey." Why? Because being a disciple is to be a slave of Christ and to be a sacrifice for Christ.

And a fourth inherent weakness in counseling as a ministry is that it can create a subcategory of "counselors" in the church. There are some ministries that have, you know, certificated counselors well. Well, what are certificated counselors? Are they, is it like elder deacon counselors? There's a category that's not scriptural that's created and often creates confusion within the body of Christ.

And again, counseling is a hybrid. We're not dismissing the need for counsel and go look at our website and we have a statement about biblical counseling and how we handle that. We do it, we counsel, but to look at counseling as a subset siloed ministry, you know, people need 6 to 12 weeks of counsel for a particular sin, no. You need to repent. You need to repent and start obeying the Lord. You're a slave of Christ. Live like one. Live like one.

So we've looked at those three, again, very briefly, very much in overview. We've looked at those three popular philosophies that often accompany discipleship. So let's just ask the question: well, what is discipleship? How do we do discipleship? Does the scripture give us a pattern? Right, I mean if it's not about relationship, if it's not about counseling, if it's not about kind of these artificial things, then what is discipleship? How do we do discipleship? And there's two statements that capture what biblical discipleship looks like as we seek to be slaves of Christ and sacrifices for Christ. We clarify the gospel. We clarify the gospel in order to, secondly, construct Christ-like thinking and affections. We clarify the gospel in order to construct Christ-like thinking and affections.

Now those statements are not just arbitrary to my imagination, I don't think. On my notes here I have two columns. Column 1 is clarify the gospel. Column 2 is construct Christ-like thinking patterns and affections. And under each column I have portions of the epistles. So for example column 1, clarify the gospel, Romans 1 through 11. Construct Christ-like thinking and affections, Romans 12 through 16. 1 Corinthians 1, the foolishness of the cross, and 15, the resurrection of Christ clarify the gospel. 1 Corinthians 2 to 14 construct Christ-like thinking and affections. Galatians 1 to 4 clarify the gospel. Galatians 5 and 6 construct Christ-like thinking and affections. Ephesians 1 through 3, probably one of the most clear epistles clarify the gospel, Ephesians 4 through 6 construct Christ-like thinking and affections. Same with Colossians 1 and 2 and then 3 and 4. Hebrews 1 through 12 clarifies the gospel. Hebrews 13, how do we live that out? 1 Peter 1 clarifies the gospel. 1 Peter 2 through 5, how do we live that out in government and marriage and the body and suffering?

So there's a whole pattern in the New Testament itself that teaches us what discipleship looks like. Jesus told his disciples, "You go make disciples, teaching them what I've commanded you." Well, what we have in the epistles, we have the apostles of Jesus Christ writing to the churches and teaching them how the commands of Christ work out in the church. We have an inspired pattern of exactly what Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18 through 20. My temptation is say, let's just go to look at all these epistles and work through them. Go home and do that tonight. Right, look at Ephesians 1 through 3 and the glorious statements of the gospel, and then Ephesians 4 through 6 and how Paul builds that with the unity of the church, and then our separation and distinction from the world, and our need to forgive one another and to walk in love and walk in the light, to walk in the Spirit, and how that trickles down to our family relationships and to our employment and to spiritual warfare. There's a whole progression there and all Paul is doing is he's teaching us what it looks like to be a slave of Christ and a sacrifice, and we can take that thinking to all of the epistles and see that pattern replicated over and over and over again.

Deviations from the gospel, deviations from the gospel of Jesus Christ will lead to deconstructed in a bad way. I know deconstructed now is supposed to be a good thing. It's not. Deconstructed Christian thought and affections, deviations from the gospel will lead to deconstructed thought and affection. That's why when the apostles are writing to the churches, they clarify the gospel, "Here's what Jesus has done. Here's the significance of it. Here's why these false teachers are false. Here's where their deviations will lead."

We clarify the gospel to move one another to be instructed in what it looks like to think and act like Christ, to love the Lord Jesus Christ. To put it in another way, discipleship cannot be divorced from the preaching of the gospel. Discipleship cannot be divorced from the preaching of the gospel. Discipleship is inherently doctrinal. That's why the share and care or relational authenticity and even counseling don't work as a comprehensive discipleship approach. So if that's the case, true discipleship establishes the preeminence of Christ and applies Christ's authority to all of life. It's authoritative, and it calls people to repentance continually.

So doctrinal discipleship, how do you do that? If it requires clarifying the gospel, what's the primary means? If it requires calling people to repentance, what's the primary means? We need something that addresses the will of man with clarity from the scriptures and so I would set forth that the primary means, the preeminent means of making disciples, of teaching them what Christ has commanded is the preaching and the teaching of the word of God because it addresses the will with doctrinal clarity and it calls people to repentance, to deal with the flesh that rises up, and it buttresses our hope and our faith in the glories of who Jesus Christ is, not in the misery of our own situations. The preaching and teaching of the word of God must be preeminent in true discipleship.

It's interesting that in the pastoral epistles as the Apostle Paul is writing to a young pastor, he instructs him to be a proclaimer of the truth, and I want us to just look at a couple of passages that make that clear. Look at 1 Timothy 1. 1 Timothy 1. It's interesting that the pastoral epistles fail to give directions about small groups. Look at verse 3, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions." That's how the pastoralist epistles start. Paul is saying, "Look, I am giving you a military type charge, this is what you need to do, Timothy. You need to protect the gospel. You need to protect the doctrine." Why? "Because you need to protect the love that issues from a pure heart," that which enables us to carry out a Galatians 6:1 and 2 and many other of the "one another" passages in Scripture.

Turn to 2 Timothy 4. We're just looking at the beginning and the end of Paul's epistles to Timothy to capture the point. Paul is helping Timothy here deal with people that are lovers of self in chapter 3 and creating all kinds of havoc in the church, and he tells him go back to scripture because chapter 3, verse 16, "All scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." Now chapter 4, verse 1, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but

having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry." Paul begins and ends those epistles to Timothy with charges with an order, a command to give attention to the doctrine, and then here in chapter 4, the charge is a solemn testimony, a solemn urging and exhortation. "Timothy, preach the word. Preach the word." Oh and yes, do it with complete patience and teaching, patience with the shortcomings and the provocations of people. But teach the word. That's the priority. You clarify the gospel and you construct Christ-like thinking and affections as you preach the word.

And so, just by way of encouragement, what a joy it is to go through material like this and I barely made it through half of what I had here tonight, but to go through material like this with people who say, "Yeah, that's right. This is God's word. This is exactly what we want." And to do it in a church that has well established the priority of the preaching of the word of God, and to people who have experienced the joy of sitting week after week after week under the preaching of the word of God and watching how God has transformed your life week after week after week. And sometimes we don't see it week after week, do we? Sometimes it's like looking back three months and saying, "Wow. Praise the Lord. He's changing me."

But I say that to set up this this point of application for us. As we seek to carry out Christ's command to make disciples, to teach what Christ commands, we have a wealth, a wealth of material to do that here at TCC. And let me just give you two examples of this. If you go to SermonAudio and you can find Don's messages arranged by sermon series, and there's a series titled "Essential Truth." It's five messages. "Essential Truth." And that series captures the essence of what truth is about, and it captures the foundations of what we encourage and educate people with as they come to want to follow Christ. Five messages: the authority of scripture; the fear of God; the person of Christ; the work of Christ; and repentance. Just think about those for a moment. The authority of scripture, fear of God, the person, the work of Christ, and repentance. Those are essential truths. And as you're here, you probably hear those themes that they keep just kind of circulating through the preaching. They're foundational. They're foundational. And as you pursue Christ and are grounded in the reality that scripture is authoritative, you're grounded in understanding what the fear of God is both for those outside of Christ and those in Christ, you're grounded in the necessity of Christ coming to earth, and you're grounded in his wonderful work of redemption, and you're grounded in what repentance is, and the need to call people to repentance, the need to practice repentance, do you know what happens to you as you're grounded in those essential truths? You're equipped to make disciples. You're equipped to call people to Christ by the authority of Scripture.

And so I say all of that just simply to encourage us and to do what so many of you already do, to take those resources and to let your mind be saturated with the truth that's being proclaimed week after week after week, and know that the scripture is sufficient. The scripture is sufficient as we seek to become the slaves that please Christ, as we seek to offer ourselves as sacrifices for Christ and ultimately have our lives offered and

consecrated in worship to the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the basics of discipleship, and it's a joy, it is a joy to know that following Christ in some ways is so simple. It's as simple as opening the word of God. It's as simple as sitting under the preaching of the word of God and by the Spirit of God submitting myself to the word. Now notice I said simple, not easy, right? There's a difference. There's a difference. But Jesus calls us because all authority is his to go make disciples and he calls us to teach, and we do that by bringing to bear the word of God on the people of God.

So may the Lord give us grace as we continue as a body to carry out Christ's commission, as we continue as a body to engage with one another to build up one another in the faith to the glory of God.

Father, we thank you tonight for the word of God. We thank you for the joy of digging into the scriptures and the sufficiency of this book for life and for godliness. We thank you for your Spirit that enables us to understand and strengthens us to live out what you've given to us to do. And we pray for your grace as we go forth to our callings in this week, that we would carry out all that we do in the name of Christ and for the glory of God. And we pray it in his name. Amen.

Thanks for listening from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, OH. You can find more church information and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com, teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted. All rights reserved.