

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

THE TRUE NATURE OF A DISCIPLE

TRUE GOSPEL, REAL DISCIPLES

THE ONLY PARADIGM

“Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”

MATTHEW 28.19-20 NLT

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Specifically it means to follow his way of life, which we have seen requires the abandonment of our way (repentance) and the internal transforming work of the Holy Spirit represented by baptism. Through that work of rebirth (regeneration), we are brought into union with Christ and his life, and we begin to experience that conflict of following our human sinful nature or taking up the cross-life (crucifying self) to live the way of Christ.

- ▶ “Teach my new followers to obey all the commands that I have given you.” A disciple is a learner, one who is instructed on how to follow. The Apostle Paul wrote: *Christ in you, the hope of glory. . . . is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I labor . . .* COLOSSIANS 1.27-29
As we have also seen, if we are truly born again, we will desire to learn and be instructed—in the same way that a baby instinctively craves the nourishment from his mother’s breast (1 Peter 2.1).
- ▶ What instructions did Jesus give? Comprehensively, that includes all of the teachings of Jesus in the four gospels; representatively, it is the way that Jesus lived and the example that he set for his followers.

I HAVE SET AN EXAMPLE FOR YOU

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

JOHN 13.12-15

- ▶ It’s a dirty world and we need to wash, especially our feet when we come in from the outside—and especially in the sandal-wearing, dung-littered streets of Jesus’ day.
- ▶ Normally, a host would provide water so that his guests could wash their own feet. No Jew ever washed the feet of his peer.

- ▶ As Jesus told Peter, we need our Lord to wash us; we need to be cleansed from our sin, born again, and receive a new spiritually alive nature (see Titus 3.4-6).
- ▶ Jesus went a step further and told his disciples that as their “Lord and Teacher” he was setting an *example* for them.
- ▶ By taking such a menial position, we have an example of the nature of Jesus and of *what* we need to become if we are going to truly follow him—not a “skin-deep” following, but “nature” deep. Hearing him say that “*I, your Lord and Teacher, have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*” reveals to us the radical difference that must characterize us as his followers.

THE NATURE OF JESUS

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made himself nothing

taking the very nature of a slave,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate . . . even his own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”

“Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple.”

“Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

- ▶ In light of our history as a nation and the ugliness of slavery, it is difficult for us to accept for personal application the words that Jesus took on the the nature of a slave (our translators lighten it with “servant”), or to read the instructions of the apostles that slaves were to honor and be subject to their masters in everything.
- ▶ Slavery was a reality in the world of the New Testament. It wasn’t racial-based slavery; it was *conquest-based* slavery. Those conquered became slaves; in the Roman world of the apostles, the doctors, lawyers, educators, and artisans were all slaves who came from the ranks of the conquered.

- ▶ The Apostle Peter wrote to slaves that they should submit to the mistreatment of their masters. Why? Because Jesus left an example that all should follow.
- ▶ Here is an uncomfortable truth: *one cannot follow Christ without taking the nature of a slave*. One cannot follow Christ without turning the other cheek, without keeping silent when verbally abused, without blessing when cursed, without loving one's enemy and doing good to them. Why? Because it is what was revealed in the love of God in sending His Son to die for His enemies; it is what was revealed by Christ as he took the nature of a slave to obey his Father's will and serve the needs of a sinful humanity (God's enemies) even when they demanded his death by crucifixion.

LIVING AS ONE WHO HAS BEEN CONQUERED

Jesus lived as one conquered and died as one conquered.

- ▶ Jesus was conquered by the Father's will; he did only what the Father told him to do and said only what the Father told him to say –and the way in which the Father told him to say it.
- ▶ Although equal with the Father in nature and prerogatives, Jesus set that aside to be *slave-obedient*—a total submission to the Father's will. In love he poured out and expended his life for his enemies: us.

- ▶ To be a disciple of Jesus and follow him is not possible unless we hate our own self-lives, unless we, like Jesus, give up everything of our own (Luke 14.26), including our preferred and self-fulfilling identity (Luke 14.33), and unless we possess the new nature and identity that enables us to live like Christ and unlike anything that resembles ourselves (see Galatians 2.20).
- ▶ The fact is that every single person is a conquered person: a slave. We are either slaves to our human sin nature or we are slaves to the righteous nature of Christ through the indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 6.16-23).

- ▶ We are either gratifying the desires of our sin nature (Ephesians 2.3) or we are putting that nature to death by the ability of the Holy Spirit within us (Romans 8.13).
- ▶ We are either slaves living in the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1.13) and submitted in thought and action to the ruler of the kingdom that opposed God and His will, or we have submitted ourselves to God's truth about our sinfulness and our need to be rescued from our sin-slavery (Colossians 1.13), be conquered by His love and granted pardon for our sin, and receive a new nature and identity that enables us to live the life of a Christ-conquered one.

LIVING THE CHRIST-NATURE

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

COLOSSIANS 3.9-10

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christ-followers at Colossae, we have some of his most important teaching on what it means to be a true Christ-follower: one who has been made alive in Christ and is now able to live according to Christ-nature instead of the sin-nature. The goal is to become more and more like Jesus, "*renewed in knowledge in the image of its (the new self) Creator.*" Here in chapter three, the apostle tells what it looks like for us to live the Christ-nature.

*Do not lie to each other,
since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self,
which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free,
but Christ is all, and is in all.*

- ▶ *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved—*
 - ▶ *Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*
 - ▶ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.*
 - ▶ *Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*
- ▶ *Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*
- ▶ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
since as members of one body you were called to peace.
And be thankful.*

- ▶ We are to live *out of* the new identity that is within us—not out of some other human “earth associated” identity (racial, cultural, socio-economic).
- ▶ We are not to lie to each other; as Christ-followers, we are to accurately represent him as the Truth; we pretend that we aren’t followers of Christ when we follow the way of the sinful nature. When things are said or done in such a way that the distinctions between us and others are made clear—that we are something they aren’t, something more or better—we are lying; the truth is that Christ erased those distinctions; he is all and is in all.

- ▶ “Renewed in knowledge” – what does it mean to be like Jesus in this circumstance, relationship, or conflict? It’s more than “what would Jesus do”—*what* and *who* would Jesus be? He showed us by his example.
- ▶ We are to bear with each other and forgive as Christ has forgiven us. His love keeps no record of wrongs; do we remind someone of what they have done wrong or treat them with less than the grace that God continually extends to us?
- ▶ We are to be thankful for one another, not judgmental or adversarial. Remember: **Jesus calls us to wash one another’s feet, not critique their feet.**