

FELLOWSHIP the body in union

INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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Believers need to be nurtured in order to grow as disciples. When I use the term "church" I always imagine it in quotations because not everyone regards this word the same way. The familiar church-house model where most denominational Christians meet routinely is most commonly thought to be a church. This reference is not the original New Testament model. The term *ekklesia* (ec-cle-si'a) in the original Greek text is translated "Church" throughout the Bible. The connotation of ecclesia is *those called out, the gathered out ones*. We tend to assume that church life in early Christian times is equal to its present day form. However, the form of the 'church' in the days of the apostles was quite unlike modern understanding of familiar religious forms built around a church house.

In ancient times ecclesia was a form of gathering in which members came together to transact a specific kind of business on behalf of a community. In the case of the Christian ecclesia it was and is the business of the heavenly shepherd, Christ Jesus. In this kind of fellowship all members are called to participate actively. In this church body we are called out of the world by the Spirit to be a part of Christ's body, (He, Christ the Messiah, is the head over the church.) All members bring with them unique abilities, gifts or enablements. God's *grace* provides the activation or enablement of those many gifts that are needed for Spiritual fellowship and growth in understanding. (1 Peter 4:11)

The Holy Spirit is the divine personage who brings the gifts or enablements of Grace. We who are *called out* into the Kingdom of God grow and mature, gain experience and develop testimonies in the Kingdom of God. These are our personal 'God Stories.' These testimonies when shared, build faith among those with whom we share. Testimonies are God stories that describe the dynamics of heaven touching us individually. Spiritual gifts are enablements that bear witness of God's presence in day to day experience. Church house religion, all too often deficient in such experience of God in the present.

Among the assertions I want to present in discussions of discipleship is that we as believers after being born of the Spirit, may not only know G-d, but that we all (men, women, boys, or girls) can have a spiritually *empowered* life. The "church" as Jesus Christ established it, was given this provision. But in spite of this provision, both knowing God and developing a spiritual life, is often unrealized in the institutional church. Time, circumstance and unrelenting forces of spiritual resistance (authored by our spiritual adversary) embattle believers, to derail or to side track us from attaining the spiritual life. Human traditions are *instigated instead*. Jesus warned his disciples in Mark 15 to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and also the leaven of Herod, superficial religiosity, and worldliness. Jude, half brother and an apostle of Jesus, writes that we must, " - - earnestly contend for the faith given to us by the apostles.

AN INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP

Disciples, Learning the "Way"

The foundation of the life of Christ begins as we become a disciple of Jesus. Just as he made disciples in the time of his earthly ministry so he continues today. (John 8:21 ; 17:20) Religion has made the life of the Bible remote and impersonal. It has made Peter, James and John or John the Baptist into icons or religious folk heroes. The sense of their being our brothers, sharing the same life of trials and faith has been all but lost. In our minds Bible days were another time, another faith, another kind of application. This is not the case.

Religious tradition places apostles on pedestals and this should not be the case because it is contrary to every apostolic and Christ-uttered teaching. G-d does not show favoritism nor does he show respect of persons.

A short time after the apostolic age, lust for human rulership and impure motives undermined the apostolic foundations. Liberty and spiritual forms of worship began to erode. We are entitled to the same promises and gospel practices that New Testament believers knew.

The Christian life, being Holy Spirit inspired, is not of human authorship nor human tradition. It is the way that I have found to be God inspired, life-changing, fulfilling, and in perfect accord with the Bible.

Discipleship described here is modeled by the saints and apostles in the beginning of this *church age*. Many denominations and religious teachers, attempt to mentor and advise others about the spiritual life. Since there has been a history of promoting religious traditions instead of knowing G-d, it is important that we look to grow in wisdom through the guidance of the *Spirit of Truth*, the *Holy Spirit*.

G-d has told us through the Word (James) that we may ask for wisdom or truth to be revealed to us. He further instructs us to be confident knowing that G-d is willing to give *good gifts* which bring fulfillment and blessings and not sorrows. When seeking the revelations which are **of** G-d and not false we must be fully aware of the risk of error and counterfeit. Deception and false teaching is everywhere. In order to discern the true from the false It is very important to invoke the name of Jesus Christ. His is the *name above every name!* And also know that His Spirit will not lead us into bondage, fear, submission to abusive men, or lawlessness. Meekness, gentleness, compassion and service to others is the right spirit.

The Bible teaches that Jesus' name commands all powers of heaven and earth. It is above the authority of any other god or angel or worldly authority. The word states that at the name of Jeshua, Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess his lordship. It is in His name that we can consecrate any prayer or any request. It is a safeguard and assurance that anything which will be revealed or imparted spiritually will be without deceptive influence. If you ask in Jesus, name *the deceiver* is unlikely to make his intrusion.

Reconciling The Spirit in the Seeker, the Spirit of Him being Sought

The **true Spirit of Christ Jesus is the spirit of love, forgiveness, gentleness, meekness, selflessness, and patience**. It is not tinged with fear, with condemnation, with urgency or panic, It is not contaminated by a lust for personal gain, ownership of another or any desire to control or manipulate another person. Check yourself if you are seeking with motives containing any of the negatives stated above for they are contrary to the nature of the G-d who will insure your being lead into truth.

Receiving True Gifts and not Counterfeit

Jesus instructs us about receiving gifts from G-d, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit. He teaches us that the G-d of heaven gives *good gifts* and not devilish or perverted ones. Christ also characterizes the fact that there are two sources who might affect spiritual results. G-d's gifts are good and true. Let us look at the scripture found in Matthew 7:8-11 and in Luke 11:11-13: These shed light on Spiritual gifts.

"For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." Matt 6:8; "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" :9; "Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?":10; "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" -- :11. The two gifts which are requested are bread and a fish, G-d gives things which are life-giving (bread) and safe (meat of fish). Luke chapter eleven restates the same teaching about asking from G-d the Father with a slightly different emphasis, and includes the gift of the *Holy Spirit* which is the living gift of G-d's power and presence: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?"; "Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" -- Luke 11:11-13

The references to the counterfeit gifts are not just coincidental or random examples they represent the fact that there is a source of the *bad gift*. The enemy is Satan. He does not give good gifts, nor give valid revelations. His gifts are not life giving, they give neither joy, nor health nor liberty. Yet it is possible that he will try to come in unless you exclude him from having any part of the asking and seeking transaction (namely the spiritual search for a spiritual life.) Satan's gift is characterized as a stone instead of bread, as a serpent instead of pure food, a poisonous scorpion instead of an egg. Jesus has portrayed Satan as the deadly counterfeiter who will insinuate himself into the seekers life subtly and at any opportunity. Forewarned is forearmed; for this reason we will need to initiate safe guards and precautions as I suggested above in order to keep the deceiver out of your life. There was a time when our lives were entirely under his (Satan's) control. We may not think that this was the case but the apostle is very clear about it. A couple of apostolic letters bring attention to the nature of the unredeemed life, common to each and every life before that life is renewed *In Christ*.

Paul states in his letter to Ephesus, Chapter 2, verses 2 and 3." - *in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, (Satan) the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; Among whom also we all had our conversation (lifestyle) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*" Paul's letter to Colossae, Chapter 1 verse 21. "*And you, that were sometime before now) alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*" Paul's letter to Corinth, Chapter 1 verses 10 and 11, "*Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of G-d; And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our G-d.*"