

The Credibility in Discipleship

Ephesians 5:1-2; John 13:34-35

We have spent several weeks discussing the importance and need for discipleship. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded us to teach all nations to observe His teachings. In essence, those who follow Christ as His disciples are expected to make other disciples. We are to invest in their lives, sharing the truth of Christ and the Gospel with them.

As I pondered the responsibilities of discipleship, I realized that one must gain the trust of another if discipleship is to be effective. We cannot bear influence on another if that individual lacks trust and respect in us. One of the greatest hindrances to the church is hypocrisy, whether simply perceived or reality. If we are to be effective in discipleship, we must have credibility among those we seek to disciple. Simply, our walk must match our talk. Those we seek to influence must be confident in our sincerity and faith. If the goal is reproduction and multiplication, we must ensure that we are setting the right example to follow.

With these thoughts in mind, I want to examine the [traits](#) disciples should possess as we consider: [The Credibility in Discipleship](#).

I. A Walk of Recognition ([Eph.5:1-2](#)) – In this great chapter, Paul discusses the walk of the believer, the follower of Christ. If we are to have any credibility in discipleship, we must walk in the way of righteousness. Consider:

A. The Admonition (1) – [Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children](#). That seems simple enough, but Paul speaks of great significance here. The word followers literally means to be imitators. We are admonished to imitate the God we serve. That is a very tall order. Time will not permit, nor do we have the ability to comprehend all that He is, but we must strive to imitate our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. [Matt.5:48 – Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect](#). [Lev.19:2 – Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy](#). [2 Cor.3:18 – But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord](#). [1 Pet.1:15 – But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation](#).

- We will never obtain sinless perfection in this life, but we must strive to imitate the Lord we serve. We must seek His holiness each day, denying the flesh, and striving for maturity in Christ. Those whom we invest in are not seeking perfection; but they are seeking sincerity and a genuine desire to maintain a godly life. If we will commit to imitating Christ, we will have credibility in our discipleship efforts!

B. The Expectation (2a) – *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.* Again we find a simple statement with profound implications. Paul does not refer solely to the steps we take as we journey through life, although that is part of it. Our journey must be guided by the Lord, and we must walk in a way that pleases Him. The greater context here speaks of our entire manner of life. Regardless of our location or whoever we encounter, the gracious love of Christ must be evident in our lives. Our lives must consistently show the love of Christ if we are to be an effective witness and make a beneficial impact on others. *1 Tim.4:12 – Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

- Let's look a bit closer at the text. The word translated love is the Greek word *agape*. This is God's eternal, unmerited, unchanging love. It speaks of God doing what is best for us, even when it is not necessarily what we desire. It is in essence, perfect love. This provides valuable insight to discipleship. You don't always have to agree with someone to love them. Genuine love will provide a gracious rebuke when necessary. It seeks maturity and eternal benefit in the relationship more than immediate comfort.

- We are to walk in love as Christ loved us. Think about that for a moment. His love is sacrificial, giving Himself for the need of others. His love is without boundaries. It is not limited to those who are familiar, kind, or even receptive. The love of Christ is extended to all people. He loved us when we were unlovable. He became sin so that we could be forgiven of sin. He endured the righteous judgment of God in our place. We were guilty, deserving of wrath, and He endured our punishment for us! If we will determine to live our lives in love as Christ loved, we will have the credibility we need to gain the respect of others. In loving them as Christ does, we will have the ability to overlook their faults and failures as we strive to lead them into a greater knowledge of Christ.

C. The Expression (2b) – *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.* As we discussed, the love of Christ has no bounds. He offered Himself a sacrifice to God in order to obtain our redemption. Love directed the life of Christ. Love led Him to the cross of Calvary. Love compelled Him to surrender completely to the Father's will for our salvation. Love caused Christ to place the great need of humanity above His own. Surely His flesh did not look forward to the suffering of the cross, but He endured it with great joy, knowing it would provide our salvation and reconciliation to God. *Heb.12:2 – Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

- This sacrificial life, motivated by love, was a sweet smelling fragrance to God. He was well pleased with the obedience of the Son. When we walk in love, as Christ loves, our lives also please God. If our lives are pleasing to the Lord, we have the assurance of His guidance and

blessing. We need not fear striving in our own abilities. We have the presence and power of the Spirit working in us. God will honor those who are willing to offer themselves in service to Him. Remember, when we abide in the Vine, we possess the ability to produce much fruit.

- If we are to have any credibility among those we seek to disciple, we must maintain a walk of recognition. They will easily spot a hypocrite or counterfeit. We must be genuine in our walk if we are to have an effective witness!

II. A Witness to Redemption (John 13:34-35) – Here Jesus reveals a command to follow, which in turn will bear witness to our faith. In order to possess credibility in discipleship, one must have a credible testimony that reveals the transformation that has taken place in Christ. The greatest witness to a changed life in Christ is unconditional love. Consider:

A. The Expectation (34a) – *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another.* As Jesus spoke with His disciples in the Upper Room, He revealed the commandment to love one another. Knowing He would soon die on the cross, and ascend back to the Father, in His absence, their love for one another would be imperative. This was not a suggestion to consider, but a command to obey.

- As in our text in Ephesians, Jesus also speaks of agape love, that supreme, sacrificial love that He possesses and shows. We too are expected to love one another. This should go without saying, but I know we need to be reminded. One major reason discipleship is lacking in the church is due to a lack of love. We cannot properly disciple those we do not genuinely love; and we will be compelled to disciple those we do love. If you have a heart for discipleship, seek the Lord to increase your love for others! I assure you that your efforts will be more successful.

B. The Example (34b) – *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.* At this moment, the disciples could not possibly have grasped the enormity of what Jesus just said. He had yet to bear their sin on Calvary. He had yet to purchase their redemption, but He would be faithful to the cross. His love would lead Him to offer Himself the atoning sacrifice for sin, although He knew these men personally. He knew their faults and failures. He knew Peter would deny Him; He knew Thomas would doubt. He knew they all would continue to struggle with their faith, and fail Him at times. Yet He loved them enough to die in their place. He loved humanity enough to die for each of us!

- As I ponder the enormity of this command, I am both convicted and humbled. I honestly love others, but do I love as Christ loved? Am I willing to pay any price, bear any burden for the

benefit of others? In order to be effective in discipleship, reaching others for Christ, I must be willing to love as He loved. We all must strive to love as he loved!

C. The Exposure (35) – *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* Jesus knew the adversity they would soon face. He knew they would be greatly persecuted for their faith. They would be reviled, ridiculed, and abused. The world would be skeptical of them and their message. They would look for any and every reason to discount their message and faith. Jesus knew their love would have the ability to silence the critics and win the doubters. Love cannot be ignored or argued. When one shows love, even when it is believed to be undeserved, that bears an undeniable testimony!

- This passage spoke greatly to me. What is the key to effective discipleship? How do we win the unbeliever and strengthen the weak? How do we reach the world for Christ? It is very simple: we love as Christ loved. The world can argue about a lot of things, but they cannot argue genuine love. They may question our wisdom, our ability, and even our motives; but they will never be able to question our love. If you want to make a positive impact in your circle of influence, seek the Lord to increase your love for others. I am convinced, if we would make this a priority in our lives, we would notice an immediate difference at Fellowship!

Conclusion: I have no doubt the Spirit has spoken to hearts today. I do not question your walk with the Lord or your love for others; I will leave that to the Spirit. However, I am convinced that none of us have arrived spiritually. There is always room for improvement. Has the Spirit dealt with you regarding your walk before others? Has He spoken of your need to love others more than you currently do? If so, come before the Lord and confess your need. He already knows, and He wants to meet your need.

If you are unsaved, I trust you realize the great love Christ has for you. He loved you enough to die in your place, bearing your sin and judgment. He has already provided the means of your salvation. Come to Him and receive salvation that is only available through Him!