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*Jesus commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples," Matthew 28:18-20. In much of today's Christianity, that Great Commission is the Great Confusion or simply the Great Omission. Most believers are not disciples. And discipling is often missing in today's church. The PDFs on this site explain the difference between being a disciple and being just a believer. Expect to be Biblically provoked and challenged! Are you a disciple or just a believer?*

**I. Disciple or Believer.** The terms disciple and believer are not synonymous. There is a Biblical difference. Too many Christians have settled for being just believers. Are you one of them? Are you a disciple or just a believer? This can be a life-changing question. *Pages 2 - 6*

**II. Measuring Success.** What is the Biblical measure of success in ministry? It isn't in bricks and sticks or in budgets and buildings. What solid building blocks are used by the Master Builder? *Pages 7 - 9*

**III. Are New Believers Disciples?** Does the Bible, as in Acts 14:20-22, use the terms believer and disciple interchangeably? The answer is embedded in the Bible ... not infused into it. We can make a disciple. However, we cannot make a believer. *Pages 10 - 11*

**IV. Once a Disciple Always a Disciple?** Once saved always saved is true. However, it is not true that once a disciple always a disciple. Being saved is solely based on His sacrifice and His work. Being a disciple is based on our continuing sacrifice and our continuing work. *Pages 12 - 13*

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**VIII. A Boat or a Boathouse.** This fascinating analogy shows how too many Christians are boathouse-centric rather than boat-centric. Has your boathouse hijacked your boat? Are you so boathouse-centric that you are missing the boat? *Pages 26 - 29*

**IX. The Strengths and Limits of the Pulpit.** A strong pulpit is a valuable asset. However, it is self-limiting. The medium can subjugate the propagation of the message ... and can become the message. *Pages 30 - 34*

**X. We are sinking.** The great ship of the Western church has hit an iceberg in the cold oceans of mediocrity. She is drifting, taking on water, and listing to starboard. When you look into the mirror of the Word, do you see that we are sinking? *Page 35*

**XI. What's in it for me?** What are the risks and rewards of being a disciple and not settling for being just a believer? What is the cost that Jesus told us to count? And why should you pay it? *Page 36-38*

**XII. A Second Decision.** Romans 12:1's command to be a living sacrifice is often misunderstood and misapplied. It is crucially important that you present yourself once-and-for-all-time on the altar. *Page 39-40*

**Addendum. Our Changing Taste for the Timeless Word.** Unfortunately, we prefer the pre-processed food of some translations and paraphrases over the pure milk and strong meat of the timeless Word. *Pages 41-42*



## I. Disciple or Believer

**Are you a disciple or just a believer?** That may be a life-changing question for you. Too many Christians have settled for being just believers. They have plateaued at a lower level than Jesus intended when He gave the Great Commission to *“Go therefore and make disciples ... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,”* Matthew 28:19-20. Too many Christians have spiritual development that falls significantly short of their chronological spiritual age. In simple terms, time has passed but they have not grown up. This is not new. The author of Hebrews wrote, *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant ... therefore leaving the elementary teaching ... let us press on to maturity,”* Hebrews 5:12 - 6:1. Too many Christians are not spiritually mature. Many could not even define the attributes of spiritual maturity. The purpose of Acts One Eight is neither to document this problem nor to criticize and condemn. Its purpose is to equip believers to press on to maturity ... to grow up into disciples and disciplemakers.

**Do you know the differences between a disciple and a believer?** You may think that those terms are synonymous. However, they are not synonymous. Jesus made that perfectly clear. Every disciple is a believer. However, not every believer is a disciple. It is too simplistic to think that a disciple is just a more serious version of a believer. A disciple is more than a believer with the contrast, brightness, and volume turned up. It is true that disciples, when compared to believers, are more disciplined in their Bible study, prayer, witnessing, non-conformity to the world, giving to the work of God, and other aspects of their walk with God. However, it is much more than that. God's Word gives us these four distinctions of a disciple: (1) abiding in the Word, (2) loving other disciples, (3) bearing fruit, and (4) paying the price to follow Jesus.

**Distinction 1: Abiding in His Word, John 8:31-32.** Jesus declared that abiding in His Word is a primary requirement for being His disciple. His words, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,”* John 8:32, is often taken out of context for use in evangelism. That verse is not about salvation. It is about being a disciple. Look at the context. John 8:30 states, *“many came to believe in Him.”* Then Jesus spoke directly to believers rather than to the unsaved. He spoke *“to those Jews who had believed Him,”* and He said to them, *“if you continue in (abide in) My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,”* John 8:31-32. Abiding is much more than visiting His Word once a week or even once a day. It is living in, being rooted in, His Word. You must know and live in His Word to be His disciple. A Christian who does not know and abide in His word is just a believer. Do you really know His Word?

Is your life rooted in His Word? Do you abide in His Word or are you just a visitor? Make the commitment to know His Word and to abide in His Word.

**Distinction 2: Loving one another, John 13:35.** This is another essential requirement for being His disciple. Jesus said, "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,*" John 13:35. The word translated in that verse as love is the word for unconditional love in Greek. It is the word *agape* rather than the word *phileo*. The word *phileo* indicates the brotherly love or friendship. *Agape* love brings with it unlimited co-liability. Friendship does not go as far as unlimited co-liability. Disciples truly love one another in deed and in truth. They consider each other more important than themselves. That level of love, exemplified by Jesus, openly identifies them in the world as His disciples. However, too many Christians love one another in word but not in deed. *Agape* love is more than meeting together in rows in a church sanctuary or in a classroom circle. It is more than meeting together in a home as part of a small group. Jesus prayed that His disciples would be one as He and the Father are one and that they might be one so that the world might know that the Father sent Him into the world, John 17:11, 21-23. That oneness comes from *agape* love. It comes from the distinctive love that disciples have for one another in lives connected to each other in a community of disciples. Jesus said, "*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you,*" John 15:12-14.

**Distinction 3: Bearing fruit, John 15:8.** This is a primary requirement for becoming and being His disciple. Simply stated, a disciple bears fruit. A fruitless disciple is a contradiction of terms. A fruitless Christian is just a believer. Jesus said, "*By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples,*" John 15:8. The word translated from Greek as "prove" in that verse means more than to appear as ... it means to become, to come into existence, to begin to be, or to be made. An appropriate translation of that verse could be, "*By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so become My disciples.*" What is the fruit? From the context of John 15, the fruit includes the new believers and disciples that are produced through our lives. Jesus said in John 15 that we are to bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit, and fruit that remains. Galatians 5:19-25 describes the fruit of the Spirit rather than the fruit of the believer. Galatians 5 describes the personality characteristics of the Spirit manifested in the believer's life as he or she lives by and walks in the Spirit. The fruit of John 15 is the fruit of the believer (the branch) abiding in Jesus (the vine). The branch abiding in the vine and bearing fruit is the believer becoming His disciple. The Apostle Paul was eager to preach the Gospel in Rome being under obligation, eager, and not ashamed. He desired to bear fruit among them, Romans 1:13-17. Are you driven like Paul? Do you desire that lost people come to the Savior through you? Do you want to be part of the fruit-bearing process? Do you want to bear much fruit, and so become His disciple? By bearing fruit, you can become and be His disciple.

**Distinction 4: Following Him at great cost, Luke 14:25-35.** Believers come to Jesus. Disciples then follow after Him. The cost for someone to come to Jesus (become a believer) was fully paid by Jesus. The cost for following after Jesus (being His disciple) is paid by the one who follows. It is costly to follow Jesus. It is costly to be His disciple. Paying the price is a requirement for His disciples. Jesus defined the cost in Luke 14:25-33. In the first three verses, we see two types of peo-

ple among those who were going along with Him ... those who come to Him, and those who could come after Him (i.e. if they follow Him). Disciples do more than come to Him. They follow after Him. They pay the price to follow the One who paid the ultimate price for them.

**The cost in relationships.** The first cost is stated in verses 25-26 as, *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."* Sometimes the word "hate" in the Bible means hate in the literal sense. However, in many Bible occurrences, it means strong preference or choice. That latter usage is in Genesis 29:30-31 where a preference is clearly stated about Jacob's love as, *"he loved Rachel more than Leah."* Then Jacob's lesser love is referred to as hate in the literal words of verse 31, "the Lord saw that Leah was unloved" (i.e. hated in Hebrew). A father who disciplines his son loves him more than a father who does not discipline his son. *"He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently,"* Proverbs 13:24. In describing God's choice of Jacob over Esau, the same comparative use of the word hate is used. *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,"* Romans 9:13. Jesus used such a comparison in saying, *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me,"* Matthew 10:37. Jesus made it clear that His disciples must put Him first above their own families or they cannot be His disciples. There must be such a disparity between our love for Him and our love for those in our families that our love for them seems relatively like hate. When a legitimate choice between family and Jesus must be made, a disciple chooses Jesus. Be encouraged by His promise, *"Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life,"* Luke 18:29-30.

**The self-cost.** Jesus stated that disciples must put Him above themselves, Luke 14:26. They must love Him so much more than they love themselves, that their love of self could be described as hate. This self-denial is an integral part of a disciple's life, Acts 20:24, Revelation 12:11. Jesus said, *"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple,"* Luke 14:27. Carrying one's cross is more than bearing some moderately difficult burden through life as the phrase can mean in common usage. The seriousness of carrying one's cross is seen in the example of Jesus carrying His cross on the way to Golgotha. Jesus despised its shame, Hebrews 12:2. Six trials had exhausted Him. He was weakened by His tormenters' abuse ... beaten, whipped, and with thorns driven into His scalp. He struggled carrying the heavy cross through the narrow streets and mocking crowd ... stumbling under its weight. Most of us will probably not carry a literal cross as Jesus did. However, carrying your cross, as His disciple, will involve your own version of His humiliation, shame, reproach, and suffering, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Hebrews 13:13. To carry your own cross is to be treated as He was treated ... to suffer in self-denial as He suffered. Without carrying your own cross, you cannot be His disciple. Are you carrying your cross? Are you willing to carry your cross?

**A costly decision.** Notice the emphatic negative exclusion "*cannot be My disciple*" used in both Luke 14:26 and 27 of the one who will not pay the price to follow Him. This strict requirement does not exclude someone from being saved ... but definitely excludes the uncommitted one from being His disciple. Jesus gave two illustrations of making a costly decision ... one of a man building a tower and one of a king going to war. The life of the Christian is like that ... building on the foundation of salvation ... and going to battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The tower-builder illustration is of a man who should decide before starting if he has enough to complete the project. "*For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish,'*" Luke 14:28-30. Every believer who desires to become a disciple needs first to decide about paying the price to complete the project. That decision is a Romans 12:1 type of commitment. A believer who does not become a disciple is an unfinished tower. Many Christians are mocked and ridiculed. Much of that is legitimate persecution ... the world's persecution of Jesus through them. However, some of it may be because they are unfinished towers ... and all who observe them begin to ridicule them, saying, "*They began to build and were unable to finish.*" The second illustration is that of a king going to war against an enemy outnumbering his own army by a 2-to-1 advantage. "*Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace,*" Luke 14:31-32. That king should first decide if he is strong enough to win. David went to war against the humanly bigger and stronger Goliath. The fearful army of Israel would not fight. Nevertheless, David decided that he could win because he was on the side of the living God. If the Luke 14 king decides that he cannot win, he should send a delegation to ask for terms of peace. In reality, that is no more than surrender. That is the picture of too many believers today ... surrendering to the enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. They compromise with the enemy for terms of peace ... they surrender. Jesus used the tower builder and the king as illustrations for our need to make a second decision ... a decision to pay the full price of following after Him as His disciples. The need for a second decision (after the first decision of salvation) is of foremost importance for a believer who wants to be a disciple. Believers who aspire to be disciples need to offer a one-time decisive sacrifice of themselves as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God, Romans 12:1. Then they can press on to pay the full price to complete their tower ... to press on to victory in the war.

**A disciple's open hand.** Jesus continued to explain the cost as, "*So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions,*" Luke 14:33. Some believers misinterpret Luke 14:33 because the world has conformed them to think materialistically. What are your most prized human possessions? If your answer includes house, car, boat, jewelry, wide-screen TV, computer, or smart phone, then you have been conformed to this world. Your most prized human possessions include your family relationships ... those Jesus said you must renounce to be His disciple. Your own life is a prized human possession ... one that Jesus said you must renounce

to be His disciple. Additionally, a life of personal peace (without humiliation, shame, and suffering) is a prized human possession ... one that you must renounce when you take up your cross to follow Him. Actually, the words for "*his own possessions*" do not appear in the Greek of Luke 14:33. Translators added those three words for clarity ... but conformity to the world blurs their meaning of possessions. That verse might be clearer if you disregard those three words. In addition, in that verse, the words translated as *give up* do not mean *give away* ... but rather mean *renounce your claim to* ... i.e., *transfer title and ownership to God*. Verse 33 could be accurately paraphrased as, "none of you can be my disciple who does not renounce all claims to human relationships, self, and possessions." All that you hold dear must be laid on His altar if you want to be His disciple. Do not clutch those people, your life, or anything else in your fist. Place all that you hold dear on His altar with an open hand. If He takes it away, that is fine. If He leaves it (or part of it) in your open hand, that is fine too. Be a good steward of what He leaves there. Know that you have it all on loan, in your open hand, for His glory.

**What will you decide to be?** Every believer must choose what to do about being a disciple. There is a high price associated with following after Him ... with becoming and being His disciple. Paying the price begins with a second decision after salvation to finish the tower ... a decision to win the war. Individually, each believer should sit down or get on his or her knees ... and decide. What about you? Will you pay the price to become His disciple? Are you willing to finish building your tower? Are you committed to win when humanly outnumbered by the world, the flesh, and the devil? Will you truly abide in His Word, love other disciples, and bear fruit? Will you put Him first above all others ... and above yourself? Will you renounce all for Him? All believers should make a one-time Romans 12:1 sacrifice ... putting themselves unconditionally and irreversibly on His altar. Do not settle for being just a believer. Jesus calls every believer to press on to be His disciple. That includes you. Make the commitment to become and be His disciple.

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## II. Measuring Success

**What measures success?** What is the measure of success for ministry? It is the same in your personal ministry as it is in any part of today's corporate church. Success must not be measured by the worldly standards of popularity, headcount, budgets, attendance records, membership roles, buildings, circulation, Web site hits, or downloaded gigabytes of Bible teaching. Conformity to the Word, rather than to the world, gives us the standard. The standard is, *"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ ... we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ"*, Ephesians 4:11-16. Success is achieved as the Body grows up ... not just grows out. Numbers are important as seen in the early church, Acts 2:41 and 4:4. We must not ignore numbers. However, quantity alone generates neither enduring quality nor enduring growth. True success is measured by quality before quantity. It is interesting to note that none of the seven churches of the first chapters of Revelation were criticized quantitatively ... not for low attendance, not for meager budgets, and not for inadequate square footage. All the criticisms directed toward them were qualitative. Quality produces the meaningful numbers associated with enduring growth. Success is achieved as the Body grows up to match the Head.

**His blueprint for growth.** Jesus initiated His plan to reach the world through quality rather than, or at least before, quantity. He equipped eleven men to be His disciples ... equipped them for the work of service. Large numbers were attracted to Jesus. However, multitudes were not His methodology. Thousands followed Jesus when He performed miracles as in John 6. They even followed Him across the Sea of Galilee after a free meal. However, when He taught of the deeper things, many of that multitude withdrew from following Him. Jesus was not taken off His plan when they left. He did not call them back in desperation. Instead, He turned to the twelve and asked if they too wanted to leave, John 6:66-67. It was not the quantity of followers that was most important to Him ... it was the quality. A small number of dedicated followers were better than a multitude of the uncommitted. Numbers did come later ... but only on the firm foundation of committed and equipped disciples. That was His blueprint for growth.

**Building the house of God.** In a large stone structure, the foundation's cornerstone should be the strongest. The rest of the foundation needs to be strong as well. Strong granite is much better than mudstone shale. The next courses of wall stones, layered one upon another, can stand securely for generations on such a strong foundation. Layer after layer, granite continues to be a wiser choice than shale. We, as believers, are the house of God. *"Christ was faithful as a Son over His house - whose house we are,"* Hebrews 3:6. We are His house. Jesus is the cornerstone ... and the apostles and prophets are the rest of the foundation, Ephesians 2:19-20. Believers are the living wall-stones, I Peter 2:4-5, laid course after course upon the foundation. As the building

project continues, the stones of each layer must be solid and strong for continued and enduring growth. Numerical growth in the Body has increased in many parts of the world. However, it has slowed and faltered in quality in the past decades. There is an appearance of growth and success. However, in reality even quantitative growth has flattened out. Creative efforts to bring more to the Savior have fallen short. Quality control has faltered as well. The stones are weaker today than they were before. Those claiming to be born again are less knowledgeable of the Bible, have weaker beliefs in Christianity's core truths, and are less committed to the Savior than those of a few decades ago. Too many are more shale-like than granite-like. Beautiful new edifices, large auditoriums, and sprawling church campuses accommodate the multitudes of believers relocating to bigger assemblies. However, true construction on the house of God is suffering. What blueprint for Body growth should be followed throughout the world? It is time to prioritize the quality of the building materials over the quantity of them. It is time to refocus on His blueprint for growth. Large organizations, packed stadium rallies, and sprawling structures can be wonderful and effective tools. Nevertheless, His true building project falters when the focus shifts from living stones to either organizational or physical structures.

**The history of success.** The crowds marveled as Peter and John spoke with confidence, Acts 4:13. These two were uneducated men by the world's measure. However, Jesus said, *"Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher,"* Luke 6:40. They were His disciples. He had been their teacher. Many other great disciples stand out in the early Church. Paul is certainly one of those ... as are Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Luke, Tabitha, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos. Others from Romans 16 include Phoebe, Mary, Andronicus, Junius, Urbanus, Julia, Nerijs, Gaius, and Quartus. Others stand out through the centuries ... Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Augustine ... Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Tyndale ... Bunyan, the Wesleys, Edwards, Brainerd, and Carey ... Tozer, Carmichael, Moody, Lewis, Elliot, Chafer, Chambers, ten Boom, Stott, and the Schaeffers. These men and women were strong living stones built into the walls of the house of God. The measuring rod of Church success is etched with their names. Most Christians recognize many of their names as significant successes in Church history. However, few could name the specific ministries, churches, or organizations through which they served. That is because the history of the success of the Body is composed of the stories of real people rather than the stories of edifices, programs, and organizations. The history of the Church is the story of strong living stones being built into a dwelling place for God.

**Disciples or believers?** Disciples are not just believers with their intensity and volume cranked up. Believers come to Jesus for salvation. Disciples are those who also pay the high price to follow Him. The New Testament gives these four important distinctions of a disciple: (1) disciples know, are rooted in and set free by the Word, John 8:30-32 ... and (2) disciples love one another with the unconditional co-liability of agape love rather than just the phileo love of friendship, John 13:35 ... and (3) disciples bear fruit, i.e. proving themselves to be (i.e. "becoming") disciples by bringing others to the Savior, John 15:8 ... and (4) disciples pay the high price of putting Jesus first above all relationships, above themselves, above all that they might hold dear, Luke 14:25-33. They have unconditionally presented themselves to God as living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices, as commanded in Romans 12:1 ... wholly submitted and holy sacrificed. All disciples are believers. However, not all believers are disciples. The Body and the lost world need more disciples.



**Working in the quarry.** How is success measured? Success is measured in disciples ... in those adequately prepared and presented to God in an open hand for His use. It is time to produce more stones for the Master Builder. Success throughout today's Body, is measured by strength rather than size ... by depth rather than breadth ... by obedience rather than attendance ... by commitment rather than membership ... in granite rather than shale ... in disciples rather than believers. Jesus has given us our Great Commission. He said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*", Matthew 28:18 -20. It is time to make disciples ... to add more strong living stones to the house of God.

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### III. Are New Believers Disciples?

*"But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'" Acts 14:20-22*

Does the Bible teach, or imply, in this passage that new believers may be called disciples? No. The answer is a resounding *no*. Answering yes contradicts other New Testament passages, promotes a works Gospel rather than a grace Gospel, makes unfounded assumptions about the elapsed time in the passage, and reads into it for-drawn conclusions.

**Other New Testament passages.** Four New Testament passages present Christ's definition of a disciple. His definition of a disciple is much different from the Biblical definition of a believer. His requirements for a believer being His disciple are abiding in His Word, loving fellow disciples, bearing fruit, and paying the daily price to follow Him. This is more fully developed in the Acts One Eight lessons *Disciple or Believer* and *Once a Disciple Always a Disciple?* In those lessons, it is clearly shown that there is a significant difference between a believer and a disciple. Every disciple is a believer. However, not every believer is a disciple.

**A believer by faith ... but a disciple by works.** A publication from a discipling ministry states that, "the term *disciple* is broad, including all of Christ's followers, from new Christians (Acts 14:21) to mature believers (Acts 16:1)." A cursory reading of that quote could cause someone to infer that new believers can be disciples. I am not sure what the author meant by his initial qualifier, "all of Christ's followers". Does he mean all believers ... or all followers? Believers come to Jesus ... disciples also follow Jesus. Becoming a believer is based on faith not works, Ephesians 2:8-9. Following Jesus is a work that a believer does in also being His disciple. One does not become a believer by works. And a believer does not become a disciple without works. Once a person is saved that is permanent. Once saved, always saved. However, the Bible does not allow us to say that *once a disciple, always a disciple*. Many disciples ceased following Jesus after His Bread of Life teaching, John 6:66. Therefore, to equate the terms *believer* and *disciple*, one must hold the false opinion that one can be saved by works and that a believer can lose salvation. However, that is unbiblical. Disciples are Christ's followers attaining His stated standards. How could new believers attain those high standards while still in their newness? Believers mature over time into being

disciples through abiding in the Word, loving other disciples, bearing fruit, and putting Christ above all. That certainly does not describe the attributes and disciplines of new believers.

**Unfounded calendar assumptions.** We must properly interpret Acts 14:21. We are not told how long Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe. We are told that they were there long enough to declare the Gospel to the city. Was it a week ... a month ... a year? We are not told. We must not assume anything about Paul and Barnabas' Derbe calendar. The book of Acts highlights history covering about 28 years, 64 geographic locations, and travels of over 8,000 miles (greater than the distance from Los Angeles to London). In the book of Acts, on average, there are only 36 verses per year ... just under two words per day. We must not fill in the time gaps by means of our imaginations. Nevertheless, let us imagine that they stayed in Derbe for twenty weeks and taught the new believers 10 hours per week (less time than you might spend watching TV or surfing the Internet). That would mean that they taught a total of 200 hours ... equivalent to 400 half-hour Sunday morning messages (eight years worth). I would guess that Paul could have made some disciples in that setting. However, I am imagining that scenario ... something I should not do anymore than I should be assuming they were there a short time.

**We cannot make believers.** They *made a considerable number of disciples* there. The Greek word translated as “*considerable*” could be translated as *sufficient* or *adequate* as it is in some other places in the New Testament. I wonder what Luke meant when he wrote that verse. The verse states that they *made disciples* (the same singular Greek word used in the Great Commission to *make disciples*). We cannot make believers ... only God can do that. We do not save anyone ... only God does. Therefore, we must conclude that Paul and Barnabas did not make new believers ... but rather, they made disciples out of new believers. We cannot use this passage to conclude that the Bible includes *new believers* in the term *disciples*.

**Reading truth into a passage or reading truth out of a passage.** The varying interpretations of Acts 14:21 offer a good illustration of how not to read into a verse what we want it to say. We must read God's truth out of a passage rather than read our truth into it. That is equally true for translators of the Bible. If translators of a particular translation are of the false opinion that the terms *believer* and *disciple* are synonymous, they might inaccurately translate this passage as some form of *winning disciples* or *making converts* ... neither being consistent with the Greek ... and neither being possible. You make a disciple ... you do not win one. Moreover, you do not make a convert ... God does. The Greek text states specifically that they *made disciples*. If your translation does not accurately translate this passage as *made disciples*, it might be time to get an accurate, more literal translation.

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## IV. Once a Disciple Always a Disciple?

*"Many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." John 6:66*

**Once saved always saved?** Yes! The Bible is clear that we cannot lose our salvation. There are no good works by which we can earn salvation. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast,"* Ephesians 2:8-9. There is nothing we can do to gain or lose salvation. The good works of not doing bad works cannot save us or keep us saved. Jesus said that no one comes to the Father, but through Him, John 14:6. We cannot get to the Father through ourselves. Jesus promised that He would not cast out the ones who come to Him, John 6:37. He promised that, based on the strength of the Father, no one can snatch us out of His hand, John 10:27-30. In our finite strength, we cannot pull ourselves out of the hand of the infinitely powerful God. We are not holding on to Him. He is holding onto us. Nothing and no one (not even us) can separate us from His love, Romans 8:35-39. When we have believed, we have eternal life as our present possession ... and then we will never face a salvation judgment and we have already passed out of death into life, John 5:24. Saving faith is not a work that saves you anymore than stepping out of a doomed airplane at 5,000 feet saves you. It is the parachute alone that saves you when you step out of that plane. Your stepping out in faith does not save you ... it allows the parachute to save you. Moreover, frantically flapping your arms like a bird as the parachute carries you to safety adds nothing to your salvation. Once saved always saved!

**A confusion of terms.** *Disciple* and *believer* are not synonyms. Every disciple is a believer. However, not every believer is a disciple. Jesus told Jews who had believed, *"If you continue (abide) in My Word, you are truly disciples of Mine,"* John 8:31-32. Jesus made the state of being His disciple conditioned on continually abiding (being rooted in) His Word. That is not a continuum of good works that earns or keeps our salvation. It is a continuing condition for being His disciple. In addition, Luke 14:25-35 contains more conditions for being His disciple. Jesus stated there that we cannot be His disciples if we do not put Him above all relationships, if we do not put Him above ourselves, if we do not carry our cross, and if we are not willing to give up all for Him. Those good works are not requirements for being saved. These are the requirements for being, and continuing to be, His disciples.

**Whose sacrifice and whose work is it?** Salvation is solely based on the sacrifice of Christ. His work on the cross fully paid for our sin. Nothing is lacking in His payment. Our good works add nothing to His payment ... or His payment would have to have been insufficient. However, being His disciple is different. We must be believers to be His disciples. Therefore, His work and sacri-

fice continues to be the only foundation for our salvation. However, being His disciple is based on our work and our sacrifice. Being His disciples neither saves us nor keeps us saved ... but being disciples and making disciples is the goal He set forth in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

**Multiple uses of the term *disciple*.** In heavily persecuted parts of the world, most believers are disciples because they understand the price they must pay by becoming Christian. The terms *disciple* and *believer* could almost be used interchangeably in those places. However, there are other uses of the term *disciple*. Generally speaking, a disciple is more than a casual student of a particular teacher. A disciple is a person who accepts and propagates the teaching of that leader. Many Rabbis in the day of Jesus had disciples, Mark 2:18. Even John the Baptist had disciples, Matthew 9:14, Luke 5:33 & 7:18. In that era, most disciples chose the Rabbi, teacher, or philosopher whom they would follow. Jesus reversed that by choosing His twelve Disciples. That is important because the Twelve (minus Judas, plus Paul) were to become much more than normal disciples ... more than student-followers of Jesus. They were to become His Apostles. They would have a special place in foundation of the household of God, Ephesians 2:19-22. The Gospels' model of His training of the Twelve is more a model of Apostle-making than it is simply a model of discipling. It takes more to make an Apostle than it does to make a disciple. However, His training them demonstrates many principles of discipling. The Twelve were His disciples ... and identified frequently as such in retrospect by the Gospel authors. However, Jesus did not refer to them as His disciples until doing so indirectly on the day before His crucifixion, Matthew 26:18, Mark 14:14, and Luke 22:11. His twelve disciples became the Apostles. Jesus had many other disciples ... i.e., committed and semi-committed student-followers. After Jesus fed the 5,000 (John 6), He stated that He was the living bread that came down out of heaven. "*As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore,*" John 6:66. They were other disciples ... not the Twelve. Possibly, they were just disciples in the terms of His day ... semi-serious student-followers trying to learn from Rabbi Jesus. Then when His teaching got more demanding, they left. They may not have even been believers. However, it seems likely that they were believers who ceased to be disciples. His bread of life message was very unnerving to them. They refused to continue in His Word. They rejected it. They refused to continue to pay the Luke 14 price. Therefore, they withdrew from following Him. They ceased to be His disciples.

**Once a disciple not always a disciple.** *Once saved always saved* is a Biblical fact. However, continuing as His disciples is based on our continuing work and sacrifice. Being His disciple is not some elitist position in the Body of Christ. It is not a position near the top of the organizational chart of the Kingdom of Heaven. Turn that chart upside down. Being His disciple is near the bottom ... nearest to Christ. It is a demanding life of service and total submission to Him and to His Word.

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## V. The Attributes and Disciplines of a Disciple

*"Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit." Jeremiah 17:5-8*

Attributes are intrinsic qualities or characteristics. Disciplines are codes of conduct or patterns of behavior. The following attributes and disciplines prescriptively and descriptively portray the being and behavior of a disciple of Jesus Christ. These are presented in an order that is not entirely random ... however, the order is not one of prioritized importance. The Bible passages quoted and referenced are a mirror for self-analysis, challenge, and correction if needed, James 1:23-24 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. These attributes and disciplines set a very high standard for one who aspires to be a disciple ... a high goal to be actively and intentionally pursued. *"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,"* Philippians 3:12-14. Disciplines steadfastly practiced become attributes ... conduct slowly morphing into character.

**1. Worshipping the Lord.** Proper worship is appropriately reverent and cautiously joyous. *"Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling,"* Psalm 2:11. Worship is humbly deferential. *"Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,"* Psalm 95:6. *"I will give thanks to the Lord according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High,"* Psalm 7:17. Worship is much more than singing a few songs once or twice a week. Worship is a vital and daily part of a disciple's life.

**2. Continuing in prayer.** A disciple has continuing communication with God. *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus,"* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God,"* Philippians 4:6. A lack of prayer or a de-emphasis of prayer demonstrates self-reliance and pride.

**3. Being a disciple and making disciples.** Jesus said, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,"* Matthew 28:18-20. Paul wrote, *"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,"* 2 Timothy 2:2. It was truth transferred by Paul to Timothy ... then by Timothy to faithful men ... and then by those faithful men to others also. A disciple is in this kind of multigenerational discipling chain. Seek a Paul in your life who can say, *"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ,"* 1 Corinthians 11:1. Then, as a Paul-mentored Timothy, seek teachable faithful men who can teach others also. A Timothy becomes a Paul to his faithful men ... continuing the chain. Believers come to Jesus in faith. Disciples follow Him in faith. Do not settle for being just a believer. Be a disciple and a discipler.

**4. Esteeming and obeying the Word.** A disciple knows that the Word is God-breathed ... that it is the voice of God, 2 Timothy 3:16. A disciple knows that it is truth, John 17:17 ... knows that it is pure, Psalm 12:6 & 19:7-8 ... and knows it does not wither with age, Isaiah 40:8. A disciple knows that the Word is powerful and piercing, Hebrews 4:12. A disciple's immediate decisions and life's path are defined by the Word, Psalm 119:105 & Proverbs 6:23. There is freedom in obedience to the Word. Jesus said, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free ... truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin,"* John 8:31-34. Obedience causes and cultivates intimacy with God. *"The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us,"* 1 John 3:24. A disciple strives for the high character that Paul described in 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:5-9 & 2:1-10. There is freedom in holiness and maturity.

**5. Being a serious student of the Word.** Serious study is imperative. A disciple knows and continues to be rooted in the Word, John 8:31. Devotional Bible reading is very important. Reading Bible commentaries, books about the Bible, daily devotionals, and Christian biographies can be very helpful. However, serious study is much more than these. Be intentional. Dig deep into the Word. Paul wrote, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth,"* 2 Timothy 2:15. Study and learn the Bible. Be able to use the Word accurately. A studying disciple longs for the pure milk of the Word, 1 Peter 2:2, and presses on to the maturity that comes from deeper study and application, Hebrews 5:11 - 6:8. The purest form of an English Bible is one that is closest to the original languages. Choose a translation such as the *New American Standard Bible*, the *English Standard Version*, or a *King James Bible* as your main Bible because these are more literal and better facilitate in-depth study. Dynamic Equivalents, such as the *New International Version* or a *Revised Standard Bible* are more thought-for-thought than word-for-word ... often presenting what the translators believe the text to mean rather than what it might literally state. Paraphrases such as *The Message*, primarily conveying Biblical ideas, seriously compromise in-depth study and frequently state concepts not presented in the specific text. Literal translations, although more accurate than the others, can be more difficult to read. Based on familiarity or reading level, you might want to use the others (non-literal translations) as part of your devotional reading. However, as a disciple one should make the transition to a good literal translation for regular reading and serious study.

**6. Having deep co-disciple relationships.** *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,"* John 13:35. *"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,"* Proverbs 27:17. Seek co-laborers, fellow-disciples, in your obedience of the Great Commission. *"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart,"* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

**7. Being engaged with the Body of Christ.** There was a unity, a relational oneness, in the multi-generational community of believers in the First Century Church that extended far beyond, and far deeper, than attendance at weekly meetings. *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved,"* Acts 2:42-47. This is the model of how a disciple engages with other believers today. In this relational oneness, a disciple knows and uses his or her spiritual gifts, Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12-14.

**8. Witnessing actively.** The fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23, is very important. However, the Great Commission does not command us to manifest *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Jesus commissioned us to *go therefore and make disciples*, Matthew 28:18-20. The first step in making a disciple is helping a person believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, evangelism is a vital part of making disciples as well as part of becoming and being a disciple. *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be (i.e., become) My disciples,"* John 15:8. A disciple is passion-driven to win others to Christ, Romans 1:13-17 and I Corinthians 9:19-23. A fruitless disciple is a contradiction of terms. A fruitless disciple is really just a believer. A disciple is prepared to defend the faith ... confident and equipped to give answers. *"But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence,"* I Peter 3:14-15. A disciple persuades others to believe, Proverbs 15:2.

**9. Living after a one-time unreserved and irrevocable sacrifice.** A disciple makes a decisive post-salvation once-for-all-time sacrifice of self to God. *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship,"* Romans 12:1. A disciple fights daily against conformity to the world and strives for renewal and transformation. *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect,"* Romans 12:2.



**10. Paying the daily price to follow Him.** You cannot be His disciple if you do not put Him above all other relationships, above your self, and above all else. An initial decision to be willing to pay the price to follow Him is necessary. Then you cannot be His disciple if you do not daily take up your cross and purposefully follow Him. Jesus stated that you cannot be His disciple if you do not pay this price, Luke 14:25-35. The Bible is emphatic that marriage is a permanent and intimate oneness. Disciples neither desert nor neglect their spouses ... but in the oneness of marriage prioritize Christ above all.

**11. Being motivated by the invisible and the eternal.** A disciple walks by faith and not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal,"* 2 Corinthians 4:15-18. A disciple sees all of life, relationships, opportunities, time, treasure, and stewardship from an eternal perspective, Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:16-31, Acts 2:41-47, Acts 4:32, and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. A disciple does not fear of death, John 5:24, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-9.

**12. Seeing suffering as an opportune manifestation of the life of Christ.** *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh,"* 2 Corinthians 4:7-11. His divine light shines forth through our human affliction as a testimony to the lost world. A disciple understands that God is the Potter and we are the clay, Isaiah 64:8.

**13. Being engaged in spiritual warfare.** A disciple recognizes that earth is not home ... that being in the world is not being of the world ... that citizenship is in Heaven, John 15:18-19, John 17:14-21, and Philippians 3:20. A disciple battles against the world, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17, and 1 John 5:4-5. A disciple battles against the flesh, Mark 7:20-23, Romans 7:15-25, Romans 8:1-13, Galatians 5:13-25, Galatians 6:7-8, and 1 Peter 2:11. A disciple battles against the Devil, Ephesians 6:10-17 and 1 Peter 5:8-9.

**14. Being self-perceived as a servant.** A disciple seeks to be a Christ-like servant. A disciple does not see being a disciple as being in an elite position above others. *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,"* Philippians 2:3-8.

**15. Being steadfastly faithful.** *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen ... and without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him,"* Hebrews 11:1 & 11:6. Being a steadfast disciple and a disciplemaker is not a phase in the Christian life ... it is life itself. It is absolutely true that *once saved always saved*. However, it cannot be said that *once a disciple always a disciple*. It is possible for a disciple to cease following Him and to slip back to being just a believer, John 6:66. Therefore, being a disciple is a life-long marathon. *"My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord,"* 1 Corinthians 15:58.

**16. Anticipating the return of Christ.** *"For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words,"* 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,"* Revelation 22:20.

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## VI. Evangelism *and* Teaching in Acts

*"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the Apostles whom He had chosen." Acts 1:1-2*

**A highlights history.** These verses are the opening words of Luke's second history document written to Theophilus. His first, the Gospel of Luke, is a history of the Life of Christ. His second account (the book of Acts) documents the initial expansion of the Gospel in the First Century. The four Gospels devote one-third of their coverage to the short time from the Triumphal Entry to the Ascension. That is 1,200 verses documenting what Jesus did and taught in about seven weeks. The entire book of Acts contains only 1,007 verses and covers about 28 years of early church history. On average, that is only 36 verses per year ... 3 verses per month ... or just under 2 words per day. That is why Acts can be rightly called a *highlights history*.

**A count that counts.** The Gospel spread rapidly and widely in the First Century, as Jesus outlined in His expansion strategy into *"Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth," Acts 1:8*. The book of Acts records early missionaries going to, or through, over 60 geographic locations ... traveling a total distance more than that from Log Angeles to London, more than from Beijing to Baltimore, more than from New Jersey to New Delhi. Initially, there were about 120 believers that met to pray in an upper room, Acts 1:15. Then the Holy Spirit arrived and Peter delivered a very teaching-like, fulfilled-prophecy based evangelistic message. About 3,000 people responded in faith, Acts 2:41. Immediately they were devoting themselves to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. A short time later 5,000 men responded to the Gospel, Acts 4:4. These Bible-given statistics show that numbers can be important. They represent the number of people who believed. Nothing is found in those passages about local church membership roles. Did they gather together? Absolutely!

*"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved," Acts 2:42-47.*

Too often, church growth is measured in campus acreage, building square footage, budget prowess, number of staff, and people on the roles or in the pews. Some of today's church-growth body count is little more than a record of sheep shuffling as people move from one local church to another ... rather than the count of those who have believed in Christ. The Acts 2 and 4 numbers were counts of the people who believed in Christ in just the one city of Jerusalem. A count that counts is how many believe in Christ. What is that count in my city? What is it in yours? The Acts history of evangelism did not record early church sheep shuffling. It is a record of a count that counts. In addition, it is a history of teaching the Word.

**Evangelism and teaching.** In Acts, Luke wrote about evangelism and teaching in the First Century. Evangelism is the obvious first line of attack in obeying the Great Commission to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,*" Matthew 28:18-20. However, teaching is also part of that commission. Jesus included the command, "*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*" ... not *some* but *all* that He commanded. The first converts devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. Preaching, proclaiming, and testifying in Acts were about the Gospel and directed toward non-believers. Teaching in Acts was directed toward believers. A great example of the balance of these two is found in the account of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch.

*"But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch," Acts 11:20-26.*

Evangelism is found throughout Acts ... as is teaching from Acts 2:42 to the final words of the book describing Paul's ministry while under house arrest in Rome. "*And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered,*" Acts 28:30-31.

**Extensive teaching.** Do not be infer from Acts that those early Christians went on hurried mission trips stopping only a few days in each place as if they were flat stones skipping across the surface of a placid pond. The first seven chapters of Acts record their ministry in just Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas taught in Antioch for an entire year, Acts 11:26. They stayed a long time in Iconium, Acts 14:3. Paul taught for a year and a half in Corinth, Acts 18:11. Paul spent two years reasoning with those present at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus, Acts 19:9-10. After staying in Asia for a while, Acts 19:22, he exhorted the believers throughout Macedonia and then spent three months in Greece, Acts 20:2-3. Paul was very evangelistic ... but he was also committed to teaching the believers. His commitment to teaching is evident in the following excerpt from his words to the elders of Ephesus ... as follows:

*"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and ... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house ... I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God ... be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears," Acts 20:18-31.*

Acts teaching was not via brief weekly messages. Moreover, it is not done the American-way in much of the World today. I taught many times in Poland for thirty or forty hours per week to a group of believers ... sometimes for three weeks in a row (equaling the time of four years of Sunday messages). For three days in the Ural Mountains, I taught 3 or 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon ... and taught again in the evening. That is ten months of Sunday messages in three days. First Century believers were committed to much teaching. They were continually devoted to the Apostles teaching, Acts 2:42. A lengthy message is mentioned in Acts 15:32. Paul gave *much* exhortation, Acts 20:2. In addition, Paul gave at least one message that continued until midnight ... then he talked with them until daybreak, Acts 20:7-11. The Acts believers feasted on more than a weekly 30-minute Sunday brunch of the Word.

**Full obedience.** We are not fully obeying the Great Commission, or following the example of the book of Acts, if we are not involved in the expansion of the Gospel. Likewise, we are not fully obeying the Great Commission, or following the example of the book of Acts, if we are not involved in teaching believers to obey all that He has commanded. The teaching *all that He has commanded* includes more than directing a new believer to a seat in the meeting hall, handing them a paperback New Testament, or teaching them a few needed basics of the pure milk of the Word. Good teaching means helping them press on beyond the basics of milk to the strong meat of the Word, Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Move them on from milk to meat. The goal is to make disciples ... not just believers. The goal is to make disciples ... not just milk-only veal Christians. Evangelism without meat teaching is not discipling.

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## VII. Milk or Meat?

*"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."* Hebrews 5:12-14

These three verses are about our spiritual diet ... about spiritual *milk* and stronger spiritual *solid food*. The Greek word translated as *solid* in the verses above is a word that means strong, firm, solid, or steadfast. The Greek word translated as *food* means meat, nourishment, meal, or rations. I prefer the King James Bible translation of *solid food* as *strong meat*. Looking back to the beginning of Hebrews 5, the superiority of Christ's priesthood is presented ... and that theme is continued into the following chapters. Immediately before the verses above, Christ's priesthood is compared to the Old Testament pre-Levitical priesthood of Melchizedek. Such a comparison is not milk. It is strong meat! Moreover, as stated in verse 14, such strong food is for the mature ... for the spiritual grown-ups. Much of today's Christianity promotes immaturity and spiritual atrophy. Milk is preached while meat is seldom taught. How long have you been a Christian? Has it been long enough that *"by this time you ought to be teachers"* might apply to you? Could that be the product of a self-perpetuating, milk-only diet?

**The need for milk.** There is a vital need for the milk of Bible basics in a new believer's life. Many ministries do a fine job at evangelism and teaching basic follow-up to new believers. An infant needs the simple basics of the pure milk of the Word to begin to grow. As Peter wrote, *"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"* 1 Peter 2:2. However, if an evangelistic ministry does not continue on to equipping the saints with strong meat, it will not move new believers (individually or as a body) to maturity ... *"to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,"* Ephesians 4:13.

**Every word of the Word.** Quoting Deuteronomy 8:1-6, Jesus said, *"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,"* Matthew 4:4. That statement is a huge challenge. There are over 800,000 words in the Bible! Let me soften that a little ... there are only a little over 31,000 verses, only 1,189 chapters, and only 66 books. Paul wrote that all Scripture is God-breathed, 2 Timothy 3:16. Therefore, the challenge stands ... do not be on a milk-only diet. Press on diligently to the full meat of every word of God's Word. That is the challenge.

**Is such a challenge Biblical?** Yes! The statement of Jesus from Matthew 4:4 is enough to answer that question affirmatively. Such a challenge may be implied by, or inferred from, Paul's statement,

"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose (counsel) of God," Acts 20:27. However, such a conclusion may be based on a milk interpretation. The word translated there as *purpose* means will, counsel, purpose, or motive as seen in its seven other occurrences in Acts and in I Corinthians 4:5, Ephesians 1:11, and Hebrews 6:17. Paul's words from Acts 20:27 may not mean *all of the Word*. However, there are passages that do teach the need for the strong meat of all the words of all of God's Word.

**All Scripture is profitable.** *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work,"* 2 Timothy 3:16-17. That is *all ... not just some!*

**A lamp and a light.** *"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,"* Psalm 119:105. The whole Bible is a guide for the whole of life. This verse does not mean that a single out-of-context verse can give the needed direction for your next step or for your life's course. The more you know of God's Word, the safer you are in using it as a life-guide. Solomon's words to his son could be God's statement to us as His children. *"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life,"* Proverbs 6:23.

**The role of leaders.** Ministry leaders are not given by Christ to steal our ministries from us. In many situations, it seems that the saints (the sons and daughters of God) equip their leaders so that the leaders can fulfill their own ministries while the leaders do not equip the Saints for their ministries. That is not the model presented in Scripture. Sound in-depth teaching is necessary for believers, individually and corporately, to grow up into the full measure of the fullness of Christ. Ministry overseers must be able to teach, I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9. Moreover, they must teach ... meaning they must equip the saints for their ministries.

*"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love,"* Ephesians 4:11-16.

**Transferable Truth.** Jesus prayed for His Disciples, and for us, that God would *"Sanctify them in truth, Your Word is truth,"* John 17:17. That truth is not meant to be hoarded. We are to transfer it to others who can transfer it to others ... and on and on. Jesus gave us the Great Commission to go make disciples ... part of that being to teach new disciples to observe all that He had commanded, Matthew 28:18-20. Paul wrote of this transfer-

able truth to his son in the faith, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,"* 2 Timothy 2:1-2. Preaching in the New Testament was a means to proclaim the Gospel and to bring lost people to faith in Christ. However, teaching in the New Testament was a means to equip the saints with transferable truth. Unfortunately, many of today's leaders preach milk to believers rather than teach transferable meat to them. As a result, many believers are, *"tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,"* Ephesians 4:14.

**The time of ear tickling.** A milk diet can become self-perpetuating and seemingly addictive. Veal Christians are not accustomed to digesting solid food. Therefore, they seek leaders who offer warm soothing milk and man-made myths. *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths,"* 2 Timothy 4:3-4. That time has come.

**The dilemma of atrophy.** The author of Hebrews faced a dilemma. He needed to teach the meat of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus. However, his readers had atrophied ... needing to learn the basics again. They needed and wanted milk. However, their greater need was for strong meat.

*"Concerning him (Melchizedek) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil,"* Hebrews 5:11-14.

Hebrew believers in Christ were the original audience of the book of Hebrews. They would have been more apt to know Jewish history than would their Gentile counterparts. However, the author of Hebrews knew that it would be difficult to teach them the similarities between Christ's priesthood and that of the Genesis 14 pre-Levitical Melchizedek priesthood. He wrote that it was difficult to explain because they had become dull of hearing. It was not that they would not listen ... but that they could not comprehend deeper spiritual truth. An adequate amount of time had passed since they were saved for them to have become teachers. They had already been taught the basics. However, they needed to be taught the basics again. Their spiritual ears had been dulled. Their spiritual knowledge had dwindled. Their dietary needs had atrophied from meat to milk. He went on to explain that a milk-only diet limits one's ability to comprehend spiritual truth ... describing such people as infants. Solid food is something that one has to be conditioned to digest. Meat is for the spiritually mature ... for the spiritual adults. Verse 14 ends with an additional pre-condition for maturity. Spiritual maturity comes from a meat diet *and* exercise (application) i.e., to those *"who because of practice have their senses trained."*



**The challenge to press on to maturity.** The author of Hebrews offered more than reproof. He prescribed a cure for their problem. He told them how to leave infancy and press on to maturity.

*"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment,"*  
Hebrews 6:1-2.

The readers of Hebrews needed to be taught the basics again. However, they also needed to move on beyond those elementary teachings. Too many Christians are stuck at, or are constantly revisiting, the beginning of their faith. It is critically important to know the basic facts about Christ and salvation. However, the author of Hebrews prescribed moving beyond those elementary teachings. Paul preached Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 1:23, and Christ as Lord, 2 Corinthians 4:5. However, there is more to Christ than Him crucified. Included in the solid food category is the superiority of His priesthood as seen in its comparison to that of Melchizedek. And have you heard the phrase "simply to the Cross I cling" from the hymn *Rock of Ages*? That is a fine concept. But what did the Holy Spirit instruct us through the author of Hebrews? He did not tell us to go back to the cross. He told us to "*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,*" Hebrews 4:16. Jesus is no longer on the cross. He endured its pain and shame ... but He did not stay there. He is at the Throne of God, Hebrews 12:2. That is where we are told to go in time of need.

What things are included in the elementary teachings that we are to master and move beyond? The first thing is not thinking we need to be saved again ... "*not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.*" That is actually the point of Hebrews 6:4-6 ... stating that it is impossible to save someone who is already saved. Pressing on to maturity is the solution for immaturity. Impossibly getting re-saved is not the solution. We are also to understand and then leave behind the basic instruction about baptisms and commissioning ... *washings and laying on of hands*. The basics of prophecy are also on the leave-behind list. Understand the Bible's basic teaching on the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment ... then move on. Press on with a strong meat diet and use what you learn. Application produces growth. Use it or lose it. The author of Hebrews moved on to the meat about Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 begins with the words, "*For this Melchizedek...*". Hebrews 7 through 10 continues the solid teaching about the superiority of Christ's priesthood. A milk-only diet perpetuates a milk-only diet. A milk-only diet not only perpetuates immaturity but also produces spiritually dulled hearing and regression into spiritual infancy. Have you moved on from milk to strong meat? You are what you eat. Have you mastered the basics? Are you ready to move beyond the elementary teachings? Are you pressing on to maturity? In addition, are you multiplying transferable truth to faithful believers who will perpetuate the process? Have you become a disciple *and* a disciplemaker?

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## VIII. A Boat or a Boathouse

Jesus set the bar high when He said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another," John 13:35. Loving one another is visible proof of being His disciples. Many people say that they love their church. Do they mean they love their fellow-disciples? Or do they mean that they love their worship services, their pastor, or the feeling they get on campus? None of these is necessarily wrong. However, the words of Jesus quoted above refer only to a love between fellow-disciples. A recent survey reported that one-quarter of church attendees compared their church experience to attending a public event with no real connection to the other attendees. There is no *disciple love* in that setting. And don't be mistaken ... turning to the stranger standing next to you on Sunday morning and saying *God loves you and so do I* is foolishness. The statistic in that survey is very unfortunate. However, the survey reported on people *attending church* ... rather than on people *being church*. That is at the core of a serious misconception about today's church. Attending gatherings of the church is very important. However, the emphasis must be on *being church*. A body or a building ... a boat or a boathouse? That is a good question to help us think through what our view of church may have become compared to what church was designed to be. *Ecclesiology* is the study of the church. When first used in England in the 1800's, it referred to the architecture and ornamentation of church buildings. That definition is rarely used today ... although in practice, it might often be appropriate. Today, the common use of *ecclesiology* refers to the nature and function of the church. This boat or boathouse analogy gives us a look at the true nature and function of the church. Be forewarned ... this analogy may cause you to take a radically different look at your being church versus attending church.

Boathouses have been built for centuries along the deepwater shores of lakes and rivers. Originally, their construction was driven by utilitarian function, as places for the protection and maintenance of boats. They were temporary structures with improvised framing sheathed in low-cost materials. A boat entered the deepwater level of the boathouse to be serviced there or disassembled and its parts taken to the floor above for more detailed service. For instance, a sailboat's mainsail could be removed from its mast and laid out on the upper floor for mending. When serviced and reassembled below, the whole boat could once again sail safely and efficiently across the rough waters beyond the relatively calm waters inside the boathouse. Those early boathouses existed solely to attend to the needs of the boat. There has been a boathouse evolution over the centuries. An example of a primitive purpose-driven boathouse is one found at the mouth of the River Gloy in Highland Scotland south of Inverness. It is little more than a two-story quonset hut with deepwater access. At the fully evolved extreme are Yale University's state-of-the-art 22,000 square foot Gilder Boathouse along Connecticut's Housatonic River ... and the elegant Boathouse Bed and Breakfast along Bolton Landing's millionaires row on Lake George in

the Adirondack Mountains. Many of today's boathouses have evolved into commercial enterprises with coffee bars, restaurants, and varied recreational facilities. Many no longer service boats but only provide a place to dock while accessing their nautically themed, non-boating activities and facilities.

For this *Boat or Boathouse* analogy, consider the *Hobie 16* sailboat. It is as thrilling to sail today as when introduced by the Hobie Cat Company in 1969. It is seriously fast and seriously fun ... producing a serious adrenaline rush. This classic can be sailed by one person – by an experienced and knowledgeable captain. The *Hobie 16* is beautifully designed and built to sail ... to really sail. Catching the wind in its mainsail, jib, and spinnaker, propels it across a windswept stormy lake. Sailing a *Hobie 16* is exhilarating ... much more so than sitting in an upscale boathouse lounge sipping a Frappuccino with strangers while watching a prerecorded regatta on multiple oversized flat screens. Imagine disassembling a *Hobie 16* into its many parts (sails, kick-up rudders, mast, trapeze, trampoline, harken and ratchet blocks, halyards, shackles, rigging, et. al.) and distributing those parts throughout a lakeside community up to twenty miles or more from the boathouse. Then once per week, on a Saturday night or Sunday morning, bring those parts together in the second-floor maintenance room. They are assembled there in orderly rows as a gathering of disconnected parts ... but never assembled into the sailboat they were designed to be. At the end of the hour, they scatter again to their individual locations and wonder why they never really sail. That is a picture of many churches today. The parts of the sailboat (the church) are never really assembled into a functioning sailboat and taken for an exhilarating sail. They assemble, but are never *assembled together* ... somehow thinking they have satisfied Hebrews 10:25 by their disassembled attendance. Their boat-life is only a boathouse-life. The boat is the church ... the boathouse is not the church. The boathouse is a place where the boat comes for regular maintenance. The church-house is the place where the boat needs to come for regular service (not just services) by the four kinds of maintenance men described in Ephesians 4:11-13, "*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*" That is the job description for the leaders of the boathouse. Moreover, the individual pieces of the *Hobie 16* (the people of the church) do not sail alone. They were designed to sail assembled. Disconnected individual parts can do little more than float along with the current.

In today's church culture, it is too easy to be boathouse centric rather than boat centric ... church-house centric rather than church centric. When we become boathouse centric, our boathouse starts calling itself the boat. We speak of *attending boathouse* rather than speak of *being boat*. Consequentially, we measure success by the size of our boathouse and the number of parts at weekly services. Moreover, we cease to measure success by nautical miles sailed or nautical storms conquered. Too often, our boathouses evolve into commercial enterprises with coffee bars, restaurants, nautical bookstores, and non-nautical activities. Then sadly, the boat seldom sails. The *Hobie 16* is a great analogy for the church. Each is masterfully designed. Each has many parts. When their parts are assembled together into one and when each part does its part, both sail beautifully. Jesus is the experienced, knowledgeable captain of our boat. A boathouse leader is

not the captain of the boat. The sails catch the wind of the Spirit that propels the church across the stormy waves of life. The assembled boat does need regular maintenance ... and the boathouse should be a great place for that to happen. The boat was designed to sail ... to really sail. It was not designed for perpetual docking in the boathouse. The boat is a boat 24/7 ... not just for one hour each week as disassembled parts gathered on an expansive second floor of a boathouse. Is your church a boat or a boathouse? You can sail a boat ... but you cannot sail a boathouse. You can attend a boathouse ... but you cannot attend a boat.

My hope and prayer is that this analogy has made you think about your view of, and experience in, the church. This was not written to assess the liberal institutional church-house. It was written specifically to challenge your view of, and experience in, the conservative evangelical church. It is purposely descriptive (assessing a problem) rather than prescriptive (offering a cure). The prescription for each of us is become a disciple, be a disciplemaker, and become part of a community of disciples.

### Some thought provoking questions:

Do you see the church as a boat or as a boathouse? Asked another way, do you have a boat ecclesiology or a boathouse ecclesiology?

Do you attend church? Please do not answer yes. Church is something you *are* rather than something you *attend*. By all means, attend a Biblical boathouse ... one that understands the difference between the boat and the boathouse.

Does your boathouse focus on servicing boats or boathouse services? How much of your boathouse budget is for maintaining the boathouse ... how much of it is for maintaining the boat?

Has your boathouse hijacked your boat?

Are you being equipped at your boathouse for sailing ... or are you equipping your leaders for their sailing? Are you being equipped for life in the boathouse or for a life of sailing?

Are you so boathouse centric that you are missing the boat?

Will you arrive in Heaven after lifelong church attendance having never obeyed the "*not forsaking our own assembling together*" exhortation of Hebrews 10:25?

Are you trying to sail unassembled from the other parts? Are you alone and disconnected from the other parts of the church ... floating along with the current?

When are you going to get in the multi-level chain of 2 Timothy 2:2 and be a disciple and a disciplemaker in a community of disciples?

### Glossary of terms in this analogy:

The *boathouse* in this analogy represents the administrative, organizational, and physical structure of a building or campus used by the church in a particular geographic location.

The *boat* (although inanimate) represents the church as a living organism ... as the Body of Christ.

The *parts of the boat* represent individual believers.

The *Captain of the boat* is Jesus. In this analogy, He is the captain *and* the crew. There is no other crew in this analogy. The people of the church are *not* the crew ... they are the parts of the boat.

The *leaders of the boathouse* are not the captain or the crew of the boat. They are part of the boat.

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## IX. The Strengths and Limits of the Pulpit

A strong pulpit has been a valuable asset in the post-Reformation church. There are excellent biographies of great Christian preachers. They are inspiring and convicting. They prayed much, owned enviable libraries of books they actually read, studied long, read in the original languages, wrote extensively, preached powerfully, and preached or read their lengthy messages from the pulpit. They did not preach brief, vacuous, crowd-pleasing, motivational talks. They preached the Word ... *really preached* the Word. Men and women responded to the Gospel ... a Gospel of faith alone in Christ alone. Moreover, they strongly exhorted men and women to walk in obedience and faith. The pre-Reformation church did not have a strong pulpit. It was not Word-focused. The Reformation was successful in redirecting the focus of the Church from the *altar* to the *Word*. The pre-Reformation Church kept the Word from the people ... virtually re-crucified Christ every Sunday ... presented a salvation by works ... and accentuated a superiority of a clergy separated from the laity. The Reformers changed much of that. They, and conservative church leaders to this day, put the Word in the hands of the people ... made the sacrament of communion to be a remembrance rather than a re-crucifixion ... and presented a non-works grace-only Gospel. Unfortunately, they continued to accentuate a superiority of a clergy distinctly separated from the laity. The Reformers sought to make the church Word-centric. However, in doing so, they also made it pulpit-centric. The medium of the pulpit is not only the vehicle for the message ... but in some ways, it is the message. Moreover, it can subjugate the message ... and it most often suppresses the propagation of the message. It is my hope that you are mentally processing these propositions ... and possibly are perplexed or disconcerted by them. They challenge the status quo. Please read on.

Today's church often strives to be successful in numbers, budgets, youth relevance, and seeker-friendliness. In this quest for success, pulpit ministry is marked by several significant limitations.

- I. Sunday messages (viewed in person, on television, or on-line) have little or no prerequisites. There is seldom any attempt at, or requirement for, hierarchal learning. Most pulpit messages are seldom more than entry-level freshman classes. Algebra 1 and English 1 are taught ... but Algebra 2 and English 2 are not. The cookies are kept on the bottom shelf so that everyone can reach them. However, no one is pulpit-led out of his or her freshman year (or with a few exceptional preachers, out of his or her sophomore year). It is not that many preachers cannot preach hierarchal, thought engaging, contextually complex, and content-filled messages ... they can. Nor is it that we in the pews cannot understand such messages ... we can. It is just that in many of today's churches we do not need to understand the Bible at an in-depth level. We only need to get to next Sunday reasonably unscathed by the perils of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. Today's pulpit messages contain nominal complexity and produce minimal perplexity. Pew people seldom get anything that challenges their understanding. Extended Biblical context is essentially unimportant to everyone except possibly the preacher. In many churches, pew people are challenged to take notes during the pulpit message. However, if they are only repeating freshman classes, how many times do they need to take notes? Such note taking reminds me of the new students at the London Centre scribbling down every word the great D.H.C. spoke ... straight from the horse's mouth into their notebooks (Huxley's *Brave New World*, chapter 1). Today, there is little truly expositional preaching. The meaning of *expositional* has devolved into little more than motivational preaching following a verse-by-verse or chapter-by-chapter path. Such messages do not demand engaged learning. They require little contextual reference ... little critical thinking ... little analysis of propositions ... little independent discovery ... and little Biblical discernment. Such messages do not really equip the saints for the work of service. They simply motivate the saints for another weekly visit to the pew.
  
3. Pulpit ministry in today's church often seems to be patterned after the television style of the daily news ... minimal information, sound bites, and entertainment to get people to come back for more of the same. Some have taken this to an extreme. However, do not simplistically blame the preachers. In many churches, if the preachers do not adequately entertain the people, the people will go to other churches, change channels, redirect their browsers, or multi-task (mentally or digitally) during the message to satisfy their hunger for emotional satisfaction. Today's preacher is challenged to be entertaining in order to fill the pews and collection plates on the way to building a more expansive campus ... or be judged by himself, his peers, and the people in the pews. Such a ministry goal seems to present a different Christianity altogether ... one that is comfortable, easy, and amusing ... one where most of our wants are satisfied but few of our needs are met. Might this new Christianity-lite sadly be a utopian *Brave New Church*?
  
4. The pulpit itself separates the clergy from the laity. Physically domineering Reformation pulpits made no pretense about it ... nor did later, somewhat smaller wooden pulpits. Today's clear plastic pulpits and sturdy teaching stands perched on raised platforms at the focal point of indoor amphitheaters continue the domination and separation. In addition, a podium-less wirelessly amplified preacher on the platform perpetuates the separation. A pulpit or a platform isn't necessarily wrong ... but it does elevate the clergy above, and separate them from, the laity. Did Jesus ever teach from behind a pulpit? Or did He often sit to teach as in Luke 5:3 & John 8:2?
  
5. The pulpit often suppresses the propagation of the message. It is seen as the center for fishing for men. The pew-people bring nonbelievers into the church goldfish bowl to be caught by the professional fisherman ... rather than personally taking the Gospel to them. Shouldn't we fish where the fish are ... rather than bringing them to the bait shop? Believers bring others to church. Disciples bring others to faith in Christ. The medium of the pulpit most often suppresses mass obedience to the Great Commission.

6. Good seminaries are fine institutions that turn believers into disciples in the process of equipping them to be ministry leaders. Unfortunately, the church seldom does that for laypeople. The pulpit is the focal point of church ministry ... proven by staff allocation, facilities, and budgets. In addition, the pulpit has proven that it most often does not or cannot produce disciples ... but only produces freshman believers. Many seminaries do a fine job. However, their weakness may be that they do not recognize the limits of the pulpit.

I expect that if you are still reading this, that you are processing my propositions. I hope that you are doing so ... analyzing them ... thinking critically ... and questioning their validity. You may have even gotten a little agitated by them. To illustrate my point, let me ask you this, *when was the last time that happened to you on a Sunday morning?*

You may wish to tell me something like this: *You don't understand today's church. Sunday morning messages have to be entertaining and short to keep people's attention. Moreover, the pews are filled with a wide variety of people. There are first-time visitors, regular attendees, entertainment hungry teens, non-believers, new believers, hurting believers, carnal believers, and aged saints. The preacher has to speak to everyone in one message from the pulpit.*" I agree completely ... but in thinking that, you have proven my point. Moreover, let me tell you that I do understand the challenge of the pulpit. I have been there and done that. The fact is that the medium of the pulpit subjugates the message and its propagation. The pulpit is medium-limited. The old saying was, *put the cookies on the bottom shelf so that everyone can reach them.* Maybe someone should put the cookies on the top shelf. If we cannot quite get them in our grasp, it may be time that we are stretched so that we can reach them. I do not write as a stranger to the church. For over five decades, I have participated in church services in the pew and in the pulpit. I have been at Bible conferences as attendee or speaker ... in Sunday school as student or teacher ... in prayer meetings, at mountain top retreats, in ministry board meetings, teaching Bible studies, and leading evangelist meetings. I have made disciples in obedience to the Great Commission. I have taught while sitting and preached standing in varied pulpits. In addition, I have again and again heard people express their frustration at hearing Algebra I and English I repeated again and again ... sometimes presented poorly and sometimes very well. Moreover, I am sure that I have offered my own freshman pulpit lectures. The fact is that the pulpit is limited ... especially in its capacity to actually make disciples.

### **Some warnings.**

Your frustration with your church experience may be based on false expectations of what can be done from the pulpit. Highly skilled pulpit practitioners, and there are some, are still limited by their medium to presenting freshman and sophomore classes. If the best preacher in the world took over your pulpit, you might only become a more contented perpetual underclassman. Do you disagree that pulpit preaching is medium-limited to freshman level, or on rare occasions to sophomore level, context and content? Then can you tell me the subject *and* content of the messages preached from your real or virtual pulpit two months ago? What did you learn from it? Did you, or could you, teach someone else what you learned?



Is your church pulpit-centric? Answer these questions. Who is the highest paid staff person in your church? What portion of your church budget is committed to pulpit ministry? What meetings have the highest attendance? Does your church leadership equip and empower you for your ministry ... or do you just fund their ministry? If your church attendance is via the television, your web browser, or the radio, your church life is pulpit centric. If you attend a satellite church to watch a flat screen preacher, your church is pulpit centric. Which of these questions can you affirmatively answer? Do you semi-regularly attend Sunday morning pulpit services? Can you name someone that is discipling you ... or has disciplined you? Can you name someone that you are discipling? Your answers reveal something about your church and personal pulpit-centricity.

Christianity is best lived by disciples rather than by those who settle for being just believers. A ministry that is predominately pulpit-centric seldom produces disciples. What is missing in most churches, and in most Christians' lives, is a strong participation in the process of discipling. A disciple is more than a believer with the volume and intensity turned up ... can you verbalize the Biblical definition of a disciple? Part of being a disciple is abiding in His Word ... and that requires in-depth knowledge of it. Your life in the Body and in the world demands that you know, and abide in, the Word. What part of your Christian life requires your in-depth knowledge of the Word? Has your knowing the Word at an in-depth level seemingly become irrelevant in your church experience?

If reading this has made you think about trading in your pastor or attending a different church next Sunday, you could be missing the point. Maybe you should read this again. In addition, if reading this has tempted you to reject all pulpit ministries, you have definitely missed the point and should definitely read it again. There is a great need in today's church for solid Biblical pulpit ministry that believes that we are not looking for entertainment ... that understands we can comprehend complex Biblical truth ... that realizes we have a greater attention span than that required by a daily news broadcast ... and that sees us as more than pew-fodder. It is sadly true that today many Christians suffer because of weak pulpit ministries. However, their greatest need is not for a stronger pulpit. Their greatest need is for involvement in becoming a disciple and a discipler. Get involved in the process of discipling. Become a disciple. Make a disciple. Seek out a strong pulpit ministry ... but do not be pulpit-centric. Be Great Commission centric.

### **Addendum ... A Disciple in the Local Church**

Jesus said, "*I will build My church,*" Matthew 16:18. The Great Commission is not *Go therefore and make churches* ... but rather, "*Go therefore and make disciples.*" Jesus builds His church in the wake of our making disciples. A Christ-honoring local church gathering is a manifestation of His church. It can be a wonderful place where God is worshipped ... where communion is celebrated ... where the Word is publicly read, taught, and preached ... where baptisms, marriages, and funerals are performed ... where believers of all generations fellowship together ... and where the Gospel is proclaimed. However, the church building is not the replacement of the Old Testament Tabernacle. The church is His body ... not His building. "*Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant ... but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are,*" Hebrews 3:5-6.

Local gatherings of the first century church were much different from those of today. Christians were severely persecuted and frequently martyred. Their gatherings were considered heretical and illegal. Therefore, their constituency was more disciple-like than that of the local church today. Church gatherings today contain a more diverse group of people. The more a local church is seeker friendly, the more non-believers are in their midst. Today's pulpit ministries are often more culturally acceptable to attract more people to the Gospel. Therefore, the teaching of the Word in those situations can be weaker. However, some pulpit ministries are strong. They declare the uncompromised truth of the Word and effectively proclaim the Gospel. They have not been squeezed into the world's mold. They are rooted in sound doctrine and do not subvert the truth to build attendance. They are not tickling the ears of those who attend their gatherings. They know that the boathouse is not the boat. They understand the strengths of a sound pulpit ministry ... and they recognize its limits.

Non-believers, new believers, immature believers, and even carnal believers can find acceptance and comfort in many of today's local church gatherings. However, many serious believers sense that something is missing. Some turn to media ministers to get stronger teaching. Some seek a new church gathering or fight for change. Many serious believers are simply dropping out. However, the solution may be to switch their focus away from the pulpit ministry to their own ministry as a disciple and disciplemaker. Today's church gathering is a great place to lock onto a seeker ... to help that person come to faith in Christ. It can be a place to help a new believer begin to grow into a disciple. It can be a place of witnessing and disciplmaking opportunities. It may be time to switch their expectations away from what they personally take away from the boathouse to what they give to the boat.

Local gatherings of the church should be strong and pure. Heresy, doctrinal error, and leadership impurity should not be tolerated. Pulpit ministry should be more than a talk loosely connected to a verse. A strong pulpit is good and needed. However, it is still limited. Church is an integrated multi-generational Body. Seek gatherings that recognize that in content and worship. Being an active participant in such church gatherings is important. However, finding such gatherings can be extremely difficult. If you are part of a wonderful one, rejoice and be glad. If you are not, be very cautious. Don't just drop out. Be a functioning part of the Body. Do your best to find a Christ-honoring gathering of the church. And whatever you do, be boat centric rather than boathouse centric. Become equipped to be a disciple, a disciplemaker, and a witness. It may or may not be time to make a church gathering change ... or a pulpit change. However, doing so may not fix anything. Maybe you need to lower your expectations of the pulpit ... and raise your expectations of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

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## X. We are Sinking

*"If anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was." James 1:23-24*

Many of today's Christian men, without adequate models, mentors, and teachers have acquiesced to maintaining the mundane and the misdirected. Rather than seeing themselves as soldiers of the Cross warring behind enemy lines, they have conceded to a passive and lukewarm spirituality of second-hand ministry. Unchallenged to a higher calling, they have settled for being just believers rather than disciples. Too many of their churches are institutionalized places of encouragement and entertainment rather than places of equipping. Such churches, no longer seeing themselves as spiritual outposts of the Great Commission, have become ends unto themselves. Many seem to be more committed to the Great Campus than to the Great Commission. Making disciples has been eclipsed by attracting attendees. Sadly, the Great Commission is little more than the Great Omission. Such institutions are more of a fading cultural phenomenon than a rising counter-cultural revolution. A majority of Christian men in their morality, and their churches in their methodologies, are indistinguishable from the men and institutions of the world. Their lives have morphed into a soft spirituality that takes little more than a conciliatory stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Moreover, they are afraid to stand against the conformist failure of much of today's Christianity. The great ship of church has hit an iceberg in the cold oceans of mediocrity. She is taking on water and listing to starboard. What is the response of most of its deckchair passengers as it sinks low into the icy waters of uninformed sterility? They applaud the improved view from the port-side rail ... speak of building bigger ships ... and head back to the ship's buffet table of fats and sweets. All the while, the dining-hall clamor and the boisterous ballroom music drown out the cries of multitudes in its wake slipping below the surface of the waters of eternity. When you look into the mirror of the Word, do you see that we are sinking?

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## XI. What's in it for me?

**Asking the question.** Following Jesus ... what's the price and what are the perks? I must admit that spiritually speaking, that question makes me cringe a little. The particular question that I am referring to is *not* about salvation. It is *not* about why someone should come to Jesus. But rather, it is about why should a believer follow Him without reservation ... why he or she should make the after-salvation second-decision commitment to be a Romans 12:1 *living sacrifice* ... why one should pay the price to be a disciple and not settle for being just a believer. An investment-type man or woman, maybe a venture capitalist, could analyze this second decision on a risk and reward basis. One could ask, *What's in it for me?* That can be an appropriate question because Jesus instructed us to sit down and count the cost of being His disciple, Luke 14:25-35.

**Personal peace and affluence.** Many Christians today, as Francis Schaeffer foretold in his 1976 *How Shall We Then Live*, have embraced the twin values of “personal peace and affluence”. *Personal peace* means being left alone, undisturbed, and tribulation-free so that I can, via ever increasing *affluence*, enjoy a life of more and more material things ... having my own territory and my own toys. Therefore, when we read John 10:10, we could be tempted to overlay those two impoverished values on these words of Jesus, “*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*” We could read into those words that He came to give us ever-increasing personal peace and affluence. But that is not what He said. Although it applies, I am not referring to the prosperity gospel movement ... the pyramid seed-scheme of the false teaching that if you make the pastor wealthy, God will make you wealthy. On the contrary, I am writing about the misguided belief in evangelical Christianity that Jesus came to give us personal peace and affluence. Since that is not what He meant, we should ask, *What is this abundant life He gives?*

**An accurate paraphrase of John 10:10.** Amplified by a variety of accurate definitions of the Greek word translated as “*abundantly*” in that verse, it could read *I came that they may have life ... a supreme life, an exceeding life, a superior life, an extraordinary life, an uncommon life, a remarkable life, a life beyond measure.* A life so defined is not simply one of personal peace and affluence. So what did Jesus mean by an abundant life? What are the rewards and what is the price for such a life? Please don't think like a Westerner. Consider that some serious believers, after they have become serious, have gone through consequential severe times. Are such sufferings and tribulations the perks or the price ... or both? Is there more to it?

**Let's start with the perks.** What are some of the positives to being a second-decision disciple rather than a just a believer who has settled for only fire and life insurance? Jesus said, “*Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with perse-*

*cutions; and in the age to come, eternal life,”* Mark 10:29-30. In these words, He promised that we will be rewarded for such sacrifice ... and that the rewards will be in this lifetime. But did you notice the phrase *along with persecutions*? Tribulations will come. However, if you let endurance work its work, you will become mature and complete. *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing,”* James 1:2-4. That last phrase, *lacking in nothing*, does not refer to personal peace and affluence. It refers to a complete, mature life in the center of God’s will ... an exceptional life that makes a difference here and for eternity. Another perk comes at the judgement of believers at what is referred to as the *Bema Seat* from the Greek in 2 Corinthians 5:10. That is a rewards judgement ... not a sin judgement, John 5:24 & Romans 8:1. It is clearly described in, *“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire,”* 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. So what is in it for me? The answer is ... blessings here and rewards in Heaven!

**A disciple or just a believer?** There are many reasons to be a disciple and not just a believer. Jesus said that we must continue in, abide in, His Word to truly be His disciples, John 8:31. A life rooted in the Word makes us: approved of God, 2 Timothy 2:15 ... purified, Psalm 119:9,11 ... re-proved, corrected, and trained, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ... guided in life, Psalm 119:105 ... given wisdom and understanding, Psalm 119:98-100, 130 ... comforted and revived, Psalm 119:50,71 ... given hope, Romans 15:4 ... given peace and sure-footedness, Psalm 119:165 ... given joy, Jeremiah 15:16 ... and generally blessed, Luke 11:28. Jesus said that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for each other ... by our unconditional co-liability, John 13:35. There are two perks here. First our being in a band of disciples is a testimony of Christ to the world, John 17:11, 21-23. And second, there is strength in numbers for us. *“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart,”* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. And a believer becomes a disciple, in part, by bringing others to faith in Christ. Jesus said, *“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be [in Greek ‘become’] My disciples,”* John 15:8. So what is in it for non-believers? They come to faith through disciples! And what is in it for God? He is glorified!

**Taking His high road.** There is another important reason to become a living-sacrifice disciple. The reason is that you are commanded to be one. *“Therefore I urge [exhort] you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present [the Greek verb here indicates that this is a one-time, once-for-all-time presentation of] your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship,”* Romans 12:1. Remember that you are not negotiating with God. He is the potter ... you are the clay, Isaiah 64:8. The clay has no legitimate agenda for the Potter. His agenda is for you to be a disciple rather than just a believer. The Matthew 28:18-20 Great Commission states as His goal for you to be a disciple and a disciplemaker. Submit to the Potter. Should the clay

ask the potter, *What's in it for me?* The better question to consider is, *What's in it for the Potter?* And please don't quarrel with the potter, Isaiah 45:9. His plan for you is far better than any plan you have for yourself. Trust Him and pay the price to follow Him. The price is high ... but it is all worth it. No one ever regrets doing life God's way. You will never regret taking His high road.

**What is the high price for taking that road?** It is putting Christ first above all ... above all relationships, above your own life, above all that you hold dear, Luke 14:25-35. That means putting Him above your personal peace and affluence ... above your territory and above your toys. Will you go through tribulation in paying that price? There are other sources of pain and suffering. But yes ... you will pay a price in seriously following Him. Moreover, you may need to reset your perspective on this because the Western world has a bad attitude toward suffering and tribulation. If we are squeezed into the world's mold, Romans 12:2, we want to eliminate all sources of trouble as quickly as possible and chemically dull any accompanying physical or emotional pain until the source of tribulation is gone. We might say, *no pain no gain* ... but we seldom embrace that in our spiritual lives. My basketball coach embraced the no-pain-no-gain philosophy and therefore we embraced it individually and as a team ... and we won the championship. Suffering goes with the territory of following Christ, "*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*" Philippians 1:29. And Jesus said, "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you,*" John 15:20. Let's not think like misguided Westerners. We need an eternal perspective. "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ... For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal,*" 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Maybe we should ask, *Do we really want to win?* and *Will we pay the price to win?*

**The call to all believers.** The call to all of us is to present ourselves to God, once and for all time, as living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices. Jesus challenges us to be more than believers. He wants us to become His disciples and disciplemakers. He wants us to not only come to Him but also to follow after Him in obedience and sacrifice. Salvation is solely based on His sacrifice and His work. However, being a living-sacrifice disciple is additionally based on our sacrifice and our work. So my encouragement to each person who reads this is based on "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong,*" 1 Corinthians 16:13. My encouragement is this, *Man up! Stand up and be counted as one in His band of disciples!*

*It is a price worth giving ... because it is a life worth living!*

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## XII. A Second Decision

(1) *“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Romans 12:1-2

**Misunderstood and misapplied.** These two verses are often misunderstood and misapplied. However, they are critically important in a believer’s decision to become a disciple and to live as a disciple. Verse one is a challenge to each believer to make a one-time second decision after salvation. Verse two gives direction for a disciple’s daily life. All Christians should submit to God every day as part of their taking up their cross daily, Luke 9:23. However, that is not the intent of Romans 12:1. Its command to *“present your bodies”* is a once-for-all-time dedication, surrender, and submission to Him. It is not salvation. Salvation is based solely on the sacrifice of Christ. This is different. This is your sacrifice. It is the one-time giving of your life unconditionally and permanently to God as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice. It is your voluntary life-long gift of yourself to Him for His glory and for His unrestricted use.

**Why make this second decision?** It is because of His mercies. This passage starts with the word *therefore*. Wherever you read a *therefore* in the Word, understand what it is there for. Read it again emphasizing the first word, *“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God...”*. The Romans 12:1 *therefore* connects Romans 1-11 to this command. God’s great mercies in saving us and sanctifying us are detailed in the first eleven chapters. *Therefore*, present yourself to God! God will bless us in this life and in eternity. However, the proper motivation for this sacrifice is not in front of us ... it is behind us. Our proper motivation is based on what He has already done. Imagine Jesus holding up His nail-scarred hands to you as He says, *After all I have done for you ... do this for Me*. The Living Bible’s loose paraphrase of the end of 12:1 captures the pathos in this command, *“When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?”*

**Why a one-time sacrifice?** It is because that is the meaning of the words in the command. The verbs in *“do not be conformed”* and *“but be transformed”* in 12:2 are present tense. That means do these things now and keep on doing them hourly, daily, and throughout your life. That is part of taking up your cross daily. However, *“Present your bodies”* in 12:1 is not present tense. It is a Greek verb that does not have an ideal English equivalent. The Greek verb translated as *present* is in the aorist tense indicating a punctiliar action ... a once-for-all-time, timeless act. It does not mean keep on doing it ... but rather do it once for all time. Both the Williams New Testament and the Amplified New Testament render it more clearly as *“make a decisive dedication of your bodies.”* As a believer-priest, offer yourself once-for-all-time as a living sacrifice to Him on the altar. Romans 12:1 is about a sacrificed life ... a life permanently placed on the altar.

**Three illustrations offer insight.** There is an illustration of this in Deuteronomy 15:12-17. A freed Hebrew slave could decide to voluntarily and permanently re-enslave himself to his master. That choice was based on the past mercies of the master ... was prompted by the slave's love for his master ... and was permanent. An awl was used to pierce the slave's ear indicating that he was the master's servant for life. This re-enslavement was the slave's choice ... was not forced on him ... and was a once-for-all-time decision. Another illustration is in the Old Covenant's animal sacrifices. An animal had to be acceptable to be placed on the altar. A diseased or blemished animal was unacceptable. That illustrates the holy and acceptable part of a Romans 12:1 sacrifice. The animal that was sacrificed was dead ... but our sacrifice is living. The sacrificed animal being dead illustrates the permanence of the sacrifice. No sacrificed animal crawled off when the altar got hot. No priest took an animal back at the end of the day to possibly offer it on another day. It was a permanent sacrifice. If a Romans 12:1 living sacrifice crawls off when the altar gets hot or if it is withdrawn, it was never a Romans 12:1 sacrifice. Another illustration comes from life experience. It is seen in the difference between cohabitation and a life-long, until-death-do-we-part marriage. Co-habitation is a temporary *I'm totally and completely yours for another 24 hours unless I get a better offer* commitment. However, a Romans 12:1 sacrifice is a life-long commitment. It is not a 24-hour co-habitation commitment.

**Re-offering it.** Should your Romans 12:1 sacrifice ever be re-offered? The answer is that it might be appropriate if the sacrifice was unacceptable. A Romans 12:1 sacrifice needs to be living, holy, and acceptable. The living part is easy because upon believing in Christ we have "*passed out of death into life*," John 5:24. It is the holy part that can be challenging. Old Testament sacrificed animals had to be acceptable ... or they were rejected. No animal could be perfect. But each one had to be without disease, generally healthy, and without blemish. This illustrates two things for a Romans 12:1 sacrifice. First, this sacrifice must be disease-free. The terminal disease of sin and separation from God must be cured by salvation. That is why Romans 12:1 is narrowly addressed to believers (indicated by the word *brethren* in that verse). This living sacrifice is exclusively for believers. A non-believer's sacrifice is unacceptable because it must be offered after salvation rather than before salvation. You must come to Him before you can follow Him. To be sure of your salvation visit [www.911God.org](http://www.911God.org). Second, the holy part indicates an acceptable level of spiritual cleanliness in a believer's life. Only then will a Romans 12:1 sacrifice be acceptable to God. "*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work*," 2 Timothy 2:21. You cannot be perfect ... but you can present yourself at an adequate and acceptable level of spiritual health and holiness. Once your living and holy sacrifice has been accepted by God, you never need to re-present yourself. But if your sacrifice was unacceptable because it was no more than temporary or because it was unholy, then repeating it is legitimate. Make this second decision to offer yourself as a once-for-all-time living and holy sacrifice ... voluntarily and permanently enslaving yourself to God. Do not do this lightly. It is a very serious second decision. And then, after your living and holy sacrifice is accepted, move on to your Romans 12:2 non-conforming and always transforming life as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. After all He's done for you ... do this for Him!

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## Addendum

### Our Changing Taste for the Timeless Word

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.”* Isaiah 40:8

Over the past decades, there has been a move away from detailed study of the Word of God. There has been a move away from studying the Bible toward just reading it. Paralleling that, there has been a move toward versions of the Bible that tell us what the Word means rather than just presenting what it says. That change can be seen in the widespread popularity of the latter two types of Bibles listed below ... both in personal use and referenced from our pulpits. The three types of Bible versions are:

1. Word-for-word translations such as the NASB, ESV, KJV, and NKJV.
2. Dynamic equivalents (thought-for-thought translations) such as the NIV.
3. Paraphrases (idea-by-idea re-wordings) such as the New Living or The Message.

Our tastes have changed. However, the pure Word has not. Unfortunately, dynamic equivalents and paraphrases have become the most popular. We prefer their pre-processed food to the pure milk and raw meat of the Word. Every translation from the original languages requires the translators to decide what the original words, phrases, and sentences actually say ... and how to best say that in our language. However, dynamic equivalents and paraphrases go beyond that to what the translators decide that the texts mean ... i.e., how it would be understood by the original readers and transposed into today's societal tastes. However, our society and language are no surprise to God. His Word does not need to be re-phrased or re-worked for our times and tastes. *“The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace, refined seven times,”* Psalm 12:6. His Word is already refined. It does not need to be re-refined by dynamic equivalence or paraphrase. His Word is timeless, eternal, and accurate to the finest detail. Word-for-word translations are the closest we have to that in our language. Dynamic equivalents and paraphrases are not ... blurring or losing the details of His Word.

Studying a paraphrase of the Bible is like flying over the mountains in a small plane ... blurring and losing many, if not most, of the details. Studying a dynamic equivalent is more like an ATV drive through the mountains with a guidebook telling us what we are really seeing ... blurring significant tactile details. However, studying a word-for-word translation is like a life-long hike through the mountains ... visually, physically, and emotionally drinking in a snow-capped peak, a shadowy canyon, a towering cliff, a lush summer mesa, a flowering meadow, a rock outcropping, a

solitary path, the rustling leaves or a cracking twig underfoot, the smell of a stand of pines, the effortless beauty of a soaring red-tailed hawk, the sound of a rushing snow-melt stream, and so much, much more ... from the detailed beauty of a single flower, the feel of moss on some rough north-side bark, the smell of a new rain, to the grandeur of a range of jagged peaks. As a disciple abiding in the Word, choose a good word-for-word translation (being closest to the original texts) for your personal Bible study. Choosing a dynamic equivalent or a paraphrase may make easier reading ... but you will miss out on some, or much, of the detail, accuracy, depth, meaning, impact, richness, and grandeur of His Word. The meanings of the Bible's phrases and thoughts need to be understood. However, we must not sacrifice the details and the words of His Word for the sake of easy reading or superficial study.

Jesus stated that each and every word, the smallest letter, and even a piece of a letter in God's Word are important. He said, "*man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,*" Matthew 4:4 ... and "*until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished,*" Matthew 5:18. More than the others, word-for-word translations give us the important details of His Word.

**An important warning.** Like many others today, I use Bible software and a variety of online versions of the Bible ... on my phone, tablet, notebook, and desktop. However, it is invaluable to me to have a good printed one as my main Bible. I have a single-column (room for my notes) New American Standard Bible. It is like an old friend ... familiar, comfortable, and very trustworthy. No digital copy can be that to me. Invest in one of high quality. Mark it up and wear it out. But be prepared because when it starts falling apart and you have to replace it, it will be traumatic.

**Abbreviations:** New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), King James Version (KJV), and the New International Version (NIV).

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