

MODELING: SETTING AN EXAMPLE OF HOW A DISCIPLE LIVES

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. Sadly, helping others follow Jesus is too often viewed as just about having Bible knowledge and the ability to teach. This can result in people who work to educate others and convince others to believe Bible truths, but are not necessarily transformed into disciples of Jesus. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you learn the importance of providing a model/example of how a disciple of Jesus Christ lives.

JOHN 13:1-17

While teaching was an important aspect of Jesus's work on earth, it was far from the only aspect of how Jesus worked to help others follow Him. For, Jesus saw the need to set an example for His disciples to see and follow. In this text, Jesus did not just preach a sermon about serving others; He modeled it in a way His disciples could not easily forget! Then, He urged His disciples to follow His example. In fact, whenever Jesus's life was recalled through written record, it would not just be His teachings that would be recalled, but also His perfect, sinless example (Acts 1:1-3; 1 Peter 2:21-24)! If Jesus saw providing an example of how one ought to live to please God as a critical element to be held alongside teaching God's ways, certainly those trying to make disciples today should see their work no differently.

PHILIPPIANS 3:17; 4:9

Paul's work was not just about spreading information and telling people what they should believe and how they should live. Rather, Paul left an example for people to follow that was worthy of imitation. Yet, Paul's instructions that others should follow his example was not about setting himself out to be the standard. Instead, Paul encouraged people to follow his example only to the extent that his example imitated the example of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1)! Whenever people thought of Paul, they would hopefully not just remember His instructions, but also

his example across many different aspects of what living for Jesus looks like (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Similarly, whenever others think about you, the things you teach them and the things they see from you should be in harmony rather than in conflict, and they should be encouraged to follow both rather than pick between them!

MATTHEW 23:1-7, 15

While Jesus practiced what He preached, He recognized that it was often not what the people were accustomed to seeing from their teachers. For example, the scribes and Pharisees were often viewed by the people as religious teachers who were thought to be righteous. However, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy (throughout this chapter and elsewhere, Matthew 5:20; 15:1-20). He urged people to follow their teachings (when they agreed with what Moses said), but not to follow their example. For, they would tell others what they should do, but then not live in the way they bound on others. Certainly, just as Jesus condemned such hypocritical teachers living at that time, Jesus will condemn hypocritical teachers of His word today! Rather than helping people follow Jesus, they make disciples of themselves who do not resemble Jesus (v. 15)!

HEBREWS 13:7

The Hebrew writer urges people to remember their leaders who had spoken God's word to them. However, notice that they were not just to remember those things that were spoken by these leaders. Instead, they were also to remember their faith that was seen as worthy of imitation! All those who preach the gospel of Christ to others are spiritually leading others (even though they may not serve in an official role, Ephesians 4:11-16). Still, this passage should be seen as encouraging you to set an example of what faith in Jesus looks like. Whenever you face challenges and persecution. How you overcome temptation. In your family life. How you treat other people. In your speech. In your character. In sharing the gospel. In your priorities. In your worship. In how you conduct yourself at work. In your recreation. In every aspect of life!

1 PETER 5:1-3

As Peter addressed elders (shepherds, overseers), he specifically reminded them about their responsibility to be examples to the flock they oversee. It is critical that elders do not just view themselves as bosses with authority to make decisions, but shepherds with the

responsibility to lead by example. As elders, they are older men with life experience and experience following Jesus (1 Timothy 3:6). They must demonstrate what living for Jesus looks like to the local church and provide an example that raises the bar for all the members to aspire to follow!

1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

As Timothy served in the role of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5), teaching the gospel was a critical aspect of his work that he needed to pay close attention to. However, Timothy was also told to pay close attention to his life! He needed to do this so that his life would be pleasing to God and so that he would set an example for others that was worthy of imitation (that reflected the example of Christ). The same thing remains true for all who work to teach the gospel of Christ to others today, whether in an official role or not (Titus 2:6-8)!

MATTHEW 5:13-16

The responsibility to set a good example of what living as a disciple of Christ means is, in fact, directly given to everyone who follows Jesus. As Jesus was the Light who had come into this world (John 3:19-21; 8:12), His followers are expected to now reflect His light throughout the world today, wherever they are! In doing so, those who are around you can see the Light of Jesus and be drawn to Him so that they, too, will choose to glorify God in their own lives. Sadly, however, those who fail to set the proper example and do not reflect the light of Jesus (while claiming to follow Him) can result in others either blaspheming God (Romans 2:17-24) or failing to ever be transformed to become imitators of Jesus (1 John 2:3-6).

CONCLUSION

Those who work to teach the gospel of Christ to others must not just be able to communicate what Jesus teaches. Instead, they must also set the proper example of what living as a true disciple who has learned from and imitates Jesus looks like. In this, they help people recognize how to take Jesus's teachings from merely intellectual information to whole life transformation. Furthermore, your life that practices what the mouth preaches provides an example that works to draw people to the transforming light of Jesus Christ with much greater intensity than your words could ever accomplish alone!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What is the danger of just viewing Bible knowledge as important in gospel work?

How did Jesus view the importance of His example?

How did Paul view the importance of His example?

How should what you teach and how you live compare?

What is the danger if your teachings and life do not harmonize?

What are people taught to do regarding leaders who taught the word of God to them?

What are some specific areas of your life in which you must set an example?

Who are expected to provide a good example of being a disciple of Jesus?

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Written by Eric Krieg

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