

22. Instructions for the disciples of Christ

December 2, 2007

According to the dictionary, 'disciple' is defined as follows:

One who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another

The twelve disciples of Jesus Christ were the original disciples. But if you follow and obey the teachings of Jesus Christ that is recorded in the Bible and desire to spread His instructions to others, you are a modern day disciple of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 12, Jesus wanted His twelve disciples to learn a few very important things. So in His rapid succession, He gave instructions to them because they were in great danger:

- 1) They were surrounded by immense crowds of people whose major concern was not to hear spiritual truth but to see Jesus do a miracle or meet some personal need.
- 2) The scribes and Pharisees were plotting against Jesus and trying to get Him out of the way.

The snare of popularity and the fear of man has brought ruin to more servants of God than we care to count. I believe that Jesus also wants us to learn these.

A. BEWARE OF HYPOCRISY

Luke 12:1-12 In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."

Many of you still remember Jimmy Swaggart. In 1985, as a nationally known evangelist and preacher he wrote a book condemning sin in America, especially sexual sin and pornography. Just a short time later, he tearfully confessed years of involvement in these very sins, and promised repentance. But he was arrested for similar crimes again a few years down the road. His hypocrisy may have surprised many people, but not God. He is the one who exposed Swaggart's secret.

You may have some hidden secrets that you don't want anyone to know. But in God's sight, it is a wide open fact.

In the Christian life, a hypocrite is somebody who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. These people know that they are pretending, and they hope they will not be found out. Their Christian life is only a shallow masquerade.

How can we keep hypocrisy out of our lives? Jesus compared it to leaven which is yeast, something that every Jew would associate, with evil. Like yeast, hypocrisy begins very small but grows quickly and quietly. As it grows, it infects the whole person. Hypocrisy does to the ego what yeast does to bread dough. It puffs it up. Soon pride takes over and the person's character deteriorates rapidly.

It is very OK to say, "I don't know," "I am sorry," "I have sinned," and "Please pray for me." Actually, it is refreshing to hear someone so honest to show his or her true spiritual condition instead of fancy front.

You may not agree with me on this, but I truly believe that the main reason for hypocrisy is coming from fear of man – what they might think about me, what if they don't like me. In order to gain other people's approval, some people make themselves to be someone they are not.

The cure for hypocrisy is to forget about what people may say and do, but fear God alone. The fear of God is the fear that conquers all other fears, because the person who truly fears God need fear nothing else. All that men can do is kill the body, but God can condemn the soul.

Luke 12:4-7 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

One time I was talking with a pastor of another denomination. He also is involved in police chaplaincy in a different police agency. He told me that he doesn't close his public prayer for his police agency in Jesus' name when he prays, so that he may not offend non-believers. I told him, "If Pima County Sheriff's Department doesn't like the way I pray to God, they don't have to keep me as a chaplain. I am more concerned about what God would think about me than what some commanders think about me."

If any of you are concerned about what your coworkers or family members think about you as a Christian or praying before your lunch in restaurant or break room, don't be. You may not be the most popular person and they think that you are weird. They are probably right. But in God's sight, you are His precious child. Take pride in being a child of Almighty God. Just don't be an obnoxious Christian.

It is not important that men praise our names on earth, but it is important that God acknowledges us when we get to heaven.

Luke 12:8-12 "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. 9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 10 And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. 11 Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

This idea of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has troubled many. Some Christians who were taught wrongly think that they blasphemed the Holy Spirit and feel totally defeated and hopeless before God. They are convinced that they have committed this unpardonable sin.

We must recognize the terrible danger of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, and our need to avoid this sin at all cost. Yet, at the same time, guarding our hearts against the unwarranted accusation of this sin.

What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? We understand this by first understanding what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is all about.

*John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
John 16:8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

When a person persistently rejects the work the Holy Spirit wants to do in us, and that person continuously rejects the invitations from Jesus Christ, he or she will come to the point that his or her heart will no longer repent. That is when that person has blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven – not because it is a sin “too big” for God to forgive, but because it is an attitude of heart that cares nothing for God’s forgiveness. It may want forgiveness on its own terms, but never God’s way.

B. BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS

Luke 12:13-21 Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" 15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Jesus refused to get involved this man’s family problem. Why? Because He knew that no answer He gave would solve the real problem, which was covetousness in the hearts of the two brothers. Like too many people today, this man wanted Jesus to serve him but not to save him.

Covetousness is an unquenchable thirst for getting more and more of something we think we need in order to be truly satisfied. It may be a thirst for money or the things that money can buy, or even a thirst for position and power.

Christians are not immune for this monster. Why do you think twelve disciples constantly argue? Were they discussing about their theological difference? No, they were coveting over their positions in the kingdom of Jesus on earth.

How do you respond to the rich farmer’s dilemma of having too much? If we say, “I certainly wish I had that problem!” we may be revealing covetousness in our hearts. If suddenly you inherited a great deal of wealth, would it create a problem for you? Or would you simply praise God and ask Him what He wanted you to do with it?

Prosperity can bring many problems in our lives. It can choke the Word of God out of us, create snares and temptations, and give us a false sense of security.

Is it wrong to have retirement account? Is it wrong to invest in stock market? Absolutely not. But when those materialistic things become our masters, that is when the problem starts. Money can be a great servant to do wonderful things for the Kingdom of God, but it becomes a master, it tries to compete with God in our hearts.

What does it mean to be “rich toward God”? It means to acknowledge gratefully that everything we have comes from God, and then make every effort to use what He gives us for the good of others and the glory of God. To be rich toward God means spiritual enrichment, not just personal enjoyment.

C. BEWARE OF WORRYING

Luke 12:22-34 Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. 23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? 25 And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 26 If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? 29 And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. 30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. 31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. 32 Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The rich farmer worried because he had too much, but the disciples might be tempted to worry because they did not have enough. When a person is living by faith because he doesn’t have a lot, that person’s faith is also tested and challenged. Some exchange their faith in God who can do all things with worry that doesn’t do a thing other than giving them ulcer.

Covetousness and worry are closely connected. Covetousness can never get enough, worry is afraid it will never have enough – neither have their eyes on Jesus.

Worry is destructive. Worry in Greek is “Tossed like a ship at sea, to be in doubt”. Our English word ‘worry’ comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle.” Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

People worry for unknown future – whether it is death, sickness or anything unknown in general. Some people are paralyzed from worry “what if”. Over 95% of our worry never come to reality. In the meanwhile, a person cannot trust God to take care of him. Because he puts his trust in what he can do or what his money can do, God allows him to go through the bottomless pit of worry by his own choice.

The bottom line of Christian’s worry is “what-if-I-don’t-get-what-I-want” over God’s will. Whether it is about your health, your finance, or your relationship with someone you love, worry doesn’t do one good thing for you. Worry is a sin against God.

How do we win over worry? The first step is to realize that God knows our needs, we must trust Him to meet them. We are children in His family, and servants in His kingdom and He will see to it that our needs are fully met.

I am sure that many of you remember a silly song "Don't worry, be happy." Worry doesn't stop because we close our eyes, but it will stop its rampage in our hearts when we remember the faithfulness, provision and protection from our loving God.

The second step is putting God's kingdom as our foremost interest over ours. V31 should be our life long verse, not just Sunday morning.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We need to forget about what people may say or do, but fear God alone and obey Him
- 2) It is not wrong to own things so long as things do not own us.
- 3) When worry starts in our hearts, the best way to defeat it is to run toward God in prayer and the Bible.