

APPENDIX A

DEVELOPING A CHRISTOCENTRIC VIEW OF THE DISCIPLE

Besides considering the question of whether the Gentiles could become Christians the Jerusalem church had to face a second question. It is an important question for the development of cross-cultural leaders. And that is, “So we know that God calls culturally diverse people as disciples of Jesus, but what will characterize the way of a disciple of Jesus? How will disciples be identified?”

The Jerusalem church is confronted by this question after some men went to the multicultural church of Antioch and began to teach that the believers had to be circumcised for salvation.¹⁴⁴ Paul and Barnabas entered into what must have been an explosive debate. In their minds the whole work of God among the Gentiles was at stake. Indeed, in Paul’s mind the whole work of Jesus at the cross was at stake.¹⁴⁵ What is required to be a disciple of Jesus? The question is theological in nature yet has important behavioural implications. How Jewish does a disciple of Jesus need to be? Again the unity of the Church was threatened as people took sides, some calling for circumcision, some calling for none. After some debate, Peter spoke an authoritative word that settled the theological question:

¹⁴⁴ Acts 15:1.

¹⁴⁵ Paul dealt with aspects of this issue extensively in Galatians. “If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all” (Gal. 5:2). However, we should also note that in respect to the cultural sensitivities required for sharing the Gospel with the Jews, he had directed Timothy to be circumcised.

Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.¹⁴⁶

Circumcision could not be prescribed to be a disciple of Jesus because salvation is by grace, not through fulfillment of the law. However, the question of behaviour in the life of a disciple remained important for the health of these new multicultural churches.

James the half-brother of Jesus recognized both the hand of God and the need to make some cultural and moral instructions regarding the lifestyle of the disciple. He stood in the Council and made this statement:

Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages." It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.¹⁴⁷

They drafted a letter and sent it to the believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. The church in Antioch was glad and encouraged by its message. Again the church had successfully dealt with a theological question that confronted them because of the Holy Spirit's work in a multicultural world. Making pronouncements, though, does not easily settle matters so close to people's hearts. Under stress, former patterns easily slip

¹⁴⁶ Acts 15:7-11.

¹⁴⁷ Acts 15:13-21.

back in. The emotional transformation was difficult even for Peter. Before the Jerusalem council, he had come into conflict with Paul because of a retreat into Jewish cultural values in his interactions with other-culture believers in Antioch.¹⁴⁸ Paul though, was able to fully embrace the work of God for the nations. He wrote in Galatians 3:26-29 that the disciple's identity must be firmly wrapped up in Jesus Christ: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The question of what characterizes a disciple is one that must continue to be asked. Often as believers from within a culture or cultures we can confuse being Christian with being our culture. Craig W. Ellison writes that the by-product of this is often an "unintended arrogance."¹⁴⁹ As an example, Ellison outlines the major assumptions of middle-class culture in contrast to the culture that pervades many cities.

Middle-class culture treasures predictability, privacy, possessions, and power. It teaches its members to dislike unpredictability, public display of feeling, poverty, weakness, and dependency. Because of economic and political positioning, the middle-class person is usually able to assume certain facts of life quality, such as relative safety and properly functioning public services. Individual members of the middle-class have adequate resources to care for a variety of personal and family needs without overt dependency on others. In so doing, they live out the highest values of middle-class individualism. Anything less, anything which reflects weakness and dependency, is experienced as shame and guilt.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Gal. 2:11-21.

¹⁴⁹ Craig W. Ellison, "Addressing Felt Needs of Urban Dwellers," *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality* ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 99.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

For many middle-class believers in North America these values are believed to be right and, therefore, Christian. The implication of these values and their association with a Christian way are many. The believer from this middle-class culture for the most part, believes theology should be about matters of the spirit not matters of material. Biblical references to the poor are spiritualized to refer to spiritual poverty. Justice is reduced to addressing individual righteousness rather than societal structures or systems. Preaching is linear and logical. And worship services are well planned and predictable.¹⁵¹ The “good” disciple is able to get their life together, take care of themselves, and avoid troubling anyone by being dependent on them. Even for me, with roots in middle-class Christianity, it was difficult to emotionally grasp that Acts 2:41-47 is descriptive of an urban church and urban disciples. The urban dweller and much of the two-thirds world has a more accommodating view of suffering and its unpredictability. They prefer stories in preaching and the arousal of passion; the best worship for them is “celebration, not cerebralization; participation, not observation; releasing, not restricting.”¹⁵²

One of my challenges has been to understand the extent of my cultural distance from the disciples in the Bible. I was taught to simply see myself in the text and stories. Wonderfully, that is possible with God’s Word and yields great fruit. The danger though is in applying my culturally contextualized reading as “*the way*.” My best help in confronting this tendency has been to walk through the Punjabi Market along Main Street in Vancouver. There I feel and have a great cultural distance with these dear people from

¹⁵¹ Ibid. This list was drawn from Ellison’s discussion of implications.

¹⁵² Ibid. Ellison goes on to comment, “I don’t think it’s an accident that around the world, the most rapidly growing churches in large cities are Pentecostal. It has little to do with glossolalia, in my opinion. Rather, they’ve caught the heartbeat of urban dwellers and have shaped their ministry to the masses.”

the Punjab, in India. I remind myself that I am that far and farther from the first century peoples.

Though culturally distant from the Bible, discerning a basic view of the disciple in an urban multicultural context or a rural one does not have to be difficult. As Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the Gospels, and Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John wrote letters to the churches, they had to confront the question of what constitutes the life and behaviour of a disciple of Jesus. How should disciples from all the nations follow Jesus? Though no trans-cultural model of a disciple is prescribed in Scripture, we can get some clues. The Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, means to be one who learns by following; one who is a student, an “imitator of the teacher.”¹⁵³ Jesus described the disciple in John 15:7-8, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” The Matthean commission emphasizes that disciples are to be taught to obey everything Jesus commanded. Luke recalls the “negative” demands for being a disciple, emphasizing that Jesus requires devoted allegiance.¹⁵⁴ And Mark emphasizes the servanthood required for Jesus’ followers. Paul said that we are to be “conformed to Christ.”¹⁵⁵ John said we must “walk as he walked.”¹⁵⁶ Peter said we are to be holy strangers in the world.¹⁵⁷ Generations of Christians, since, have worked

¹⁵³ *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, “disciple” [CD-ROM] (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Press, 1985).

¹⁵⁴ Luke 14:26, Luke 14:27, Luke 14:33.

¹⁵⁵ Gal. 4:19.

¹⁵⁶ 1 John 2:6.

¹⁵⁷ 1 Pet. 1:15-17.

through the biblical material to answer this question of the church's place in the world. They have sought to understand who Jesus' disciples are and what helps them become mature in this earthly journey.¹⁵⁸

Though an exhaustive list is not possible here, I have drawn out seven clues for keeping a basic picture of the disciple.

1. The disciple responds to Jesus' command to be with Him.
2. The disciple pursues becoming like Jesus.
3. The disciple rearranges beliefs, values, and commitments in accordance with Scripture.
4. The disciple is not birthed into legalism but love.
5. The disciple is filled with the Spirit to exhibit spiritual fruit.
6. The disciple seeks to keep right relationships centered in love.
7. The disciple participates in Jesus' mission to the world.

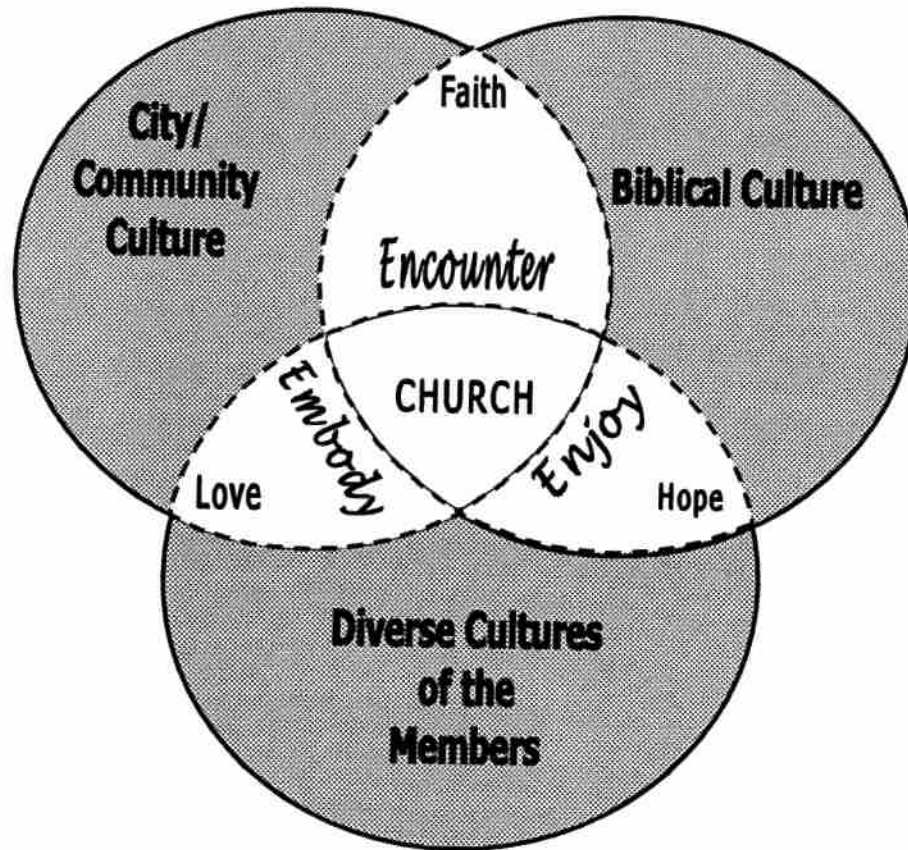
An effective cross-cultural leader has a firmly Christocentric view of the disciple. Such a view will create room for the different understandings and applications of Scripture that will arise from the cultural lenses people wear. It will also create the expectation that Christ does confront culture; a culture can have aspects of behaviour and belief that are contrary to Scripture and, therefore, sinful. The basic and balanced view of the disciple nurtures the expectation of transformation. Figure 2 illustrates how the Bible and its culture engages with the culture of a city or community and the diverse cultures of the church's members to impact the formation of a church.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Two recent publications have proved helpful in my exploration of this topic: Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), Chapter 8 "On Being A Disciple, or Student of Jesus" and Chapter 9, "A Curriculum of Christlikeness." Also the work done by Randy Frazee and the Pantego Bible Church has been helpful for me. From their study of discipleship history, they have developed a spiritual formation calendar for their congregation presenting 10 beliefs, 10 virtues, and 10 practices necessary for the maturing disciple; Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 70-86.

¹⁵⁹ I designed this model informed by David Britt's Church-Community Congruence Model (See note 25) and David Hesselgrave's "Three-Culture Model of Missionary Communication" found in *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd Edition

Figure 2

3 Culture Congruence Model for Community Formation in the Multicultural Church



It is my conviction that something seductive and sinful happens when cultural practices and values are held up as “being Christian.” Legalism and discrimination are not far behind. In the beginning, the disciples were characterized not by their membership to an institution but by their association with Jesus as the Way of salvation

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 108. Hesselgrave’s model illustrates the interaction between a biblical culture, a missionary’s culture, and the respondent culture. He understands each culture to be shaped by sources, messages, and respondents.

and the ensuing lifestyle that presented a new way to their world.¹⁶⁰ They were a movement. They could not be penned down to temples or synagogues. They could only be associated with Jesus and with others who were following Him.

Paul, culturally both Roman and Jewish, became an apostle of the Way to Gentile cities and their governments. His effectiveness as a cross-cultural leader is amplified not only by his background but also by his intense Christ-centered view of himself and other disciples. Often he draws together faith, hope, and love as ways that are characteristic of Jesus' disciples.¹⁶¹ Those three words—faith, hope, and love—become compressed constructs that gathered beliefs, behaviours and virtues together.¹⁶² In light of that, at Cityview I have taken those three concepts and created a construct of the disciple that fits our context. The disciple is one who is devoted to Jesus, The Way, and is learning the ways of faith—encountering the person of Jesus, the ways of hope—enjoying the peace of Jesus, and the ways of love—embodying the passion of Jesus. These words from Dallas Willard have provided guidance for me:

¹⁶⁰ In John 14:6, Jesus declared that He is “the Way.” The churches in the book of Acts are referred to as the people of “The Way:” Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

¹⁶¹ Paul groups faith, hope and love together in his letters to the churches: Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:29, 13:13, 14:1; Eph. 1:15-18; Col. 1:3-5; 1 Thess. 1:3. On other occasions Paul groups faith and love together but makes no direct mention of “hope.” Instead, he may speak of some aspect of the promises we have in Christ: “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (Philem. v. 6).

¹⁶² Dallas Willard, *Faith, Hope and Love as Indispensable Foundations of Moral Realization*, www.dwillard.org/Christianity/Pubs/faith_hope_love.htm, accessed 10/31/01. Willard writes that faith, hope, and love “are really conditions of significant moral attainment, found in the raw but earnest beginner.” He writes, “We must view them as specific concretizations, in peculiar ways of having faith, hope, and love (or ways of them having us.) In any case, I suspect that they are better understood as attitudes, not character traits at all.”

Though costly, discipleship once had a very clear, straightforward meaning. The mechanics are not the same today. We cannot literally be with him in the same way as his first disciples could. But the priorities and intentions—the heart or inner attitudes—of disciples are forever the same. In the heart of a disciple there is a desire, and there is decision or settled intent. Having come to some understanding of what it means, and thus having “counted up the costs,” the disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him. Thus, “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher” (Matt. 10:25). And moreover, “After he has been fully trained, he will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

Given this desire, usually produced by the lives and words of those already in The Way, there is yet a decision to be made: the decision to devote oneself to becoming like Christ. The disciple is one who, intent upon becoming Christ-like and so dwelling in his “faith and practice,” systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end. By these actions, even today, one enrolls in Christ’s training, becomes his pupil or disciple. There is no other way.¹⁶³

Informed by Scripture, the constructs of faith, hope, and love provide us with the proper lenses for seeing others and ourselves as disciples in a multicultural church. It will assist the emerging cross-cultural leader to see disciples not as people “who have arrived” but as people who are becoming.¹⁶⁴ Jesus is the central person of our faith, the only source of our hope, and the unending supply of our love. Like Peter and the Jerusalem church we may find that the movement towards a Christ-centered view of ourselves and others is painfully slow. However, the disciple called by God to cross cultures as a leader, can be assured, God will complete the work.

¹⁶³ Dallas Willard, “Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?” *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 261. The article was first published in *Christianity Today*, October 10, 1980.

¹⁶⁴ Murren, *Churches That Heal*, 91. Murren highlights the importance of “becoming” as an attitude and approach to the Christian life for a climate of change and healing; “A church that heals understands that its mission is to see broken, hurting people become whole followers of Christ—new creations journeying into the full discovering of their identity in him. But too many people find that they can’t “become” in the church they’re in, and so they move from church to church, hoping to find an environment that won’t be filled with obstacles to that process. This constant need to “move on” is a dangerous epidemic afflicting church life in America today. Many move on because they feel stunted by a church environment that demands conformity or silences questions. Jesus respected every person he ever met; often church doesn’t. Prepackaged belief systems that deal with styles, opinions, and practices rather than the bedrock faith presented in the Bible become prisons for people, and healing stops.”