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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Six

The Ministry of Teaching

In this chapter we will consider many aspects of the ministry of teaching. Teaching is the responsibility of apostles, prophets, evangelists,¹ pastors/elders/overseers, teachers (of course), and to some degree, all followers of Christ, as we are all supposed to be making disciples, teaching our disciples to obey all that Christ commanded.²

As I've previously emphasized, the disciple-making pastor or minister teaches first by his example, and second, verbally. *He preaches what he practices*. The apostle Paul, a very successful disciple-maker, wrote:

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

This should be every minister's goal—to be able to honestly say to those he leads, "Act like me. If you want to know how a follower of Christ lives his life, just watch me."

By comparison, I can remember telling a former congregation that I pastored, "Don't follow me...follow Christ!" Although it didn't occur to me at the time, I was admitting that I was not a good example to follow. In fact, I was actually admitting that I was not following Christ as I should, and then telling everyone else to do what I wasn't doing! How different this was from what Paul said. In truth, if we can't tell people to imitate us because we are imitating Christ, we should not be in the ministry, because people use ministers as their role models. *The church is a reflection of its leaders*.

Teaching Unity by Example

Let's apply this concept to teaching by example to the teaching of one particular topic, the topic of unity. All pastors/elders/overseers desire that the flocks they lead be unified. They hate divisions within their local bodies. They know that factions are very displeasing to the Lord. After all, Jesus commanded us to love each other just as He loved us (see John 13:34-35). Our love for each other is what marks us as His disciples before the watching world. All this being so, most leaders of flocks admonish their sheep to love one another

¹ The preaching of the gospel by evangelists could be considered a form of teaching, and evangelists certainly need to proclaim a biblically-accurate gospel.

² All believers are not given responsibility to publicly teach groups of people, but all have the responsibility to teach on a one-to-one basis as they make disciples (see Matt. 5:19; 28:19-20; Col. 3:16; Heb. 5:12).

and strive for unity.

Yet, as ministers who are supposed to be teaching *foremost* by our example, we often fall far short in our teaching about love and unity by how we live. When we, for example, demonstrate a lack of love and unity with other pastors, we send a message that contradicts what we preach to our congregations. We expect them to do what we do not.

The fact is, *the most significant words Jesus spoke concerning unity were spoken to leaders regarding their relationships with other leaders.* For example, at the Last Supper, after He washed His disciples' feet, Jesus said to them,

You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you (John 13:13-15). [Note that Jesus taught by example.]

Pastors often use this passage of Scripture to teach their flocks about loving one another, which is certainly appropriate. The words in this passage, however, were addressed to leaders, the twelve apostles. Jesus knew that His future church had little hope of succeeding in its mission if its leaders were divided or if they competed with each other. So He made it clear that *He expects His leaders to humbly serve each other.*

In the context of the culture of His day, Jesus demonstrated humble service by means of doing one of the lowest tasks of a household servant, the washing of feet. If He had visited a different culture at a different time in history, He may have dug out the latrines or washed out the garbage cans of His disciples. *How many of His modern leaders are willing to demonstrate that kind of love and humility towards each other?*

Within the space of less than an hour, Jesus repeatedly underscored this important message. Minutes after He washed their feet, Jesus said to His group of future church leaders:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

These words certainly have application to all of Christ's disciples, *but they were originally spoken to leaders regarding their relationship with other leaders.*

Once again, just minutes later, 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 (John 15:12-13).

Note that Jesus was again speaking to leaders. Within seconds, He again said,

This I command you, that you love one another (John 15:17).

Then, a few minutes later, Jesus' disciples heard Him pray on their behalf,

And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, *that they may be one, even as We are* (John 17:11, emphasis added).

Finally, just a few seconds later, as Jesus continued His prayer, His disciples heard Him say,

I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; *that they may all be one*; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; *that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me*. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; *that they may be one*, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, *that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me*, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me (John 17:20-23, emphasis added).

Thus, within the space of less than an hour, *six times* Jesus emphasized to His future leaders the importance of their being unified and demonstrating their unity by humbly loving and serving one another. This was obviously very important to Jesus. Their unity was a key factor in the world believing in Him.

How Well Are We Doing?

Unfortunately, while we hope our flocks will be unified with love, many of us compete with each other and use unethical means to build our churches at the expense of other churches. Many of us avoid any fellowship with other pastors whose doctrine is different. We even advertise our lack of unity on signs we post for the world to see in front of our church buildings, sending a message to everyone: "We are not like those other Christians in other church buildings." (And we've done a good job at educating the world on our lack of unity, as most unbelievers know that Christianity is a very divided institution.)

In short, we don't practice what we preach, and our example teaches our congregations much more than our sermons about unity do. It is foolish to think that average Christians are going to be unified and love each other when their leaders act differently.

The only solution, of course, is repentance. We must repent of setting the wrong example before believers and before the world. We must remove the barriers that divide us and start loving each other as Jesus commanded.

That means we must, first of all, meet with other pastors and ministers, including pastors of different doctrinal persuasions. I'm not speaking of fellowshiping with pastors who are not born again, who aren't striving to obey Jesus, or who are in ministry for personal profit. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, and Jesus told us exactly how to identify them. They are known by their fruit.

I am speaking, however, of pastors and ministers who are striving to keep Jesus' commandments, true brothers and sisters in Christ. If you are a pastor, you should be committed to loving other pastors, demonstrating that love in practical ways before your flock. One way to start is by going to other pastors in your vicinity and asking their forgiveness for not loving them as you should. That should break down some walls. Then commit to meeting together regularly to have a meal, encourage and admonish one another and to pray. When that occurs, you might eventually lovingly discuss the doctrines that tend to divide you, striving for unity whether you ultimately agree or not on everything you discuss. My life and ministry were enriched significantly when I finally became willing to listen to ministers who were not in my same doctrinal camp. I was missing so much blessing for so many years by shutting myself off.

You can also demonstrate your love and unity by inviting other pastors to preach at your church or house church gathering, or your church can have combined meetings with other churches or house church gatherings.

You can change the name of your church so that it doesn't advertise to the world your disunity with the rest of the body of Christ. You can pull out of your denomination or named association and identify only with the body of Christ, sending a message to everyone that you believe that Jesus is building only one church, not many different churches that can't get along with each other.

This, I know, sounds radical. But why do anything to uphold what Jesus clearly never intended? Why be involved in anything that displeases Him? There are no denominations or special associations mentioned in Scripture. When the Corinthians divided over their favorite teachers, Paul firmly rebuked them, saying that their divisions revealed their carnality and spiritual babyhood (see 1 Cor. 3:1-7). Do our divisions reveal anything less?

Anything that sets us apart from one another should be shunned. House churches should avoid giving themselves names or joining any associations that have names. In Scripture, individual churches were identified only by the houses in which they met. Groups of churches were identified only by the cities in which they were located. They all considered themselves to be part of the one church, the body of Christ.

There is only one King and one kingdom. *Anyone who sets himself up so that believers or churches identify with him is building his own kingdom within God's kingdom.* He had better get ready to stand before the King who says, "My glory I will not give to another" (Is. 48:11).

All of this is to again say that ministers should be setting the right example of obedience to Christ before everyone, because people are going to follow their example. The example they live before others is their most influential means of teaching. As Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi:

Brethren, join in *following my example*, and *observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us* (Phil. 3:17, emphasis added).

What to Teach

Like Paul, the disciple-making minister has a goal. That goal is to "present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28b). So he, also like Paul, will "*admonish every man and teach every man with all wisdom*" (Col. 1:28a, emphasis added). Note that Paul didn't teach only to educate or entertain people.

The disciple-making minister can say with Paul, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). That is, he wants to produce true Christ-likeness and holiness in the lives of the people he serves, which is why he teaches believers to obey all of Christ's commandments. He teaches the truth, admonishing his hearers to "pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The disciple-making minister knows that Jesus commanded His disciples to teach their disciples to obey *all*, and not just part, of what He had commanded them (see Matt. 28:19-20). He wants to be certain not to neglect teaching anything Christ commanded, and so he regularly teaches verse by verse through the Gospels and the epistles. That is where Jesus' commandments are recorded and re-emphasized.

This kind of expository teaching also insures that his instruction will remain balanced. When we teach only topical messages, we are more apt to focus on topics that are popular with people and likely to neglect those that are not so popular. The verse-by-verse teacher, however, will not only teach about God's love, but also about His discipline and wrath. He will not only teach about the blessings of being a Christian, but also about the responsibilities. He will be less likely to major on minor themes, emphasizing what is less important and neglecting what is most important. (According to Jesus, this was a fault of the Pharisees; see Matt. 23:23-24.)

Overcoming Fears of Expository Teaching

Many pastors are afraid to teach verse by verse because there is so much that they don't understand in Scripture, and they don't want their congregations to know how much they don't know! That, of course, is prideful. There is no one on earth who perfectly understands everything in Scripture. Even Peter said that some of the things that Paul

wrote were difficult to understand (see 2 Pet. 3:16).

When a pastor who teaches verse by verse arrives at a verse or passage that he doesn't understand, he should simply tell his flock that he doesn't understand the next section and skip over it. He can also request that his flock pray that the Holy Spirit will help him understand. His humility will set a good example before his flock, *a sermon in itself*.

The pastor/elder/overseer of a house church has the extra advantage of teaching a small group in an informal setting, because questions can be asked during his teaching. This also opens up the possibility of the Holy Spirit giving insight to others in the group regarding scriptures that are being studied. The result can be much more effective learning for everyone.

A good place to start when teaching Christ's commandments is His Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7. There, Jesus gave many commandments, and He helped his Jewish followers rightly understand the laws given through Moses. A little later in this book, I will teach through the Sermon on the Mount verse by verse to demonstrate how it can be done.

Sermon Preparation

There is no evidence in the New Testament that any pastor/elder/overseer ever prepared a weekly oration/sermon, complete with neatly-prepared points and illustrations all written down in outline form, as is the practice of many modern ministers. Certainly none of us could imagine Jesus doing such a thing! Teaching in the early church was more spontaneous and interactive, following the Jewish style, rather than oratory, as was the practice of the Greeks and Romans, a tradition that was eventually adopted by the church when it became institutionalized. If Jesus told His disciples not to prepare a defense when they were called into court, promising that the Holy Spirit would give them spontaneous, irrefutable words, we would expect that God would be able to help pastors in church gatherings to some degree!

This is not to say that ministers should not prepare *themselves* by praying and studying. Paul admonished Timothy:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Ministers who follow Paul's instruction to "let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Col. 3:16) will be so full of God's Word that they will be able to teach from their "overflow." So dear pastor, the important thing is that you immerse yourself in the Bible. If you are knowledgeable and passionate about your topic, very little other preparation is really necessary to communicate God's truth. Additionally, if you teach verse by verse, you can simply use each consecutive verse as your outline. Your preparation should then consist of prayerfully meditating on the verses of Scripture you will be teaching. If you pastor a house church, the interactive nature of teaching will even more so lessen the need for sermon outlines.

The minister who has faith for God to help him as he teaches will be rewarded with God's help. So trust less in yourself, your preparation and your notes, and more on the Lord. Gradually, as you gain faith and confidence, prepare fewer sermon notes, until you can get along with just a skeleton outline or no outline at all.

The one who is self-conscious before others is the most likely to depend on prepared notes because he is so afraid of making a public mistake. He needs to realize that his fear is rooted in insecurity that is rooted in pride. He would be better to be less worried about how he appears in the eyes of people and be more concerned about how he and his audience appear in God's eyes. No prepared speech can move listeners like a heart-felt, Spirit-anointed teaching. Think of how communication would be hindered if everyone

used prepared notes for all his or her conversations! Conversation would die! An unrehearsed conversational style comes across as much more sincere than a prepared oration. Teaching is not acting. It is imparting truth. We all know when we are just hearing a speech, and when we do, we have a tendency to automatically tune out.

Four More Thoughts

(1) Some ministers are like parrots, getting all their sermon material from books that others have written. They are missing out on a wonderful blessing of being personally taught by the Holy Spirit, and they are also likely to be propagating the errors of those writers they copy.

(2) Many pastors imitate the preaching and teaching styles of other preachers, styles that are often purely traditional. For example, it is thought in some circles that sermons are anointed only when they are loud and fast. Church attendees are thus subject to sermons that are shouted from beginning to end. The reality is that people usually tune out redundant shouting, just like they do when they hear monotone speaking. A varied voice is much more captivating. Moreover, *preaching* is naturally louder as it is exhortational, whereas *teaching* is usually done in a more conversational tone because it is instructional.

(3) I've observed sermon-listeners in hundreds of church services, and it amazes me that so many preachers and teachers are oblivious to the many indications that people are bored and/or not listening. Pastor, the people who look bored *are* bored! Those who aren't looking at you while you speak are probably not listening. People who are not listening are not being helped in the least. If *sincere* people are being bored and/or not listening, then you need to improve your sermons. Give more examples. Tell relevant stories. Make up parables. Keep it simple. Teach the Word from your heart. Be sincere. Be yourself. Vary your voice. Make eye contact with as many listeners as possible. Use some facial expression. Use your hands. Move around. Don't speak too long. If the group is small, let people ask questions at any reasonable time.

(4) The idea that every sermon should have three points is just a human invention. The goal is to make disciples, not follow modern homiletic theories. Jesus said, "Feed My sheep," not "Impress My sheep."

Whom to Teach

Following Jesus' model, the disciple-making minister is, to some degree, selective with regard to *whom* he teaches. That may surprise you, but it is true. Jesus often spoke to the multitudes in *parables*, and He had a reason for doing so: He didn't want everyone to understand what He was saying. This is clear from Scripture:

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt. 13:10-13).

The privilege of understanding Christ's parables was reserved for only those who had repented and decided to follow Him. Those who turned down the opportunity to repent, resisting God's will for their lives, were likewise resisted by God. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (see 1 Pet. 5:5).

Similarly, Jesus instructed His followers: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear

you to pieces" (Matt. 7:6). Obviously, Jesus was speaking figuratively. He meant, "Don't give what is valuable to those who don't appreciate its value." Pigs don't realize that pearls are precious, and likewise spiritual pigs don't value God's Word when they hear it. If they believed it was actually God's Word that they were hearing, they would give it their utmost attention and obey it.

How do you know if someone is a spiritual pig? You cast one pearl his way and see what he does with that one pearl. If he disregards it, then you know he is a spiritual pig. If he obeys it, then you know he is not a spiritual pig.

Unfortunately, too many pastors are doing what Jesus told them not to do, continually casting their pearls before pigs, teaching people who are resisting or have rejected God's Word. *Those ministers are wasting their God-given time.* They should have shaken the dust off their feet and moved on long ago, just as Jesus commanded.

The Sheep, Goats and Pigs

The fact is, you can't disciple someone who doesn't want to be disciplined, someone who doesn't want to obey Jesus. Many churches are full of people just like that, people who are only cultural Christians, many of whom think they are born again just because they have given a mental assent to a few theological facts about Jesus or Christianity. They are pigs and goats, not sheep. Yet many pastors spend 90% of their time trying to keep those pigs and goats happy, while neglecting the ones whom they could help spiritually and should be serving, the true sheep! Pastor, Jesus wants you to feed His *sheep*, not the goats and the pigs (see John 21:17)!

But how do you know who are the sheep? They are the ones who come to church earliest and leave the latest. They are hungry to learn the truth, because Jesus is their Lord and they want to please Him. They come to church not just on Sundays, but whenever there is a gathering. They get involved in small groups. They often ask questions. They are excited about the Lord. They are looking for opportunities to serve.

Pastor, devote the majority of your time and attention to those people. They are the disciples. To the goats and pigs who attend your church, preach the gospel as long as they can stand it. But if you preach the true gospel, they won't be able to stand it for long. Either they will leave the church, or if they have the power, they will attempt to remove you from your position. If they succeed, shake the dust off your feet as you leave. (In a house church setting, such a thing cannot happen, especially if your church meets in *your* house!)

Likewise, evangelists should feel no obligation to continually preach the gospel to the same people who have repeatedly rejected it. Leave the dead to bury the dead (see Luke 9:60). You are an ambassador for Christ, carrying the most important message from the King of kings! Your position is very high in God's kingdom and your responsibility is great! Don't waste your time telling anyone the gospel twice until everyone has heard it once.

If you are going to be a disciple-making minister, you should be selective in regard to whom you teach, not wasting your valuable time on people who don't want to obey Jesus. Paul wrote to Timothy,

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to *faithful* men, who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2, emphasis added).

Reaching the Goal

Imagine for a moment something that never could have happened under Jesus' ministry but happens all the time in modern churches. Imagine that Jesus, after His resurrection, stayed on the earth and started a church like a modern institutional church, and then

pastored it for thirty years. Imagine Him giving sermons every Sunday to the same congregation. Imagine Peter, James and John sitting on the first pew during one of Jesus' sermons, where they had been sitting every Sunday for twenty years. Imagine Peter leaning toward John and whispering in his ear with a groan, "We've heard this same sermon ten times."

We know that such a scene is absurd, because we all know that Jesus would never have put Himself or His apostles into such a situation. Jesus came to make some disciples and do it a certain way within a certain amount of time. Over a period of about three years, He disciplined Peter, James and John, and some others. He didn't do it by preaching to them once every Sunday in a church building. He did it by living His life before them, answering their questions, and giving them opportunities to serve. He completed His task and moved on.

So why do we do what Jesus would never have done? Why do we attempt to accomplish what God wants by preaching sermons to the same people for decades? When will we ever have completed our task? Why aren't our disciples, after a few years, ready to go make some disciples of their own?

My point is that, if we are doing our jobs correctly, there should come a time when our disciples are mature enough to not really need our ministry to them any longer. They should be turned loose to make disciples themselves. We are supposed to reach the goal God has set before us, and Jesus showed us how to do it. Incidentally, in a growing house church there is a continual need to disciple people and develop leaders. A healthy house church will not fall into the endless cycle of the same preacher preaching to the same people over decades.

Right Motives

To succeed at teaching that leads to the making of disciples, there is nothing more important than having the right motives. When someone is in the ministry for the wrong reasons, he'll do the wrong things. That is the primary reason why there is so much false and unbalanced teaching in the church today. When a minister's motives are to gain popularity, be successful in the eyes of others, or make lots of money, he is destined to fail in the eyes of God. The saddest thing is that he may succeed in reaching his goal of gaining popularity, becoming successful before others, or making lots of money, but the day will come when his wrong motives will be exposed at Christ's judgment seat, and he will receive no reward for his work. *If* he is permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven,³ everyone there will know the truth about him, as his lack of reward and his low position in the kingdom will reveal it. There is no doubt that there are different ranks in heaven. Jesus warned:

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19).

Of course those ministers who do obey and teach Christ's commandments will suffer for it while on earth. Jesus promised suffering to those who obey Him (see Matt. 5:10-12; John 16:33). They are least likely to gain worldly success, popularity and wealth. What they do gain is future rewards and praise from God. Which would you rather have? In this regard, Paul wrote:

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even

³ I say "if" because those who are wolves in sheep's clothing are clearly "ministers" who are selfishly motivated, and they will be cast into hell. I suppose what sets them apart from true ministers with wrong motives is the degree of their wrong motivations.

as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon 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 upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:5-15).

Paul likened himself to a master builder who lays a foundation. Apollos, a teacher who came to Corinth after Paul had established the church there, Paul likened to one who built upon the foundation already laid.

Note that both Paul and Apollos would ultimately be rewarded based upon the *quality*, not the *quantity*, of their work (see 3:13).

Figuratively speaking, Paul and Apollos could build God's building with six different kinds of materials, three of which are common, relatively inexpensive and combustible, and three of which are uncommon, very expensive, and not combustible. One day, their respective building materials would undergo the fire of God's judgment, and the wood, hay and straw would be consumed by the fire, revealing their worthless and temporal quality. The gold, silver and precious stones, representing works that were precious and eternal in God's eyes, would endure the testing flames.

We can be certain that unbiblical teaching will be burned to ashes at Christ's judgment. So will anything done in the power, methods, or wisdom of the flesh, as well as anything done for the wrong motives. Jesus warned that anything we might do that is motivated by the desire for the praise of people will not be rewarded (see Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18). These kinds of worthless works may not be evident to human eyes now, but will certainly be revealed to all in the future, as Paul warned. Personally, if my works were of the wood, hay and straw category, I'd rather discover it now than later. Now there is time to repent; then it will be too late.

Checking Our Motives

It is very easy to deceive ourselves about our motives. I certainly have. How can we know if our motives are pure?

The best way is to ask God to reveal to us if our motives are wrong, and then to monitor our thoughts and deeds. Jesus told us to do good works such as praying and giving to the poor in secret, and that is one way to assure ourselves that we are doing good because we desire the praise of God rather than the praise of people. If we are only obedient to God when people are watching us, that signals something is very wrong. Or, if we avoid scandalous sins that would ruin our reputation if we were caught, but indulge in lesser sins that no one would likely ever know about, this shows our motivations are wrong. If we are truly trying to please God—who knows our every thought, word and deed—then we will strive to obey Him all the time, in things big and small, things known and unknown to others.

Similarly, if our motives are right, we will not follow church growth fads that serve only to increase church attendance at the expense of making disciples who obey all of Christ's

commands.

We will teach all of God's Word and not just focus on popular topics that appeal to worldly and unspiritual people.

We will not twist God's Word or teach scriptures in a way that violates their context within the whole Bible.

We will not seek titles and places of honor for ourselves. We will not seek to be known.

We will not cater to the wealthy.

We will not lay up treasures on earth, but live simply and give all we can, setting an example of good stewardship before our flocks.

We will be more concerned with what God thinks of our sermons than what people think.

How are your motives?

A Doctrine that Defeats Disciple-Making

The disciple-making minister never teaches anything that works against the goal of making disciples. Thus, *he never says anything that would make people feel comfortable with disobeying the Lord Jesus*. He never presents God's grace as a means to sin without fear of judgment. Rather, he presents God's grace as a means to repent of sin and live an overcoming life. Scripture, as we know, declares that only overcomers will inherit God's kingdom (see Rev. 2:11; 3:5; 21:7).

Some modern ministers, unfortunately, hold to unbiblical doctrines that do great damage to the goal of making disciples. One such doctrine that has become very popular in the United States is that of *unconditional eternal security*, or "once saved always saved." This doctrine maintains that born again people can never forfeit their salvation regardless of how they live their lives. Because salvation is by grace, they say, the same grace that initially saves people who pray to receive salvation will keep them saved. Any other viewpoint, they maintain, is tantamount to saying that people are saved by their works.

Naturally, such a viewpoint is a great detriment to holiness. Since obedience to Christ is supposedly not essential for one to enter heaven, then there is little motivation to obey Jesus, especially when obedience is costly.

As I stated earlier in this book, the grace that God extends towards humanity does not relieve people of responsibility to obey Him. Scripture states that salvation is not just by grace, but also through faith (see Eph. 2:8). Both grace and faith are necessary for salvation. Faith is the proper response to God's grace, and true faith always results in repentance and obedience. Faith without works is dead, useless, and cannot save, according to James (see James 2:14-26).

That is why Scripture repeatedly declares that continued salvation is dependent upon continued faith and obedience. There are scores of scriptures that make this abundantly clear. For example, Paul states in his letter to the Colossian believers:

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—*if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven (Col. 1:21-23, emphasis added).*

It couldn't be clearer. Only a theologian could mistake or twist Paul's meaning. Jesus will confirm us blameless *if* we continue in the faith. This same truth is reiterated in Rom. 11:13-24, 1 Cor. 15:1-2 and Heb. 3:12-14; 10:38-39, where it is clearly stated that final salvation is contingent upon continuance in faith. All contain the conditional word *if*.

The Necessity of Holiness

Can a believer forfeit eternal life by sinning? The answer is found in many scriptures, such as the following, which all guarantee that those who practice various sins will not inherit God's kingdom. If a believer can return to the practice of the sins in the following lists compiled by Paul, then a believer can forfeit ultimate salvation:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither *fornicators*, nor *idolaters*, nor *adulterers*, nor *effeminate*, nor *homosexuals*, nor *thieves*, nor the *covetous*, nor *drunkards*, nor *revilers*, nor *swindlers*, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10, emphasis added).

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: *immorality*, *impurity*, *sensuality*, *idolatry*, *sorcery*, *enmities*, *strife*, *jealousy*, *outbursts of anger*, *disputes*, *dissensions*, *factions*, *envying*, *drunkenness*, *carousing*, and *things like these*, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21, emphasis added).

For this you know with certainty, that no *immoral* or *impure* person or *covetous* man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:5-6, emphasis added).

Notice that in every case, Paul was writing to believers, warning them. Twice he warned them to not be deceived, indicating that he was concerned that some believers might think that a person could practice the sins he listed and still inherit God's kingdom.

Jesus warned His closest disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew of the possibility of their being cast into hell because of not being ready for His return. Note that the following words were addressed to them (see Mark 13:1-4), and not to a crowd of unbelievers:

Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day *your Lord* is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason *you* [Peter, James, John and Andrew] be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when *you* [Peter, James, John and Andrew] do not think He will.

Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, "My master is not coming for a long time," and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth (Matt. 24:42-51, emphasis added).

The moral of the story? "Peter, James, John and Andrew, don't be like the unfaithful servant in this parable."⁴

⁴ Amazingly, some teachers, who can't escape the facts that Jesus was warning His closest disciples and that the unfaithful servant clearly represents one who was a believer, say that the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth is a place in the outer fringes of heaven. There, unfaithful believers will supposedly temporarily mourn their loss of rewards until Jesus wipes the tears from their eyes and then welcomes them into heaven!

To underscore what He just said to His closest disciples, Jesus immediately continued with the Parable of the Ten Virgins. All ten virgins were initially ready for the coming of the bridegroom, but five become unready and were excluded from the wedding feast. Jesus ended the parable with the words, "Be on the alert then [Peter, James, John and Andrew], for *you* [Peter, James, John and Andrew] do not know the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13). That is, "Don't be like the five foolish virgins, Peter, James, John and Andrew." If there were no possibility of Peter, James, John and Andrew not being ready, there would be no need for Jesus to have warned them.

Jesus then immediately told them the Parable of the Talents. It was the same message again. "Don't be like the one talent slave who had nothing to show for what his master entrusted to him when he returned." At the end of the parable, the master declared, "Cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). Jesus could not have made His message clearer. Only a theologian could twist His meaning. There was a danger that Peter, James, John and Andrew could all be cast into hell in the end if they weren't obedient when Jesus returned. If that possibility existed for Peter, James, John and Andrew, then that possibility exists for all of us. As Jesus promised, only those who do the will of His Father will enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 7:21).⁵

Those who teach the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security clearly work against Christ and assist Satan, teaching the opposite of what Jesus and the apostles taught. They effectively neutralize Jesus' commandment to make disciples who will obey all He commanded, blocking the narrow road to heaven, and widening the broad highway to hell.⁶

Another Modern Doctrine that Defeats Disciple-Making

It is not just the teaching of unconditional eternal security that deceives people into thinking holiness is not essential for ultimate salvation. The love of God is often presented in a way that neutralizes disciple making. Preachers can often be heard saying to their audiences, "God loves you unconditionally." People interpret that to mean, "God accepts and approves of me regardless of whether I obey or disobey Him,." That, however, is simply not true.

Many of those same preachers believe that God casts people who are not born again into hell, and they are certainly correct in their belief. Now let us think about that. *Obviously*, God doesn't approve of people whom He casts into hell. So how can it be said that He loves them? Are people who are cast into hell loved by God? Do you think they would tell you that God loves them? Of course not. Would God say that He loves them? Certainly not! They are abhorrent to Him, which is why He justly punishes them in hell. He doesn't approve of or love them.

This being so, God's love for earthly sinners is clearly a *merciful love* that is only temporary, not an *approving love*. He has mercy on them, forestalling His judgment and

⁵ Of course, Christians who commit a single sin do not immediately forfeit their salvation. Those who ask forgiveness for their sins are forgiven by God (if they forgive those who sin against them). Those who don't ask for God's forgiveness place themselves in the danger of being disciplined by God. Only by hardening their hearts to God's on-going discipline do believers run the risk of forfeiting their salvation.

⁶ Those who are still not persuaded that a Christian can forfeit his salvation should consider all of the following New Testament passages: Matt. 18:21-35; 24:4-5, 11-13, 23-26, 42-51; 25:1-30; Luke 8:11-15; 11:24-28; 12:42-46; John 6:66-71; 8:31-32, 51; 15:1-6; Acts 11:21-23; 14:21-22; Rom. 6:11-23; 8:12-14, 17; 11:20-22; 1 Cor. 9:23-27; 10:1-21; 11:29-32; 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:24; 11:2-4; 12:21-13:5; Gal. 5:1-4; 6:7-9; Phil. 2:12-16; 3:17-4:1; Col. 1:21-23; 2:4-8, 18-19; 1 Thes. 3:1-8; 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 18-20; 4:1-16; 5:5-6, 11-15, 6:9-12, 17-19, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:11-18; 3:13-15; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:6-19; 4:1-16; 5:8-9; 6:4-9, 10-20; 10:19-39; 12:1-17, 25-29; Jas. 1:12-16; 4:4-10; 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 2:1-22; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:15-2:28; 5:16; 2 John 6-9; Jude 20-21; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17-26; 3:4-5, 8-12, 14-22; 21:7-8; 22:18-19. The proof texts produced by those who teach the doctrine of unconditional eternal security are scriptures that simply emphasize God's faithfulness in salvation, and say nothing about human responsibility. Thus they must be interpreted to harmonize with the many scriptures I've just listed. Just because God promises His faithfulness is no guarantee of anyone else's faithfulness. Just because I promise my wife that I'll never leave her and keep my promise, that is no guarantee that she will never leave me.

giving them an opportunity to repent. Jesus died for them, providing a way for them to be forgiven. To that degree and in that way, it could be said that God loves them. But He never *approves* of them. He never feels a love for them like a father feels for his child. Rather, Scripture declares, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on *those who fear Him*" (Ps. 103:13, emphasis added). Thus it can be said that God does *not* have the same compassion on those who *don't* fear Him. God's love for sinners is more akin to the mercy a judge has on a convicted killer who receives a life sentence rather than the death penalty.

There is not a single case in the book of Acts where anyone preaching the gospel said to an unsaved audience that God loved them. Rather, the biblical preachers often warned their audiences about God's wrath and called them to repent, letting them know that God *did not* approve of them, that they were in danger, and that they needed to make dramatic changes in their lives. Had they only told their audiences that God loved them (as do so many modern ministers), they may have misled their audiences into thinking that they were in no danger, that they were not storing up wrath for themselves, and that they had no need to repent.

God's Hatred of Sinners

Contrary to what is often proclaimed about God's love for sinners today, Scripture often states that God *hates* sinners:

The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; *You hate all who do iniquity*. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord *abhors* the man of bloodshed and deceit (Ps. 5:5-6, emphasis added).

The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence *His soul hates* (Ps. 11:5, emphasis added).

I have forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; she has roared against Me; therefore *I have come to hate her* (Jer. 12:7-8, emphasis added).

All their evil is at Gilgal; Indeed, *I came to hate them there!* Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! *I will love them no more*; all their princes are rebels (Hos. 9:15).

Note that all of the above scriptures do not say that God only hates what people *do*—they say He hates *them*. This throws some light on the common cliché that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. We cannot separate a person from what he does. *What he does reveals what he is*. Thus God rightly hates people who commit sin, not just the sins people commit. If God approves of people who do what He hates, He is very inconsistent with Himself. In human courts, *people* are put on trial for their crimes, and *they* receive the just recompense. We don't hate the crime but approve of those who commit crimes.

People Whom God Abhors

Not only does Scripture affirm that God hates certain individuals, it also declares that God abhors some kinds of sinful people, or that they are an abomination to Him. Note once more that the following scripture quotations do not say that what these people *do* is an abomination to God, but that *they themselves* are an abomination to God. They do not say

that God abhors their *sins*, but that God abhors *them*.⁷

A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an *abomination* to the Lord your God (Deut. 22:5, emphasis added).

For everyone who does these things, everyone who acts unjustly is an *abomination* to the Lord your God (Deut. 25:16, emphasis added).

Further, you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat. I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall *abhor* you (Lev. 26:29-30, emphasis added).

The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord *abhors* the man of bloodshed and deceit (Ps. 5:5-6, emphasis added).

For the devious are an *abomination* to the Lord; but He is intimate with the upright (Prov. 3:32, emphasis added).

The perverse in heart are an *abomination* to the Lord, but the blameless in their walk are His delight (Prov. 11:20).

Everyone who is proud in heart is an *abomination* to the Lord; assuredly, he will not be unpunished (Prov. 16:5, emphasis added).

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an *abomination* to the Lord (Prov. 17:15, emphasis added).

How are we to reconcile such scriptures with those that affirm God's love for sinners? How can it be said that God abhors and hates sinners, but that He also loves them?

It must be recognized that not all love is the same. Some love is not conditional. It could be called "merciful love." It is a love that says, "I love you in spite of." It loves people regardless of their actions. That is the kind of love God has for sinners.

Contrasted with *merciful love* is *conditional love*. It could be referred to as "approving love." It is a love that is earned or merited. It is a love that says, "I love you because of."

Some think that if love is conditional, it is not love at all. Or they belittle such a love, saying it is purely selfish, and unlike God's love.

The truth is, however, that God does possess conditional love, as we will soon see in Scripture. Thus *approving love* should not be sneered at. *Approving love* is the primary love that God has for His true children. We should much more desire God's *approving love* than His merciful love.

⁷ It could be argued that all of these scriptures that show God's hatred and abhorrence of sinners are from the Old Testament. God's attitude toward sinners has not changed, however, from Old to New Testaments. Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22-28 is an excellent New Testament example of God's attitude toward sinners. At first, Jesus wouldn't even answer her pleadings, and He even referred to her as a dog. Her persistent faith resulted in Him showing her some mercy. Jesus' attitude toward the scribes and Pharisees can hardly be considered one of approving love (see Matt. 23).

Is *Approving Love* an Inferior Love?

Stop and ask yourself this question: “Which kind of love would I rather people have for me—*merciful love* or *approving love*?” I’m sure you would prefer that people love you “because of,” not “in spite of.”

Would you rather hear your spouse say, “I have no reason to love you, and there is nothing about you that motivates me to show you my favor” or, “I love you for so many reasons, because there are so many things about you that I admire”? Of course, we would rather that our spouses love us with an *approving love*, and that is the primary kind of love that draws couples together and keeps them together. When there is nothing that a person admires in his or her spouse, when all *approving love* has ceased to exist, few marriages last. If they do last, the credit goes to *merciful love*, which stems from the godly character of the giver of that love.

All this being so, we see that *approving*, or *conditional love*, is not an inferior love at all. While *merciful love* is the most praiseworthy love to *give*, *approving love* is the most praiseworthy love to *gain*. Moreover, the fact that *approving love* is the only kind of love that the Father has ever had for Jesus elevates it to its rightful place of respect. God the Father has never possessed even a drop of *merciful love* for Jesus, because there was never anything unlovely in Christ. Jesus testified:

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again (John 10:17, emphasis added).

Thus we see that the Father loved Jesus *because of* Jesus’ obedience to die. There must be nothing wrong and everything right about *approving love*. Jesus earned and deserved His Father’s love.

Jesus also declared that he abided in His Father’s love by keeping His Father’s commandments:

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love (John 15:9-10, emphasis added).

Moreover, as this scripture indicates, we are to follow Jesus’ example, and abide in His love by keeping His commandments. He is clearly speaking of *approving love* in this passage, telling us that we can and should earn His love, and that we may take ourselves out of His love through disobedience to His commandments. *We abide in His love only if we keep His commandments*. Such a thing is rarely taught today, but should be, because it is what Jesus said.

Jesus only affirmed God’s *approving love* for those who keep His commandments:

For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father (John 16:27, emphasis added).

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (John 14:21, 23, emphasis added).

Note in the second quotation, Jesus was not making a promise to uncommitted believers that if they started keeping His words, He would draw closer to them in a special way. No, Jesus was promising that if anyone would start loving Him and keeping His word, then His Father would love that person, and both He and His Father would come to live in that

person, a clear reference to being born again. Everyone who is born again has both the Father and Son living in him by the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9). So we again see that those who are truly born again are those who repent and begin to obey Jesus, and they are the only ones who thus gain the *approving love* of the Father.

Of course, Jesus still reserves *merciful love* for those who believe in Him. When they disobey, He is ready to forgive them if they will confess their sin and forgive others.

The Conclusion

All of this is to say that God does not love His obedient children the same as He loves sinners. He loves sinners only with a *merciful love*, and that love is temporary, lasting only until they die. At the same time that He loves them with a *merciful love*, He hates them with a hatred that stems from His disapproval of their character. This is what Scripture teaches.

On the other hand, God loves His children much more than those who are not born again. He primarily loves them with an *approving love* because they have repented and are striving to obey His commandments. As they grow in holiness, He has less and less reason to love them with a *merciful love*, and more and more reason to love them with an *approving love*, which is exactly what they desire.

This is also to say that many portrayals of God's love by modern preachers and teachers are misleading and inaccurate. In light of what Scripture says, take a moment to evaluate the following familiar clichés about God's love:

- 1.) There isn't anything you could do to make God love you any more or less than He does right now.
- 2.) There is nothing you could do that would make God stop loving you.
- 3.) God's love is unconditional.
- 4.) God loves everyone the same.
- 5.) God loves the sinner but hates the sin.
- 6.) There is nothing you can do to earn or deserve God's love.
- 7.) God's love for us is not based upon our performance.

All of the above statements are potentially misleading or outright false, as the majority completely deny God's *approving love* and many misrepresent His *merciful love*.

Regarding (1), there is something believers can do that could make God *approvingly love* them more: they could be more obedient. And there is something they can do to make God *approvingly love* them less: disobedience. For sinners, there is something that they could do which could make God love them *much* more: repent. Then they would gain God's *approving love*. And there is something they could do that would make God love them less: die. Then they would lose the only love God had for them, His *merciful love*.

Regarding (2), a Christian could forfeit God's *approving love* by returning to the practice of sin, putting himself in a position to experience only God's *merciful love*. And, again, the non-believer could die, and that would stop God's *merciful love*, the only love God ever had for him.

Regarding (3), God's *approving love* is certainly conditional. And even His *merciful love* is conditional upon a person being physically alive. After death, God's *merciful love* ends, so it is conditional because it is temporary.

Regarding (4), it is more likely that God doesn't love anyone the same, because all, sinners and saints alike, He disapproves or approves to various degrees. Certainly it is true that God's love is not the same for sinners and saints.

Regarding (5), God hates sinners *and* their sins. It could be better said that He loves sinners with a *merciful love* and hates their sins. From a standpoint of His *approving love*, He hates them.

Regarding (6), anyone can and everyone should earn God's *approving love*. Of course, no

one can earn His *merciful love*, as it is unconditional.

Finally, regarding (7), God's *merciful love* is not based upon performance, but God's *approving love* certainly is.

All of this is to say that the disciple-making minister should present God's love accurately, as it is described in the Bible, because he doesn't want anyone to be deceived. Only people whom God *approvingly loves* enter heaven, and God only *approvingly loves* those who have been born again and obey Jesus. The disciple-making minister would never teach what might lead people away from holiness. His goal is the same as God's goal, to make disciples who obey all of Christ's commandments.