

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing

*No. 16 - Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship -
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Synopsis:

Lordship Salvation's unclear gospel leads to an unclear view of discipleship and the Christian life. Here is a detailed look at that view and the correct view of discipleship.

Why Lordship Misses the Mark for Discipleship ¹

What is your definition of a disciple? We know that good theology often boils down to good definitions, and in good theology we shouldn't take definitions for granted. Let me offer you some definitions that you've probably taken for granted - not theological definitions, but just some every-day type of words. Like the word *adult*. Do you know what an adult is? An adult is someone who stopped growing at both ends and now is growing in the middle. What is a *cannibal*? A cannibal is someone who is fed up with people. You've heard this definition of a *committee*: a group that keeps minutes and wastes hours. You know what *dust* is? Dust is mud with all the juice squeezed out of it. What's a *mosquito*? An insect that makes you like flies. And my favorite definition, a *skeleton*: a bunch of bones with the person scraped off!

Don't take definitions for granted. Definitions are important. Especially when we talk about discipleship. What is a disciple? You better know what one is, because in some of Jesus' last words, He told us to go and make them. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations," He told us ([Matt 28:19](#)). But what, exactly, are you trying to make? What, exactly, are you trying to produce? What does a disciple look like?

We must begin with the end in mind. So what is your definition of a disciple? There is a lot of talk about discipleship in the church today. Everybody talks about making disciples. We just can't seem to agree on what a disciple is, and so now enter the Lordship Salvation proponents, who have a different definition of discipleship. A misunderstanding of what a disciple is confuses the gospel. It dangerously will leave people in spiritual immaturity instead of moving them on into maturity where God desires. I think we all recognize that churches are full of too many people who are in spiritual infancy and have not moved on and grown to live productive and fruitful reproducing types of lives.

I. How Lordship Salvation Understands Discipleship ¹

So what do we do about this problem? Well, the Lordship Salvation camp says that we should front-load the gospel and raise the ante. Let's raise the standard so that we make sure that only those who are committed to going on can really become Christians to begin with, they would say. Is that the answer? Doesn't this breed legalism and insecurity which never ever produces spiritual maturity and Christlikeness? We may alter the external, but not the internal; we may change the behavior, but not the heart, with a system like that. Let's take a look at how Lordship Salvation understands discipleship.

John MacArthur says, "The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience."² He equates the gospel call with the discipleship call. Another writer says, "We maintain that being a believer and a disciple are the same. A believer/disciple has salvation. One who has salvation is a disciple."³ He couldn't be much clearer about what he believes. Smith says, "Those who *believe* in Christ *follow* Him, and those who do not follow Him do not really believe in Him" (emphasis his), and "Discipleship is an invitation to salvation, not to some deeper experience of secondary commitment."⁴ And another person says, "The call to faith and discipleship are the same and cannot be separated."⁵ And then, the last one, by J. I. Packer in his classic book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*: "In our presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and making sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything."⁶

Is that going to effect how we do evangelism? Absolutely. How widely read is J. I. Packer's book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*? You'll find it still in print, I am sure. You see, there's a different definition that Lordship Salvation offers for discipleship.

II. How the Bible Presents Discipleship

But how does the Bible present discipleship? What's the Biblical definition of a disciple? The word itself comes from the verb "to learn," and so it simply means in its simplest form "learner," "pupil," "adherent to a system." But you and I recognize that there are different degrees of commitment involved in learning something. You know that because you went through college perhaps, or some other kind of school. Some of you may have just taken a course and audited it - a minimum commitment - but you were there, you were a student, you were learning. Others of you might have gone for the whole enchilada, tried to get on the dean's list, graduated with honors - the ultimate commitment. There are learners at different levels of commitment.

We see this in John chapter 6. At the beginning of the chapter there is a multitude of people who are following Jesus out of curiosity basically, or perhaps even political motivations. And yet by the end of the chapter, there are only twelve who remain, twelve who are committed. In John chapter 6, believe it or not, John refers to those who turned away from Jesus as disciples, and says that Jesus knew that they didn't believe (vv 60-66). So in the broadest sense, you see, a disciple is someone who is a follower, somebody who is learning from a system, and it may even be someone who doesn't believe. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. Peter was one of the twelve disciples, but there is quite a difference between the two.

What I am saying is that I am cautioning you to be careful about how you define the term disciple, and not lock it in to a rigid definition. It is a fairly flexible term, as long as you have the idea of learning, pupil, or adherent. Theologically it can be a flexible term always determined more carefully by its context. In the New Testament we read about the disciples of Moses, the disciples of the Pharisees, the disciples of John the Baptist, and then, of course, there are the disciples of Jesus, which is the predominate use in

the New Testament and the one that we are most familiar and comfortable with. So in its essence, a disciple is a follower, a student, a pupil, an adherent.

What also helps us to understand what a disciple is in the New Testament is the invitation that we see Jesus offering to people. He invites them to *follow* Him. He invites them with a synonymous term to *come after* Him. Now both these terms mean more than just a physical walking behind. Both these terms really denote, to the first century mind, the system of education and discipleship they had then, which was based on a Rabbi calling together a group of disciples who would share his life, who would travel with him, who would live with him, who would eat with him, who would stay with him, and basically share their lives and live with him. They didn't sign up for Discipleship 101 not knowing who their professor was. They would either seek out the man they wanted to be like, or that Rabbi would seek them out and invite them into discipleship. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," when He said, "Come after Me," I am convinced He was offering to those people a specific invitation, a pointed and direct invitation to take up a life of discipleship and to follow Him and to share His life.

The goal of discipleship also helps us understand what a disciple is. The best statement of the goal of a disciple is in [Matthew 10:25](#). Here we read, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master." You see, the whole goal of a disciple is to be like his teacher. This tells us that being a disciple is a progression; it is a process. And if our teacher is Jesus Christ, it is interminable in this life. It's never over until we are glorified and made like Him. So discipleship by its very definition is a process.

I am fond of saying that there is a sense in which every disciple is challenged to become more of a disciple. No matter where you are in your Christian life today, God wants you somewhere else tomorrow. That's discipleship. And what He is asking *you* to do today is different from what He is going to ask *me* to do today. It's a process that spans our lifetime, and nobody retires from it. The journey goes on.

III. The Differences Between Salvation and Discipleship

Now you will notice some of the differences between salvation and discipleship I have listed here and tried by indentation to show how they might be grouped. This basically, is going to form some of my comments about the problems I have with the Lordship view of discipleship.

Salvation

Justification

By grace

Through faith

Free

Christ's love for me

Discipleship

Sanctification

By works

Through faithfulness

Costly

My love for Christ

Christ's commitment to me	My commitment to Christ
Christ's cross for me	My cross for Christ
Eternal life	Eternal rewards
An unbeliever's response	A believer's response
Instantaneous	Progressive
New birth	Continued growth
One condition	Many conditions
Inclusive	Exclusive

We should notice the obvious differences and that we cannot merge the two. For example, eternal salvation speaks of justification. Discipleship speaks of sanctification. Our eternal salvation then, is positional righteousness, whereas discipleship is practical righteousness. We know that salvation is by grace through faith, and it's free. But discipleship is by works through faithfulness, and it's costly. Our eternal salvation depends on Christ's love for me, Christ's commitment to me, and Christ's taking His cross for me. Discipleship involves my love for Christ, my commitment to Christ, and my taking up my cross daily for Him. The focus of eternal salvation is eternal life. Discipleship, however, focuses on eternal rewards. Eternal salvation involves an unbeliever's response. Discipleship involves a believer's response. Eternal salvation is instantaneous, and a new birth. Discipleship is progressive and a continued growth. Eternal salvation depends on one condition: belief. Discipleship depends on many conditions, which I'll mention later. Eternal salvation is inclusive of all. Discipleship is exclusive. So let's break some of these down and talk about them by category.

A. Lordship Faith Confuses Justification and Sanctification

First of all, Lordship Salvation misses the mark for discipleship because it confuses justification and sanctification. We've said a lot about this already.² We won't spend a lot of time here. Just as they confuse faith in their definition of faith, justification, and sanctification, so they do the same with discipleship. Justification is the declaration by God of our positional righteousness before Him, while sanctification is our progressive growth in righteousness and godly conduct, learning to live in obedience, learning to live up to our new position. But we cannot confuse the two. They are related, but they must remain distinct. How clearly that comes out in the Book of Romans where justification is clearly dealt with from 3:21 through chapter 5. And when we come to chapters 6-8, we find a discussion of our sanctification. Isn't it interesting that in the Romans the first command doesn't come until 6:11? Why is that? Because obedience has nothing to do with justification, everything to do with sanctification. And so the commands don't begin until 6:11

B. Lordship Faith Negates Grace with Works

Another problem with Lordship Salvation is that it negates grace with works. What does [Romans 11:6](#) say? "If it is of works, it is no longer grace." Pretty simple. You can't mix the two. It's either by works or by grace. Lordship Salvation confuses the two. Free grace believes that it is through faith in Christ that we are eternally saved, but it is through faithfulness to Christ that we are made disciples.

Lordship Salvation talks about costly grace, but free grace says that there is only one kind of grace, and it is free. Discipleship is costly, but grace is free. John MacArthur says, "Salvation is both free and costly."⁸ How so? How can something be free and costly? Well, he says that it is a paradox, a seeming contradiction. No, it's just bad theology, bad English, and bad logic. *A* cannot equal *B*. Is salvation costly? To God, yes. To Jesus, yes. But we have a word for that, and the word is *redemption*, which in its essence means to purchase or to buy. It implies cost. Let's be more careful when we talk about salvation in its various terms and various perspectives. When we talk about eternal salvation and its cost, we talk about redemption, but the cost is not ours, it's God's, it's Jesus'. He paid the price. But what does [Romans 3:24](#) say about our redemption and the freeness of salvation? It couldn't be clearer. [Romans 3:24](#) says, "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Free to us, costly to God. And the only reason we can have a free salvation is because God paid a tremendous price. So we don't say that there is no price. We don't deny that there is a cost to salvation. We just say that God paid it by His grace.

That's the wonderfulness of our salvation. Salvation is free to us, but it cost Him something. To talk about "costly grace" is a contradiction in terms. We call that an oxymoron, like "military intelligence," "Russian economy," "Social Security," or "Honorable Senator." Those are oxymorons, contradictions. There's no such thing as "costly grace." Grace, by its very definition, is free. There is only one kind of grace. It's absolutely free. We talk about "free grace," and that's a redundancy, but we have to do it because the debate has forced us to do it. We talk about the "Free Grace" movement. That's kind of like talking about the "inerrant word of God." Why do we have to say that? Or the "infallible, inerrant word of God," or the "infallible, inspired, inerrant word of God." All those are redundancies, but the debate that's going on demands it of us. It's a shame.

We believe that Christ's love for us is what brings us our salvation. It is our love for Christ that is part of the discipleship process. In the same way, it was Christ's commitment to me that took Him to the cross, and my commitment to Him that helps me to grow as a disciple. His commitment to me, that took Him to the cross, and He took up His cross and carried it down the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha for me, and I am to take up my cross daily for Him in discipleship.

And then, we have eternal life versus eternal rewards. It's amazing to me how many times Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle used rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ as a motivation for Christian living, as something to look forward to and to shape our lives by. It was so good to hear [Dr. Earl Radmacher's] exhortation about keeping our eyes on the eternal significance of life in the Kingdom of God, because Jesus and Paul certainly did, and yet we hear so little teaching about that. And that is, for one reason, because Lordship Salvation has confused the two. They don't like to talk about rewards, and so many

rewards passages are interpreted as salvation passages. Discipleship truth is interpreted as salvation truth. We lose the beauty of the promise of rewards and eternal significance and kingdom life, and a whole section of Scripture is eviscerated.

C. Lordship Faith is Unrealistic in Its Expectation of the Unregenerate

Lordship Salvation confuses discipleship, which also results in an unrealistic expectation from the unregenerate. You see, the Lordship Salvation view of discipleship assumes a Christian response from unbelievers. But what would an unbeliever understand about carrying his cross? What would an unbeliever understand about loving God with all his heart? He doesn't know God. Would we expect an unbeliever to give up all his possessions or be willing to? What kind of logic is it that demands of an unbeliever such sophisticated, mature Christian decisions that I am still grappling with in my own life? It just doesn't make sense to expect from someone who is dead in his sin, to expect from someone whose mind has been veiled by Satan himself, to respond to God with a fully loving heart at the moment of salvation, to respond to God in total commitment and total submission, to be willing to suffer for Him.

We believe that obedience and commitment are a response to God's wonderful grace, and that's why [Romans 12:1](#) is [Romans 12:1](#) and not [Romans 1:1](#). Paul had to wait until 12:1, so that he could say, "by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice." That's why he waits until [Ephesians 4:1](#) to exhort us to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." He had to tell us about who we *are* before he tells us what to *do*. And yet we are so guilty of getting the cart before the horse and telling people what to do before we tell them what they are and why they should do it. Even we, who believe in free grace, will fall into that error. Listen to the words of [Colossians 2:6](#) as well: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in Him." There is a process; there is a progression. We receive Christ; we trust in Him as Savior. He comes inside of us. We now learn to walk with Him in fellowship.

This progression probably comes out best in Titus. You might want to look at Titus chapter 2. I don't think it can be said any clearer of how salvation should result in discipleship, that they are sequential. Verse 11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." The grace of God has appeared. Jesus has brought us salvation. That salvation teaches us as a consequence how to live a godly life. The word used for *teaching* there is a word that was used of training children. How appropriate, since the Christian life is a process of taking those who are not mature into maturity, from spiritual infancy into spiritual adulthood.

So it is unrealistic to expect the unregenerate to make mature Christian decisions. It takes the grace of God to teach us how to make those decisions and commitments. Did it ever occur to the Lordship Salvation person, for example, that someone who is drowning may just want to get out of the water, and not become a life-guard? Or become a missionary? When someone realizes that they are lost in their sins and they are destined to separation from God, what is their concern? A legitimate concern is to be saved from sin or separation. Some may be saved with a heart of gratitude, some may be saved with a loving heart. I don't deny that these things can happen in an overlapping manner so that we can't

easily separate the two. Some people realize that when Jesus saves them they owe Him everything, and they should commit to Him, and they do so from day one. That happens. But probably, more likely, there are people like me, who coasted along for a good while before we really understood what the Christian life should be about and what God has done for us. And no matter how they start, God is going to continue to ask of them decisions and commitments along the way.

D. Lordship Faith Leaves You No Where to Grow

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because their understanding leaves you nowhere to grow. You see, if disciples are born not made, then there is nowhere to grow. We understand the conditions of discipleship, which are: love God with all your heart, love Him more than your mother, brothers, sisters, father, etc, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow Christ, be willing to commit all of your possessions, be willing to suffer for Jesus Christ, abide in His word. All these are conditions for discipleship that we find in the gospels.⁹ Now if we believe that people must make those commitments in order to become a Christian, where does that leave them room to grow? But growth is expected. Peter said, "As new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby" ([1Pet 2:2](#)). He said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" ([2 Pet. 3:18](#)). Part of that growth is dealing with the reality of sin in our lives. How does Lordship discipleship leave room for the reality of sin in our lives? In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, no matter what you do with the carnal Christian there, he's still a carnal Christian. He's still undeniably a babe in Christ. There is growth that needs to take place. And when you get to [1 Corinthians 11:30](#), you see Christians that are living in carnality and abusing the Lord's supper, and they die in their carnality. They are believers who have not submitted.

Lordship Salvation is not realistic in its expectations for Christian growth, nor is it realistic about the reality of sin in our lives. I think that the Bible is very clear that there is always another level of commitment that we are called to. That's just the excitement of the Christian life. Life is an adventure with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm quite an outdoors person and when I get to walking in mountains or the hills, I'm like a billy-goat. I've got to start climbing. I love a good view, and so I'll climb. I was in Southern California this summer and I climbed up this one hill. But it's awfully deceiving when you're in the mountains sometimes, because you think if you just get up to that top you'll have a beautiful view. And then you get up there and you find, "Well, I'm not really at the top, am I? There's another ridge I didn't see, and I'll bet the view is even better up there." So you go up to the next ridge and you say, "Boy, the view is beautiful up here." But you know what? There's still another ridge there, and so pretty soon you're getting way up there. That's what discipleship is like. God takes us to one level and life is exciting, but you know something? There's another level to get to. There are greater challenges, greater rewards, greater excitement in store for us.

That's how Jesus called His own disciples. When we study the process of discipleship and His calls and appeals to them in the gospels, we find that He called the disciples to be disciples, kind of like calling saved people to be saved. For example, in John chapter 1, we find Peter coming to Jesus Christ, and yet we see Jesus inviting the earliest disciples, including Andrew, to follow Him. So we are introduced to Peter and assume that Peter probably believed then, and yet we know that later in life, as told by Mark chapter 1 or Matthew chapter 4, that Jesus sees them by the sea mending their nets or fishing and He

says, "Come follow Me." Well, didn't He already say that to Peter in John 1? Yes He did, but He needs to say it again. These men knew more about Him, so the commitment level needed to change.

What do you do with Luke chapter 5 when Jesus sees them again by the sea, and He says, "Follow Me"? Most people assume that this is a parallel account of Matthew chapter 4. I don't. I explain the details in my dissertation.¹⁰ But I think it is significant to note that the setting is different, the circumstances are different, they are doing different things, and yet Jesus says to Peter again, "Follow Me." In fact, Jesus says to Peter a number of times, "Follow Me," "Follow Me," "Follow Me" throughout the gospels, and then you get to John chapter 21 and He tells Peter twice, "Follow Me." Peter is surely a believer by now, isn't he? Why in John chapter 21 does Jesus have to tell Peter to follow Him? Because He's given him new revelation and He's challenging him to a greater commitment based on that new content. He told Peter, "When you are older, you are going to be stretched out and you are going to be led where you don't want to go," referring to his manner of death. And then He said, "Now, you follow Me - Now that I've told you that you are going to die for Me, you follow Me." Well, you see, "Follow Me" takes on a whole new significance to somebody who has just learned that he's going to die. And then Peter sees John over there and asks Jesus, "What about him? What about this guy?" And Jesus says, "It's none of your business. You follow Me." Well, there's another new revelation for Peter: God has an individually designed ministry for him, an individual calling for him. "Don't worry about your brother, get on with what I've told you to do." And He says again to Peter, "Follow Me."

Do you want a model for discipleship? Look at Peter. That's why Peter is so prominent in the Scriptures. He's always the first apostle named, the spokesman for the group, an extrovert. An extrovert is someone who talks while he's thinking of something to say. That's Peter. But thank God that we are given the model of Peter to look at, because Peter wasn't a perfect person, and it shows us that part of discipleship is learning how to fail. Discipleship is a journey, but that journey has setbacks and obstacles and we sometimes trip and fall, as Peter did. Yet during that whole account of Peter denying Jesus Christ, if you look at that account in John, you'll see that word "follow" appears every now and then. "Are you a follower of that man?" "No, I'm not." Oh, yes, he was. He followed Christ secretly at a distance. It's an amazing study. I've got seven sermons on Peter as a follower, but I'm not going to preach them all right now.

So Jesus appeals to Peter's curiosity in John 1; He appeals to his devotion to duty in John 21. Jesus never lets up the pressure of discipleship. It is a progression. It is a process. It is a journey. It is a call to commitment. There is a sense in which a disciple is always challenged to become more of a disciple. So how can we say that all those discipleship commitments are involved in coming to Christ as Savior? What do you do with the secret disciples in John, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? They were secret disciples, but it took time for them to come out. I hate to use that term with them, but it took them time to show their Christian faces. The process of discipleship goes on. It is never finished until glorification.

E. Lordship Faith Confuses the Gospel

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because it confuses the gospel. If discipleship and eternal salvation are equated, then according to their definition, there are many conditions for salvation. You must deny yourself, according to [Luke 9:23](#), as well as take up your cross and follow Christ. Jesus said in [Luke 14:26](#), "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple;" in [Luke 14:33](#), "So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple;" in [John 8:31](#), "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed;" and in [John 13:35](#), "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

There are a lot of conditions for discipleship, but one condition for eternal salvation: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So if we take Lordship's definition for discipleship, doesn't that confuse the gospel? Of course, it does. How could a person ever know that he or she is saved, ever know that he or she has met all those conditions? Assurance would become illusive - No, it would become impossible, absolutely impossible. How many of you have met those conditions satisfactorily to yourself or to God? If disciples are born and not made, then boy, they sure have to hit the ground running. They say only 2% of Christians in America are actively leading people to Christ. But Lordship Salvation people say that part of discipleship is fishing for men, and if you're not fishing, you are not following. Well, there are a lot of Christians in that category aren't there? I think they have just excluded themselves from the Kingdom of God.

F. Lordship Faith Makes Salvation Inaccessible

Lordship Salvation misses the mark also because it makes salvation inaccessible. Here we end up with the same concern that we have about Lordship's understanding of faith: that they are taking away the hope of salvation from so many people. The gospel invitation is inclusive; it is "whoever," "whosoever." But discipleship is exclusive. Jesus said, "You can't be My disciple unless..." or "Unless a man..." When it came to salvation, Jesus invited everyone. His arms were open wide. When it came to discipleship, He practically pushed people away.

I know a fellow who started a pretty intensive discipleship ministry to teenagers. He invited all the teenagers in several churches to come, and he promoted it heavily. Only a few teenagers came. He was greatly discouraged, wanting to quit. And I told him, "Wait a minute. Let's look at what you are trying to do. It's the nature of discipleship. You will never have people flock to discipleship classes if you are doing it right." People will not flock to suffer for Jesus, or to take up their cross, or deny themselves. That's the nature of discipleship. It is very exclusive. In John chapter 6, Jesus whittled a crowd of 6,000 down to 12. Wouldn't that have looked good on His resume? Imagine if He were to apply to many churches today: "Well, I managed to build a congregation of 6,000 down to 12." That's church growth, according to Jesus. Maybe we need to reexamine our views on church growth.

There is a difference between Jesus' saying "Come to Me," and "Come after Me." I think there's a technical difference here. Small words, but great significance. When He says, "Come to Me," He's inviting people to salvation. When He says, "Come after Me," He is saying the same as "Follow Me," or

"Be My disciple." I think it comes out in [Matt 11:28-30](#) very clearly. What I see here is that He is actually extending both invitations. To those Jews who were lost in the hopelessness of a pharisaical system, burdened by the requirements of the law, He said in [Matt 11:28](#), "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." I think that is His invitation to salvation - "Come to Me...I will give you rest," the "rest" of righteousness, the "rest" of peace with God and of reconciliation with God, the "rest" that the pharisaical system can not give under its burden of law-keeping. And then He says, "Take My yoke upon you." "Now that you've come, you take. Now that you've received, you learn from me," He says. "For I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls." "Rest" speaks of the fellowship that can now be enjoyed with God, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The whole figure of a yoke implies obligation, commitment, and duty. I find both invitations here: "Come to Me," and then "Take up and learn from Me." I have no problem with the way that Jesus offered those invitations, but they are distinct. There is a big difference between believing and behaving, between receiving eternal life and taking up the cross for Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

I'll just conclude with a few practical exhortations.

When we teach about discipleship, let's be sure to keep it distinct from eternal salvation, but related. Jesus did say, "Go and make disciples" and the key verb in that passage, as you may know, is "make disciples." The going probably implies the evangelism process, but His end result is that we are to make disciples of people. I believe that is why the Book of Acts uses the term "disciples" synonymously with "believers." It's bridging from the gospels where we are told to make disciples into what actually happened. People became enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ. That's the norm for the Book of Acts, with but rare exceptions that are noted. Discipleship should follow salvation, and salvation should flow into discipleship. How will that shape your ministry then? I saw a cartoon once of someone opening the nursery door in a hospital and a little baby is crawling out, and the nurse is saying, "Good luck!" Dr. Radmacher says that we could be jailed for child-abuse or child-neglect. What do we want to do with those who come to know Christ as their Savior? Do they understand what discipleship is? Do we want to lead them further?

We ought to learn to disciple from a grace perspective, to keep grace first. It is the motivation to follow. The heart of discipleship is not what we do, but who we are in Christ. Unfortunately, I have seen that most discipleship material begins not with who we are, but with what we should do, leaving the impression that if we establish a quiet time, if we establish a prayer life, if we read our Bibles regularly, or memorize a certain number of verses, then we are disciples. Those things are important. Those things may be very necessary for spiritual growth, but that's not where God starts. He starts by telling us who we are in Christ. My friends, when somebody has the motivation, all the how-to's and all the disciplines will work themselves out eventually. When I first became a Christian, I did not go to a church for about a year and a half, but I was so motivated by the love and the grace of God that I would stay up until 3 o'clock in the morning reading my Bible. I didn't need anybody to check it off on a list for me. Give them the motivation. Give them the reason. Give them the goal. And then help them with the disciplines along the way.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this. I was asked to write some discipleship materials, and I've written and finished the rough draft. I spent a lot of time thinking about the approach I wanted to use, because there are so many different approaches out there. What is the biblical approach? What I basically ended up doing was taking the Book of Romans and saying, "Here's where we are going: This is what has happened to you. This is who you are. Now let's talk about what you should do." It makes more sense to me. It's more biblical to me. Ground them in grace. Motivate them and fire them up with grace. People will find a way to pray. They will find a way to read their Bible.

A soldier at Ft. Hood, Texas, was looking forward to seeing his girlfriend in Chicago. Then they had a security breach, and they had to close the fort down. They wouldn't let anybody in and they wouldn't let anybody out. So he was greatly disappointed. Finally he decided, "I'm going for it." He starts running toward the front gate, and the guard says, "Stop!" But he keeps running towards it and the guard says, "Stop or I'll shoot!" The young soldier said, "Look, my mama's in heaven, my papa's in hell, my girlfriend's in Chicago, and I'm gonna see one of them tonight!" You just give people the motivation; they'll find a way.

Motivation is what is so lacking, I believe, in our Christian teaching. The motivation of the Kingdom, the motivation of rewards, the motivation of love, the motivation of grace, and the motivation of duty. If motivated, people will find a way. No wonder Jesus made love the first commandment. Maybe He knew what He was doing. He says, "You just love, and you'll keep all the other commands."

Learn to disciple from grace. Teach people who they are. Make that part of your discipleship process and materials.

Another application might be that Christians who coast should be taught that that is not pleasing to God. We have an obligation and a duty to tell people who are Christians that God wants them to move on in the Christian life and not to stay in spiritual infancy or to remain in their diapers. They should not be comfortable in their diapers. If they are, we should hold their diapers in their face, make them smell the smell, make them feel uneasy. Christians who coast are not appreciating the grace of God, and we need to talk to them about it.

Let me leave you with one thought: Christians have never changed the world - only disciples have. So what are you going to do about it? What commitments are you going to make? What is God asking you to do, where you are, on your journey today? How will you challenge people to go on to a productive and fruitful life of discipleship? The cost of discipleship is high, but the rewards are great!

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¹ This article is from a message originally delivered March 31, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's fourth annual conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 21.

³ Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 65.

⁴ Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), xviii, 97.

⁵ J. Wallis, "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience," *Sojourners* (March 1976): 21.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.

⁷ See Charlie's other message also delivered at the conference and published in the previous issue of this journal: "Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 12 (Spring 1999): 21-35.

⁸ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 140.

⁹ See [Matt 10:37-39](#); [16:24-27](#); [Luke 9:23-26](#); [14:25-33](#); [John 8:31](#). For a detailed discussion of these passages as well as the whole issue of Lordship Salvation's understanding of discipleship and salvation, see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991) Gracelife edition (Burlleson, TX: Gracelife Ministries, 1997).

¹⁰ Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 150-52.