



Errors of Hierarchical Discipleship

Crossroadism and The Worldwide Boston Hierarchy Weighed and Found Wanting

INTRODUCTION

This material was presented in August of 1988 in a series of lectures held in Ghana and Togo, West Africa. Brethren there requested that I discuss what is known among churches of Christ as the Boston/Crossroads Movement. More recently they have begun calling themselves "The International Church of Christ," sometimes abbreviated as the ICOC.

The doctrines and practices under discussion did not originate among churches of Christ. The Boston/Crossroads movement is merely a spin-off of a larger movement in the denominational world, based on a doctrine of discipleship which results in an authoritarian pyramid form of leadership.

Historically, the hierarchical discipleship movement may be the most revolutionary religious development of the twentieth century. This dynamic movement is influencing denominations and religious bodies around the world.

It is comparable to the Methodist Movement of the eighteenth century. Points in common are an emphasis on methodic routine in personal devotion, militant evangelistic zeal, authoritarian hierarchical organization, the forming of close-knit cells, and the direct involvement of all members in evangelism.

Hierarchical discipleship is extremely versatile. It can be applied in virtually any church or evangelistic organization. Being based on private personal relationships, it can be introduced by stealth.

Although the movement began among denominational churches, it has spread to churches of Christ in various forms. The Boston/Crossroads Movement is not the only form this movement takes in our brotherhood. Other brethren, not directly related to Boston, such as Alvin Jennings and Milton Jones, have advocated similar ideas. Some of the same errors are also being promoted through 'church growth' and 'soul winning' workshops and seminars.

The following questions will be discussed:

- A. Why does God allow false teachers in the church?
- B. What is the doctrinal foundation of this movement?
- C. How were these ideas introduced among churches of Christ?

- D. May we have a hierarchy?
- E. What are the basic fallacies of pyramid discipleship?
- F. How should we treat people in this movement?

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW FALSE TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH?

Jesus said many false prophets would arise and lead many astray (Matt. 24:11). He also told us how to recognize them. Here are some characteristics of false teachers mentioned in the New Testament.

Matthew 7:15-23

They appear righteous outwardly but bear evil fruits.
They say 'Lord, Lord' but do not do the will of God.
They think their 'mighty works' in the name of Christ prove that they are acceptable to God, but in reality they are evildoers.

Matthew 20:25-28

They lord it over others and exercise authority over them like the rulers of the Gentiles.

Matthew 23:1-10

They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders.
They do their deeds to be seen by men.
They love being called Rabbi by men.
They set themselves up as masters and fathers.

Matthew 24:24

They try to deceive the elect.

Romans 16:17,18

They cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which has been taught.
They do not serve the Lord, but their own appetites.
They use fair and flattering words to deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.

2 Corinthians 11:3,4,13-15

They preach another Jesus and have a different spirit.
They preach a different gospel.
They are deceitful workmen disguising themselves as apostles of Christ and as servants of righteousness.

Galatians 1:6-9

They pervert the gospel of Christ and preach a gospel which is different than the original gospel.

Galatians 2:3,4

They are false brethren who would take away our freedom and bring us into bondage.

Colossians 2:4,8,16-22

They deceive people with persuasive words.

They cheat people through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the basic principles of the world.

They try to bind the old law on Christians.

They delight in false humility.

They are puffed up by their carnal thinking.

The regulations they make, according to commandments and doctrines of men, have an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-centred religion, false humility and neglect of the body, but actually are worthless.

2 Thessalonians 2:5-12

They use wicked deception.

They do not love the truth.

1 Timothy 1:3-11

They teach a different doctrine.

They desire to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

1 Timothy 4:1-4

They are hypocritical liars whose consciences are seared.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

They teach things which do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness.

They are puffed up with conceit.

They are depraved in mind and destitute of the truth.

2 Timothy 4:3,4

They teach myths contrary to sound doctrine.

Titus 1:10-14

They are insubordinate men, empty talkers, and deceivers.

They teach myths and commands of men.

Hebrews 13:9

They bring diverse and strange teachings.

2 Peter 3:16,17

They twist the Scriptures to their own destruction.

2 John 7-11

They are deceivers.

They go ahead and do not abide in the doctrine of Christ.

They bring a different doctrine.

3 John 9,10

They like to have the preeminence.
They resist apostolic authority.

Jude 3,4

They do not proclaim the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Paul wrote that false teachers would arise both from without and from within: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29,30).

Peter gave the same warning: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Jesus said it would happen. Paul said it would happen. Peter said it would happen. So it shouldn't surprise us when it does!

Actually, God uses false teachers to test us: "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder of which he spoke to you comes to pass, saying, 'Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:1-3). Do you really love God? If you don't, some false teacher will lead you astray. Do you love the truth? If you don't, God will send you a delusion that you might believe a lie (2 Thes. 2:11).

People who love God are people who seek God and heed the Word of God rather than the word of man: "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19,20). In the New Testament Peter gives the same charge: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

THESE TWO VERSES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. WRITE THEM DOWN (Isaiah 8:19,20; 1 Peter 4:11). WRITE THEM ON YOUR HEART. LET YOUR MOUTH BE GUIDED BY THEM. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God." "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Not only do these verses tell us to SPEAK according to the Word of God, but

also to KEEP QUIET otherwise.

This world is full of teachers who darken counsel by words without knowledge because there is no light in them.

Listen carefully to the following quotation. A series of articles entitled 'Progressive Revelation' appeared in the bulletin of the 'Boston Church of Christ' from May 1st through June 5th, 1988. This is from Part II which was published on May 8th. I quote:

"Any religious group which strongly emphasizes doctrinal accuracy runs a risk of losing perspective and losing God. Historically, the churches of Christ have been noted for such an emphasis. One of the mottos in the early Restoration Movement was, 'We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.' If the Bible did not specifically authorize a given practice, it was viewed with suspicion.

"This approach has led to a type of blind traditionalism because it has essentially ruled out the idea that God will progressively lead His church by granting new insights and applications. An insistence that we must have 'book, chapter and verse' for anything new has virtually guaranteed that we will have nothing new, even if the old is a failure. Without a strong conviction that God is ACTIVELY leading His people both individually and collectively, we are doomed to a stale, dying religion.

"A better motto for disciples who are 'progressive' (into making progress) would be the following: 'Where the Bible speaks, we are silent; where the Bible is silent, we speak.' Thus, if God has specified something, we shut up and submit. But if He has not, then we have the freedom to discover the most effective way to carry out His principles. Success is of God. If He is truly leading us, we will not be unsuccessful. PERIOD!" End of quotation.

Now what do you think of that? Where the Bible speaks, they are silent. Where the Bible is silent, they speak.

I rather prefer Peter's motto: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

Or, as God said through Jeremiah: "He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28).

God's word is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29). Let us put this movement under the hammer of God's word. If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

I wish to make clear that my main purpose is not to be AGAINST certain false teachers. My main purpose is to be FOR God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Because I am FOR the truth, however, I must be AGAINST error. Yet, it's not enough to be against some error. I know brethren who are strongly opposed to

Crossroadism, who themselves do and teach things which are just as bad, if not worse! The world is full of false teachers and the church has its fair share. We must be able to recognize and avoid ALL of them. The only way we can do this is to really KNOW THE TRUTH. Search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Buy the truth and do not sell it (Proverbs 23:23). "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). I plead with you. Your eternal salvation depends upon it.

Jesus tells us: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32). If we don't 'strongly emphasize doctrinal accuracy' we cannot be disciples of Christ. PERIOD.

We have already learned that false teachers are to be expected among us, that God allows this to test us to see if we love Him, and that false teachers can be recognized because they do not speak according to the Word of God.

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION OF THIS MOVEMENT?

This movement is based on the thesis that Christ's master/disciple relationship with the twelve apostles is a pattern to be followed in making, training and leading disciples today. According to this doctrine, a true disciple of Christ will make other disciples who learn to follow Christ by following him in an authoritarian teacher/student relationship. This training includes teaching new disciples how to make other disciples, and how to train and lead them in the same way. A chain of these master/disciple relationships results in a pyramid.

Fundamental Error of the Movement

The fundamental error of the master/disciple movement is that Jesus TRAINING HIS APOSTLES is used as a pattern for MAKING DISCIPLES, whereas these are entirely different matters.

Jesus made many disciples, not just twelve. In Luke 6:17 we read of "a crowd of His disciples." According to Luke 19:37 "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God."

From among His many disciples, Jesus chose twelve to commission and train as APOSTLES: "And when it was day, He called His disciples to Him; and from them He chose twelve, whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:13).

The apostles occupy a unique position in the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). The example of their being chosen, trained and commissioned had no other equivalent in the first century and has no equivalent in the church today.

What is a Disciple?

A disciple is a learner and a follower of the teachings of a master. The word is

used in various contexts in the New Testament. Not only Jesus, but also John the Baptist and the Pharisees had disciples (Mark 2:18).

In a more restricted sense, the word is used as a designation for the twelve apostles (Matt. 10:1,2). To avoid misapplication one must determine from the context whether reference is being made to the twelve, or to Jesus' disciples in general. (For example, compare Matthew 19:23 with 19:28; Mark 6:35,45 with 6:7,30 and Mark 11:14 with 11:11.) Many of the doctrinal errors of the authoritarian discipleship movement result from a failure to observe this distinction.

In Acts 6:1,2 the church is spoken of as the multitude of the disciples. At Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians (Acts 11:26). In other words, a Christian is a disciple of Christ.

In a more general sense, some people are called disciples in Acts 19:1-3 when they knew only the baptism of John and had not yet been baptized in the name of Christ.

Incorrect Definition

Advocates of pyramid discipleship use an incorrect definition for the word 'disciple.' They define a disciple as a Christian who is trained through a subordinate relationship with another Christian. This unscriptural definition results from an incorrect concept of how one becomes a disciple of Christ.

'Disciple' as a Verb

Most advocates of hierarchical discipleship like to use the word 'disciple' as a verb. When they speak of 'discipling someone to Christ' they don't refer to preaching the gospel so someone can become a disciple. They refer to a period of training under the leadership of one person.

Kip McKean of the Boston Church of Christ believes that a Christian should 'get disciplined' by some more mature Christian. In a lesson entitled: 'The Saints in the Kingdom of Light' presented in England at the 1984 'United Kingdom Missions Conference' of the Central London Church of Christ he indicated that it takes at least three years to disciple a Christian to Christ. He also said the following:

"Get disciplined by men. Most of you have discipling relationships. Some of you don't. You need to find them. It's Biblically commanded. How could you not have them? If you have them, get open. Like Moak (sp?) say, 'I'm just here to learn.' Get humble. Get submissive. Get loyal and learn. You've got great people to learn from."

"And I make it clear with the people I'm discipleship partners with, that that's the purpose of our relationship. I verbally say that: 'I'm going to disciple you to Christ,' so the relationship is defined just like Jesus defined it when He said,

'Come follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men.' They know what relationship they're getting themselves into. And if Jesus had to say it, don't you think we have to say it? I think so."

"You must have a discipling relationship with another man who is older in the Lord to be able to help you become a strong Christian."

(These quotations are from a cassette recording distributed by the Crossroads Tape Ministry, Gainesville, Florida).

This idea of discipling a Christian to Christ is foreign to the New Testament.

In Greek there is a verb form of the word 'disciple' which is found four times in the New Testament (Matt. 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21). In the first two passages it is intransitive and means to be or to become a disciple. In Matthew 28:19 and in Acts 14:21 the word is transitive and means to make disciples.

On what do they base their definition of 'discipling' as one Christian shepherding another Christian to maturity?

Sometimes an appeal is made to Ephesians 4:11-13 which teaches that a Christian is to grow to maturity in the body of Christ. But that process is not called 'discipling' and nothing is said about a master/disciple relationship.

Another passage used is Luke 6:40. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

Actually, this passage proves their definition to be incorrect. Must one be perfectly taught before he is 'discipled' to Christ? Is being perfectly taught something one can attain during a three-year crash course under some other disciple? Or is this a goal for a lifetime of learning from Christ? And WHO is the 'teacher' in this verse? Some other disciple or Christ?

Their wrong definition changes the goal into the prerequisite. There are hundreds of disciples of Christ for whom I have great respect. But I have yet to meet one who is already 'fully taught.' Becoming fully taught to be like Christ is the goal of discipleship, not the prerequisite.

How Does One Become a Disciple of Christ?

People became disciples of John the Baptist and of Christ during His earthly ministry by repenting and being baptized. At that time the message of both was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). They who refused to be baptized "rejected the counsel of God" (Luke 7:30). Jesus left Judea when the Pharisees heard that He "made and baptized more disciples than John" (John 4:1).

Before returning to the Father He commanded His followers: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is

baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15,16). In the wording of Matthew 28:19,20 they were told: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

It has been argued that since 'make disciples' (second person plural aorist imperative active) is the main verb of the sentence and 'going,' 'baptizing' and 'teaching' are participles, discipling includes both baptizing and teaching to observe all things.

Whom are we to disciple? All the nations. Nations (accusative) is the direct object of the verb 'disciple.' If 'disciple' as a verb means what advocates of authoritarian discipleship claim, is it possible to disciple a nation? Of course not. In most versions this verb is correctly translated 'to make disciples of.' Then it makes sense. 'Make disciples of all the nations.' That is possible.

Whom are we to baptize and teach to observe all things? Is it possible to baptize a nation? Greek pronouns usually agree in gender with their antecedent. 'Nations' is neuter; 'them' in verses 19 and 20 is masculine. It is to be understood -- as is stated in Mark -- that only those who believe are to be baptized. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). And whom are you going to teach to observe all things? One who doesn't believe? One who refuses to be baptized? Or one who has believed, has been baptized, and has been made a disciple? You are not going to make much progress teaching someone to observe all things until AFTER he has become a disciple!

Disciples ARE to be taught to observe all that their Master has commanded. They ARE to grow to maturity in Christ. But this is not called 'discipling' in the New Testament. And the above passages certainly say nothing about becoming the disciple of someone OTHER THAN CHRIST.

The way to make disciples is to preach the gospel. "When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples" (Acts 14:21,22). A subordinate relationship with some other disciple is not required in 'making disciples' or 'discipling' (the verb form is used in this passage).

"And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). When someone believes the gospel and is obedient to the faith by repenting and being baptized he becomes a disciple of Christ (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 6:7).

What were the results of Peter's sermon on Pentecost? "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41).

In the New Testament, people became disciples by being obedient to the faith,

not by being trained in a subordinate relationship with some other disciple.

Disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). One becomes a disciple of Christ in exactly the same way one becomes a Christian. As a disciple (learner) he will continue to grow and become more like Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

According to the hierarchical discipleship movement one becomes a disciple through authoritarian training under some more mature disciple. According to the Scriptures one becomes a disciple by being baptized into Christ. As a disciple, he grows to maturity in the body of Christ.

One Error Leads to Another

The fundamental error made by advocates of pyramid discipleship is to use the example of Christ training His APOSTLES as a pattern for MAKING DISCIPLES, whereas these are different matters entirely. This results not only in a wrong idea as to how one becomes a disciple, but also in an incorrect definition of a disciple. Other errors branch out from these roots.

May Christians Have Disciples?

May we follow Christ's example and train others by means of a teacher/disciple relationship patterned after the relationship Jesus had with His apostles?

We may not follow Christ's example in everything. Christ is the Head of the church. May we follow His example in this? (The Pope does!) Adventists say we should follow Christ's example and keep the Sabbath.

Neither may we follow the example of the apostles in everything. They imparted the Holy Spirit by the laying-on of hands (Acts 8:18). May we follow this example? (Catholic bishops and Pentecostals do!)

May we follow Christ's example and teach others the same way He taught His apostles? No, Jesus has EXPRESSLY FORBIDDEN IT. "But you, do not be called, 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers, for One is your Teacher, the Christ" (Matt. 23:8-10).

Both Jesus and John the Baptist were called Rabbi by their disciples (John 9:2; 3:26). A Rabbi was a teacher who had a master/disciple relationship with his students. According to the usual practice, disciples might eventually become Rabbis themselves and have disciples of their own.

Jesus tells His disciples, however, that they are not to be called Rabbi. They would always remain disciples. He is the only Rabbi and His disciples are all brethren.

When Jesus says we have but ONE teacher, it is the same word used in other places to describe Christian teachers (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28-30; Eph. 4:11-16). What is the difference between what is allowed and what is not allowed?

The word 'Rabbi' qualifies the meaning of the word 'teacher' in Matthew 23:8. We may have teachers in the church, but not Rabbis. In other words, Christian teachers may not have disciples. **WHAT JESUS FORBIDS IS AN ORGANIZATIONAL TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS.** And this is exactly what is advocated in the authoritarian discipleship movement!

Jesus is our only Master Teacher. Teachers in the church may not have an organizational position ABOVE the ones they teach. We are all brethren.

The word used in Matthew 23:10 for 'teachers' (also translated 'masters' or 'leaders') is not the usual word for 'teacher,' 'master' or 'leader' but is a word which is found only in this verse. It means a 'guide teacher.'

Members of the Orthodox Church are encouraged to find a 'spiritual director' to help them grow. The concept is similar. Christ, however, has provided evangelists, pastors and teachers to build up the body (Eph. 4:11). We are not to accept one certain person as our 'guide teacher' or 'spiritual director' to help us grow. Christ is our spiritual director, no one else!

We may have teachers in the church, but not Rabbis or spiritual directors. Teacher/disciple relationships have been forbidden by Christ.

May We Call a Brother 'My Disciple'?

It is common in the authoritarian discipleship movement for one person to refer to those he is training as 'my disciples.' Kip McKean stated at the 1984 'United Kingdom Missions Conference' in London: "You must fall in love with your disciple, that you are discipling to Christ."

Jesus refers to His followers as 'My disciples.' In the New Testament no Christian ever calls another Christian 'my disciple.'

With reference to Paul we read in Acts 9:25, "Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket." One finds 'his disciples' instead of 'the disciples' in many modern translations. These versions are based on certain manuscripts from the 4th and 5th centuries which differ greatly from the majority of manuscripts. Not only in the Received Text, but also in the ancient translations (Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian) one finds 'the disciples.'

It is beyond the scope of this lecture to discuss the relative merits of manuscripts. We might ask however: Is it safe to base a practice on a reading not found in most manuscripts? If 'his disciples' is correct, then this is the only place in the New Testament where the word 'disciple' is used to describe a

relationship between two Christians.

Even then we would have to bear in mind that Paul was an INSPIRED APOSTLE (Acts 22:15; 26:16-18; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). Because we continue in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) there is a limited sense in which we also might be called disciples of Paul. (See John 9:28 where the Jews refer to themselves as disciples of Moses.) Since we are NOT inspired apostles, however, even if Paul did have disciples, that would not authorize us to have disciples.

As mentioned above, a common error of sectarians is to apply passages to themselves which refer to the exclusive office of Christ or His apostles.

Paul warned against those who would try to make CHRIST'S disciples into THEIR disciples: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29,30).

May One Christian Exalt Himself Above Another?

Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matt. 10:24,25).

According to Philippians 2:3 we are to be humble and to esteem others better than ourselves. If you call a fellow Christian 'my disciple' you are exalting yourself above your brother. If he is YOUR disciple then you are HIS TEACHER in a way which violates Matthew 23:8-10.

Jesus also said, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher" (Matt. 10:25). Is it enough for you to be like some other Christian? Certainly not. That would be coming far short of being like Christ. We have but one Teacher and we are all brethren. When we make disciples, we are to make disciples of Christ, not disciples of men.

The Meaning of 'My Son in the Faith'

It is argued that the biblical expression 'my son in the faith' is equivalent to 'my disciple.'

What Paul means when he refers to Timothy as 'my true son in the faith' (1 Tim. 1:2) is clarified in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17. "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." (See also Philemon 10 where Paul speaks of Onesimus as his son, begotten during his imprisonment.)

The Corinthians were Paul's children in the faith because he had begotten them through his PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL. Others had helped them grow after they became Christians. They had MANY INSTRUCTORS (not just one). Paul's expression 'son in the Lord' does not involve a Rabbi/disciple relationship.

When someone responds to our preaching and becomes a child of God we are in a sense that person's "father" in the faith and he is our "child." It is also true that those who become Christians learn much by imitating the faith of their teachers. But nothing indicates that a Christian is the disciple of the one who taught him.

These passages must be understood in the light of the command of Christ: "But you, do not be called, 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8,9).

What then is the difference between calling someone 'my son in the faith' and calling him 'my disciple'? Simply this: The first expression, if understood correctly, is Biblical and the second is not. I say 'if understood correctly' because one could easily use these Biblical words with a meaning different than Paul's meaning. In the Catholic and the Orthodox Church this passage is quoted to justify calling a priest 'Father'! If you 'beget' someone by sowing the seed of the gospel (the Word of God) in his heart then he is your child in the faith. But that does not make you his master teacher. If he became YOUR disciple, something was sown other than the Word of God. The Word of God produces disciples of Christ.

Paul and Timothy

Some have argued that the training of Christians in a teacher/disciple relationship is no different than the situation where young evangelists work with more experienced preachers as Timothy and others worked with Paul.

There is a great difference, however, between being the disciple of someone and working with someone.

Timothy was already a disciple and was "well spoken of by the brethren" before Paul invited him to accompany him (Acts 16:1-3). Paul's purpose was NOT to 'disciple him to Christ.' He refers to Timothy as his fellow worker (Rom. 16:21) and his helper (Acts 19:22). He also calls him "our brother and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ" (1 Thes. 3:2). Timothy was Paul's fellow worker, not his disciple.

Paul uses similar terms for others who accompanied him. He calls Titus his partner and fellow worker (2 Cor. 8:23). He refers to Philemon (whom he had taught the gospel) as his fellow labourer (Philemon 1). Clement, Aristarchus, John Mark, Justus, Demas, and Luke are all called fellow workers (Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:10,11; Philemon 24).

A close personal tie developed between Paul and Timothy during their many years of service together. Of him Paul wrote: "You know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:22). This resulted from their personal association, not from a hierarchical form of leadership.

For eight years I had young men working with me in Belgium. We were fellow workers and fellow disciples of Christ. Because they were just learning Dutch and were inexperienced they assisted with my program of work. But they were not my disciples.

If a master/disciple relationship developed between an experienced preacher and a young evangelist, that would be wrong.

Some have also tried to justify a teacher/disciple relationship by the example of Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. But these are inspired letters from an apostle! Expressions of Paul's apostolic authority cannot serve as examples for US to follow!

Was Paul a Disciple of Barnabas?

In an attempt to fabricate a hierarchical chain of discipleship in the New Testament, many writers in this movement state that Paul was a disciple of Barnabas.

This has no Biblical basis whatever. Paul was NOT a disciple of Barnabas. The passages which tell of Paul's associations with Barnabas do not indicate that there was a master/disciple relationship between them. In the early years of Paul's ministry he was with Barnabas no more than two weeks! (See Galatians 1:11-24 and Acts 9:26-30.) What Paul writes in the first two chapters of Galatians indicates that he was a disciple of Christ and of no one else!

Who is Your Spiritual Father?

"You are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8,9).

In London, Kip McKean spoke about 'spiritual fathers.'

"Yes, we need to be brothers. But sometimes we're afraid of adopting the pattern of the Bible and being a father in the gospel to someone, because being a father is so much responsibility."

"You know, I think that one of the things that I saw falling short as an earthly parent that I see falling short with a lot of brothers as spiritual fathers is that they don't urge their brothers. There's not a hard-line discipline. And you can be buddy-buddy all you want, but being buddy-buddy doesn't change people's lives. When you lay it out, when you're hard-line, then things change."

"And when that man, that father in the faith, is hard-line it makes a difference in their lives."

(Cassette recording: 'Saints in the Kingdom of Light.')

In this lesson Kip McKean teaches that each Christian should have a more mature brother as his spiritual father to disciple him to Christ using hard-line discipline.

Can we be true disciples of Christ while accepting someone other than God as our spiritual father and someone other than Christ as our teacher?

Certainly not. We would be trampling under foot the words of our Lord: "But you, do not be called, 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8,9).

May We Be Followers of Men?

Although not affiliated with Boston, Milton Jones wrote a book entitled 'Discipling: the Multiplying Ministry' (1982, Star Bible & Tract Corp., Ft. Worth, Texas) which advocates these same ideas. In it he complains that most Christians today would be hesitant to say, 'Be followers of me.' He admits that some would even consider such to be blasphemy (Page 34).

It sounds like blasphemy to me. In an attempt to justify his statement he quotes two verses in which Paul says, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; 4:16). He also quotes from Hebrews where it is stated that we are to imitate the faith of our leaders (Heb. 13:7). I try to imitate the faith of fellow Christians. I think of J.C. Bailey (who first went to India to preach when he was 59 and who after almost 30 years is still doing what he can) as one who has a great faith worthy of imitation. But we may not be disciples of J.C. Bailey! That is a completely different matter. Following men has been the cause of apostasy down through the ages.

Man-Made Rules and Regulations

In the authoritarian discipleship movement rules and regulations are enforced which admittedly are not found in the Scriptures. It is argued that extra-Biblical rules and regulations are necessary to keep inexperienced Christians from going astray.

Robert Nelson in his book 'Understanding the Crossroads Controversy' (1981, Robert Nelson, Gainesville, Florida) gives these man-made rules the strange name of 'Bible principle rules' (page 84). In the appendix he compares them to the rules and regulations of Christian colleges (Ap I-1). In so doing he reveals the error of his thinking.

A Christian college is a human institution and as such may have human

regulations. No one is obligated to attend a certain school. If he doesn't like its regulations, he may chose a school with rules more to his liking.

The church of Christ, however, is a divine institution and no one but God may make rules for its members. The question is not whether certain rules are good or bad, but whether men have the right to make rules for God's church.

One of the first doctrinal problems in the church was an attempt by Jewish false teachers to bind things which God had not bound. The saints at Colossae had allowed false teachers who used "philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8) to persuade them to follow man-made rules and regulations. Paul rebuked them: "If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations -- 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using -- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:20-23).

Human rules and regulations may have an APPEARANCE OF WISDOM, but actually they are worthless. They are not an expression of spirituality, but of worldliness!

This form of worldliness has been a popular heresy in every age. The world is run on the basis of human authority and outward regulations. It HAS to be, because an outward rule is the only thing men can ENFORCE. But the kingdom of God is different. It is not based on law enforcement. The New Covenant is written on the heart.

I recently had the privilege of baptizing a man who left the Jehovah's Witnesses 12 years ago. He said he knew something was wrong with them because he didn't have the liberty Jesus promised those who know the truth.

Christian leaders violate the liberty of Christ when they impose man-made regulations on the flock, rather than teaching them to observe the things which CHRIST has commanded.

A rule-maker always tries to justify his little regulations on the basis of the principles they are SUPPOSED to advance.

Bible study and prayer are necessary for growth in Christ. Instead of teaching and exhorting the brethren to study the Word and to pray without ceasing, the rule-maker comes up with a neat little package called 'quiet time.' Someone who has had his 'quite time' every day can feel really religious. But shame on you if you missed a couple of days this week. The sons of God are treated like children in a kindergarten who are told to lay their heads on their desks for five minutes. Instead of encouraging fellowship, the rule-maker comes up

with "brother's keepers."

Neo-methodism is extremely influential in current religious thought, no doubt as a reaction to indifference. When you beg people to do what is right and they won't listen, it is tempting to try to MAKE them do what is right. This tendency is affecting the church adversely, not only in the Crossroads/Boston apostasy, but also in the name of Mission Methods, Church Growth Methods, Church Organization Methods and Devotional Methods.

Methodism always goes hand in hand with authoritarianism. When you start making rules, someone must ENFORCE them. Otherwise they don't work. This approach appeals to worldly people because it makes them feel so righteous and it gets fast visible (though superficial) results. Also, interestingly enough, it is especially appealing to young intellectuals.

John Wesley's methodistic movement started as a devotional group at Oxford. Their purpose in meeting was to deepen their spiritual life by prayer and study of the Scriptures. They were first called 'methodists' by others because they were unusually precise and 'methodic' in their religious observances. Sound familiar?

In the hierarchical organization Wesley set up, he was a real tyrant. When one of their groups in Glasgow decided to be led by a "Session" (a Presbyterian term referring to leadership by a group composed of the elders and the preacher), Wesley wrote the following letter to his evangelist in charge: "Cork, May 10, 1789. My Dear Brother, --'Sessions!' 'elders!' We Methodists have no such custom, neither any of the Churches of God that are under our care. I require you, Jonathan Crowther, immediately to dissolve that session (so called) at Glasgow. Discharge them from meeting any more. And if they will leave the Society, let them leave it. We acknowledge only preachers, stewards, and leaders among us, over which the assistant in each circuit presides. You ought to have kept to the Methodist plan from the beginning. Who had my authority to vary from it? If the people of Glasgow, or any other place, are weary of us, we will leave them to themselves. But we are willing to be still their servants, for Christ's sake, according to our own discipline, but no other. John Wesley." (This quotation is from a METHODIST book: "Church Organisations" James H. Rigg, Third Edition, Publ. Charles H. Kelly, London, 1897, page 261). Sound familiar? And the Methodists really grew! Wow! What success!

One preacher, who is not in the Boston/Crossroads movement, said he had become tired of pleading with people to do what they are obligated to do. He suggested an authoritarian approach of just telling people what to do.

Especially in times of apathy, it is tempting to try to MAKE people do what is right, but that is not God's way. Jesus is not a door-crasher. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). To whom did Jesus say that? To Christians whom he had just called to repentance: "As many as I

love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Even though we do sometimes get tired, we must keep on pleading with people, beseeching them to do what is right, exhorting them. But let us never rob them of their responsibility by coercing them.

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah: "Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live" (Jer. 38:20).

A beautiful word which is used many times in the N.T. is PARAKALEO which can mean variously: exhort, beseech, plead, beg, encourage, comfort. Examine the following passages in which it is used: Luke 3:18; Acts 2:40; 11:23; 14:22; 15:32; Rom. 12:1,8; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:13,16; 14:31; 16:15; 2 Cor. 2:8; 5:20; 6:1; 10:1; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thes. 2:11,12; 4:1,10; 5:14; 2 Thes. 3:12; 1 Tim. 2:1; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:6,15; Philemon 9,10; Heb. 3:13; 10:25; 13:19,22; 1 Peter 2:11; 5:1,12; Jude 3. See also Gal. 4:12 and 2 John 5 where similar words are used (beg and request).

We should not try to force man-made rites and regulations on others, nor should we allow others to bind them on us.

Submission

In the hierarchical discipleship movement much emphasis is placed on submission and loyalty to the 'discipler' who is above one.

We are indeed told to submit to our leaders (1 Cor. 16:16; Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5). Wives are also to submit to their husbands. But this may not be twisted into: Elders, boss the flock! Husbands, boss your wives! I don't know about your wife, but mine -- although she does a fairly good job of being submissive -- will not be bossed! Sometimes you can make people do things, but that is not submission.

An example of the authoritarian approach was given by the preacher mentioned above. He was pleased that one of their elders had announced on Sunday morning: "You are expected to be here tonight and you are expected to have your sheets filled in."

Before I explain what is wrong with this, let me give a good example in comparison. I recently saw the following in a bulletin: "Tonight our brother will be bringing a lesson to us at the 6.30 hour. Your shepherds want to provide 'food for thought' for the spiritual strength you will need for the coming week, so don't neglect the opportunity for your nourishment."

Isn't that beautiful? A command is given. One may give a command IF IT IS BACKED BY THE WORD OF GOD, and this one is (Heb. 10:25). Contrary to what some believe, it is not necessarily wrong to be absent from a second meeting on the Lord's day ... unless it is because of NEGLECT, unless one is

"forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."

To say to a whole congregation: "You are expected to be here this evening" is wrong because there may be people present whom God DOES NOT EXPECT to be there. It is presumptuous for elders to expect something God does not expect. The Lord may have a task for some that evening which is more important than being at the meeting. Would that be "forsaking the assembly"? Remember the widow's mite? There may be some who because of age or infirmity show much more dedication to God by coming ONCE each week, than someone else who is in good health shows by being there every time the door is open. Would they necessarily be "forsaking the assembly" if they stayed home? What about a couple who must travel a great distance to attend services? Would they be "forsaking the assembly" if they studied the Scriptures and praised God in their own home on Sunday night? There are many, many things about our service to God which can only be decided by ourselves, and we shall each have to be responsible for our decisions on the last day.

This elder was being presumptuous, self-willed and unjust. He was trying to lord it over the flock. If that is his customary behaviour, he is not qualified to be an elder (Titus 1:7,8).

The second part of his command was: "And you are expected to have your sheets filled in." That is about as childish as one can get. A commandment of man is being forced upon the people of God.

It seems to be one of the current fads in the U.S. to have question sheets to fill in. We were given lots of sheets to fill in on our last trip to America. Most were of such a nature that I am SURE God didn't mind at all when we didn't fill them in! They were often passed out at what was called a 'Bible study.' Usually, one could get along quite well without a Bible. Once when my parents complained that there had not been a single verse from the Bible read during a 'Bible study,' they heard the reply: "Oh, but you were five minutes late. You missed the Bible verse!"

But let's assume that some question sheets have been prepared which are excellent means of increasing ones knowledge of Christ and His word. Do the elders have a right to 'expect' that everyone fill them in? To offer them as a help, even to encourage brethren to use them, would be fine, but to 'expect' that everyone fill them in is binding something which God has not bound.

When someone does not speak according to the word of God it is because there is no light in him. Man-made rules and regulations are an expression of worldliness.

Cross-Examination and Coercion

Cross-examination is used as a means of 'training' Christians in the authoritarian discipleship movement. Members are encouraged to have so-

called 'spiritual' discussions after services asking each other questions such as: "Did you read your Bible and have quiet time every day this week? Did you invite someone to Bible study every day?"

Once a week, in a private prayer session with some more 'mature' disciple, the cross-examination is extended to the area of specific sins: "Did you commit sin A, B, C or D this week?"

Is this according to Scripture? Paul wrote: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Cor. 13:5).

A slip of paper was given to me many years ago by a former Jehovah's Witness I baptized. It is the sheet all Jehovah's Witnesses must hand in each week showing how much literature they sold, how many Bible studies they conducted, and the number of hours they 'witnessed.'

A sister who was formerly a J.W. told me she wrote across her sheet once: "Did Paul have to do this?"

The Jehovah's Witnesses deny they coerce their members, claiming the report is only for planning. It is obvious, however, that it places them under compulsion to work an 'acceptable' number of hours. Instead of 'examining themselves' they are being coerced by their leaders.

The use of compulsion to get Christians to do even something good is contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Christians are to be taught and admonished to do what is right, but they are never to be coerced.

No compulsion is to be used, for example, with regard to giving: "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

At a Catholic mass I once attended the priest walked up and down every row looking each person straight in the eye as he passed the collection basket! Most, of course, felt compelled to contribute. I smiled and said: "No thank you."

I have also heard of elders in the church who violated this principle. They visited Christians in their homes and intimidated them by asking how much they were giving. They claimed they had a right to know. In some cases they even told people how much to give!

Paul said 'Examine yourselves' not 'Cross-examine each other.'

He told the Corinthians: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. ... He who judges me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3,4). The Greek word for 'judge' in this verse means to 'examine' as in a court of law. Paul used the same word two chapters earlier when he wrote:

"He who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is [rightly] judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2:15).

The principle of self-examination also applies to the Lord's supper: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus, his run-away slave, whom Paul had taught the gospel: "whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary" (Philemon 13,14).

Christians are to serve voluntarily. Compulsion robs them of the opportunity.

The elders of one congregation which had been influenced by the Boston/Crossroads movement told a couple who lived more than a hour's drive away from the meeting place that they would be disfellowshipped if they didn't attend certain mid-week meetings regularly.

We are told to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another (James 5:16). We are not told to cross-examine one another! A cross-examination, whether by a priest in a confessional, or by some presumptuous 'more mature' disciple, is a slap in the face of Christ. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

Does this mean that we may never reprimand a brother for sin? Certainly not. There is a great difference, however, between helping a brother who has sinned, and cross-examining a brother!

Moreover, not all Christians are qualified: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load" (Gal. 6:1-5).

Coercion is common in politics and business. False religions also use compulsion effectively to manipulate their members.

Followers of Christ, however, do not coerce one another. They obey Christ: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:25,26).

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). We may not misuse our liberty as a cloak for evil (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). But neither

may we submit to someone who would bring us into bondage: "But this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:4,5). "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23).

How Serious Are These Errors?

Extremely so! When brethren usurp the authority of Christ and advocate unscriptural church government it is not just a 'matter of opinion' or a 'method of evangelism.'

Heartrending divisions have already occurred in many places where false teachers have infiltrated congregations and built up a following. When called to order by the elders they refused to repent, took 'their disciples' and left. In other cases they gained control of the congregation and those who did not agree with them had to leave.

Smooth-talking men of influence are doing all they can to champion these ideas. In private discussions and in long letters brethren have lovingly shown them from the Scriptures the errors they are making, but most of them refuse to listen and repent. They are leading many astray.

HOW SHOULD WE TREAT PEOPLE IN THIS MOVEMENT?

What should our attitude be toward people from churches practising hierarchical discipleship? There is no reason to doubt that these congregations include people who believe in Christ and have been baptized into His body. If such persons wish to worship with us and are willing to respect Biblical leadership they should be received in love. As the need arises, the way of God can be explained to them more accurately (Acts 18:26).

Beware of the Wolves

False teachers, however, must be rejected: "I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Advocates of pyramid discipleship HAVE caused division through the introduction of a hierarchical form of church government which conflicts with Biblical principles of leadership.

How we treat them is not an optional matter. God has COMMANDED us to note false teachers and to avoid them! "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:18).

Paul warned that certain brethren would draw away disciples after themselves. May we never be among them. "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from

among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch" (Acts 20:29-31).

False Pleas for Unity

Keep in mind that wolves are always in favour of unity between wolves and sheep. But what they have in mind is not conducive to the well-being of the sheep!

We all need to pray for peace and unity among God's people. At the same time we must remember that there can be no unity between truth and falsehood. Among Christians there are always some who do not love the truth. They do not study the word, or they study the word but do not accept what it says. Such people are extremely susceptible to being misled by false teachers. That is why divisions have always taken place down through the ages and always will. Actually, they purify the church (1 Cor. 11:18,19).

Those who added musical instruments to the worship a century ago emphasized unity. They wanted to be accepted, unscriptural practices and all. Understandably, for that would allow them to spread their false teachings further. They emphasized unity and divided the church.

Advocates of the 'Missionary Society' also emphasized unity as they divided the church over their sectarian 'method of evangelism.' Actually, the Society was a flop. But that did not deter its champions. What if it had been a 'success'? Would it have been less unscriptural? It would have been more dangerous, especially in a country like America where 'success' is a national god.

Those who now worship with instruments still want us to ACCEPT them. They claim they want unity. But THEY CAUSE DIVISION. As they caused division a century ago, so they cause division now by their agitations. Their plea for unity is hypocritical. Their desire for unity is not great, or they would be willing to put aside unscriptural worship for the sake of unity. They are more dedicated to mechanical music than to unity on the basis of God's Word. Their goal is unity on their own terms, not unity in Christ.

Division has ALREADY COME as a result of the authoritarian discipleship movement. Many people have already accepted these false teachings and practices, who show no signs of repenting.

Those who follow Christ, refuse to follow men, and a parting of the ways is inevitable between those who walk straight ahead on the narrow road and those who turn aside. Division is always sad, but it is better than apostasy.

The Corinthians

The argument has been made by some who are in favour of amoebic unity that the Boston/Crossroads type churches are "every bit as faithful to the word of

God as the Corinthians."

The Corinthians had serious problems, but they also had an excellent characteristic: when Paul wrote to them they REPENTED (2 Cor. 7:7-15)!

Those who reject Christ's authority by advocating teacher/disciple relationships among Christians (contrary to Matt. 23:8-10) and by setting up a hierarchy with men over tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands (contrary to Mark 10:42,43) have been warned clearly and repeatedly about the errors of their ways, but they REFUSE to repent.

What would Paul have done if the Corinthians had refused to repent? He said that anyone who rejected what he wrote was to be rejected (1 Cor. 14:38)! He also said he was ready to punish every disobedience (2 Cor. 10:6).

And what did Paul say about those who had led the Corinthians astray? "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Do not dishonour the Corinthians by comparing them with advocates of authoritarian discipleship. The Corinthians repented of their many sins. The 'disciplers' have not repented and most of them probably never will. As one of their evangelists said: "It's going to be something you'll have to deal with for a long time, probably from now on."

Avoid Them

No, we may not unite with people who cause dissensions in the body of Christ. If Romans 16:17,18 ever applied to anyone, it applies to leaders in the 'get disciplined by men' movement: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."

Love

Be sure to maintain the spirit of Christ in your dealings with those who are misled or confused. Resistance to error can do more harm than good if it is not Christlike.

Love must be our motive in opposing the doctrines of these men. We love them and hope they will repent. We also love the souls they are deceiving and the church they are dividing.

A Blessing or a Curse?

For those who know and love the Word of God, this 'discipleship' movement will be a blessing. When the subject is discussed they will test all things and retain that which is good. They will be forced to restudy discipleship and this will deepen their commitment as followers of Christ.

People who become Christians through this movement, if they love the truth, will continue to grow in knowledge. Eventually they will cast off human domination and will find their way to congregations which submit to the authority of Christ, as has already occurred in many cases.

Certain people, however, are in danger of being deceived and led astray; for example, those for whom numerical 'success' is more important than truth, those who are intrigued by human theories and doctrines, those who prefer being told what to do rather than accepting their own responsibility, and those who like to exercise authority over others.

Statistics can be Deceiving

Fidelity to New Testament principles and practice is the ONLY valid measure of success. Numerical 'success' on an unscriptural foundation is not true success. An impressive house can be built on sand, but only the house on the Rock will stand. A child can count the seeds in an apple, but only God knows how many apples are in a seed.

Watch Out!

Total commitment is Biblical, regimentation is not.

New Testament teaching on discipleship and personal commitment to Christ certainly needs to be stressed. But after someone presents a stirring plea for you to follow Christ, be careful that he doesn't trick you into following HIM instead.

Let us follow the old paths and not be led astray by human precepts and practices even if they do have "an appearance of wisdom" (Col. 2:23). Only if we continue in the word of Christ are we truly His disciples (John 8:31).

Roy Davison

©1985,1988 Roy Davison. This material may be copied for personal study only. It may not be distributed or published in any form whatever without the copyright owner's written permission.

The Scripture quotations in this article are from The New King James Version. ©1979,1980,1982, Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers. Permission for reference use has been granted.

Published in *The Old Paths Archive* (<http://www.oldpaths.com>)

