



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 18: The Means of Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard the phrase “Some things are better caught than taught?” It gets at the idea that some things are more easily learned by watching someone’s example than through formal classroom instruction.

1. What are some things that people learn more by imitation than by verbal instruction? _____

As Christians, we certainly learn much by instruction, and we’ll consider the role of teaching in Section II below. But first, we will consider the crucial and often overlooked truth that Christians are meant to grow through imitating godly examples.

MAIN IDEA

Learning from godly examples is a crucial aspect of Christian discipleship. This means that we should both seek out godly examples to follow and set a godly example for others. In Section I we will look at the importance of growing through imitating godly examples. In Section II we will consider the role of teaching as a means of discipleship and helping others grow. One of the chief means by which we grow as disciples is through personal relationships in which we bring the truths of the gospel to bear on the details of life.

I. Following Godly Examples

At the end of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul concludes a long and somewhat complex discussion about meat sacrificed to idols and other issues that were troubling the Christians in Corinth. His basic point is that in all we do, we should seek the good of others. Our concern in this study is not so much the specific issue Paul addresses, but the general principles he gives us.

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

1. What reason does Paul give for why he tries to please everyone in everything (v. 33)?

2. What does Paul tell us to do in 11:1?

3. Why do you think Paul tells the Corinthians to imitate his conduct, in addition to giving them instructions in writing? Why is imitating others' good examples an important aspect of discipleship?

Second Timothy 3 gives us another example of discipleship by imitation. In the first part of the chapter (vv. 1–9), Paul warns Timothy about ungodly people who will oppose the truth. Then, in verse 10, he tells Timothy how he should conduct himself in the face of this opposition.

2 Timothy 3:10–17

4. What has Timothy “followed” (vv. 10–11)? How will this help him to resist ungodly influences?

5. What does Paul say will happen to: a) All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus (v. 12)? b) Evil people and impostors (v. 13)?

6. What does Paul tell Timothy to do in light of this (vv. 14–15)? Why does it matter that Timothy remembers the person “from whom [he] learned” what he firmly believes?

As we've seen in both of these passages, imitating godly examples is crucial to discipleship. Paul instructs the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ. This means that they should humbly seek the good of others in everything they do, in order that non-Christians may come to faith in Christ and that believers may be built up in the faith. Thus, for the Corinthians—and for us—to follow Paul's example is to gear one's whole life around helping others come to Christ and grow in Christ.

And in 2 Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy that he personally knows about Paul's whole way of life: his teaching, conduct, aim in life, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, and the persecutions that he endured and from which the Lord delivered him. And, in the face of opposition from ungodly people, Paul urges Timothy to remember his way of life and to imitate it. Imitating godly examples is crucial to discipleship, and all Christians are called to grow as disciples and to help others grow as disciples. Therefore, all Christians should both seek to imitate godly examples and to serve as godly examples for others.

7. As we've seen throughout this study, it's important for Christians to learn through imitation in addition to instruction. What are some pitfalls of learning by instruction only and not having close relationships with godly role models?

8. If learning by imitation is a large part of discipleship, why is being involved in a healthy church crucial for the Christian life?

9. Within the life of the church, what are some practical steps which the call to imitate godly examples requires you to take?

II. Teaching One Another

Romans 15:14

1. In verse 14, Paul tells the Romans that he is confident that they are able to admonish one another. What do you think Paul expects them to do in response? _____

As we've seen in Romans 15:14, it's clear that Paul expected all church members to instruct each other. In Ephesians 4, Paul gives more explicit instruction on the subject and discusses how the whole church grows to maturity.

Ephesians 4:11–16

3. According to this passage, what is a pastor's responsibility (vv. 11–12)? How is this different from how we often think about "ministry"?

4. Who does Paul say is to attain to the unity of the faith and to the measure of the fullness of Christ? (v. 13)

5. According to verse 15, by what means are we to grow up into Christ?

6. Based on this entire passage, whom does Paul have in mind when he talks about "speaking the truth in love" (v. 15)?

7. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a church member in light of this passage? What should you be consistently striving to do in the church?

In Titus 2, we see an example of the kind of “speaking the truth in love” that Paul commands in Ephesians 4.

Titus 2:1–8

8. What does Paul tell Titus to exhort the older women to do with respect to their own personal conduct (v. 3)? What special task do they have with respect to the younger women (vv. 4–5)?

9. What are some concrete ways women in our church can carry out Paul’s instructions?

10. Based on the rest of Scripture, what do you think Paul would exhort older men to teach to younger men? Cite specific passages.

11. Think about all the passages we’ve looked at in this study. How would you summarize their teaching about the ways we grow in godliness?¹

¹ Bobby Jamieson, *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 54.