

Text: Gal. 4:11-20

Title: "Disciple-making: the role of Paul after true justification"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: There is something romantically adventurous about the thought of climbing Mount Everest, the highest mountain on earth. Edmund Hillary, an Australian mountaineer, with a Nepalese companion, made history when they became the first confirmed climbers to have reached the peak. Theirs was the ninth British expedition to attempt the feat. Others had tried and failed.

This past week some of the glory of reaching the peak was a bit tarnished as news reports about tragic deaths became known. One story appeared in USA Today titled, "What's causing Mount Everest's deadly season? Overcrowding, inexperience, and a long line to the top." That line looked like a bunch of people waiting at the DMV.

It is interesting how things that seem at first quite glorious can later lose some of their glory once we actually experience what it is like to do them.

For us believers, the Great Commission can be like that. This is the one job that Jesus gave us to do before His ascension to heaven. He said, "Make disciples of the nations by baptizing them and by teaching them all the things I have commanded you." We have songs in our hymn book that celebrate the glory of that command. We have heard messages about it. We pray for it. But when we get into experiencing what disciple-making really is like, we find that it can be a horrendously difficult, demanding, and discouraging thing to do.

Our passage tells us about the difficulty Paul had as a disciple-maker. Perhaps we think of Paul as the powerful apostle who never had any trouble making disciples for Christ. That is not the case. Everyone, Paul included, who is willing to make a disciple is going to have some trouble doing so. Even Paul did so, and yet God greatly used him in this way in spite of the trouble it involved.

I want us to think about how Paul was willing to fulfill three requirements of faithful disciple-making in his ministry to the Galatians, and I want us to ask ourselves whether or not we are engaged willingly in this important work ourselves.

I. Disciple-making requires dealing with a certain kind of fear (vv. 11-15).

Illustration: We often think of Paul's companion Timothy as the disciple-maker and church-planter who struggles with fear. Paul counseled help for Timothy's stomach trouble, and he encouraged his young son in the faith that God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). Paul asks the Corinthians to make sure that Timothy could minister among them without fear (1 Cor. 16:10). We normally think of Paul as the fearless one, and Timothy as the fearful one.

But in that same epistle to the Corinthians, Paul described his early ministry in Corinth this way: "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). So the reason Paul could help Timothy with his fear so effectively was that Paul had to deal with that same fear himself.

Application: He mentions the fear of a disciple-maker at the beginning of our passage (v. 11). What is Paul especially afraid of? He is afraid that all his efforts to disciple the Galatians would be laboring in vain. He pleads with them to share the same fear with him (v. 12a) and to realize that he is no different from them in need of their encouraging labor and toil on his behalf (v. 12b).

In fact, Paul can remember a time when he received that kind of encouragement from these believers (v. 12c). On the occasion of his gospel ministry to the Galatians, Paul suffered from some kind of physical ailment that would have tempted the Galatians to be repulsed by his preaching of the gospel. Evidently, the sickness had something to do with his eyes (see 6:11's "large letters").

So what is so very scary to Paul the disciple-maker here is how quickly people change. At one point they trusted him as God's angel or messenger and as Jesus Christ (v. 14). There is a sense in which that level of appreciation for a disciple-maker in our lives is appropriate. Jesus said this about His disciple-makers, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20).

The Galatians once understood that. They so cared for Paul's well-being that they would have taken out their own eyes and given them to Paul, who evidently could have used them (v. 15). Now all that affection had disappeared. What happened? Had Paul changed? No, the Galatians had. How could they change so drastically?

This is the fear that Paul deals with in this passage, a fear of failure, a fear of being unappreciated, a fear of the inconsistency of people who are up and down when it comes to

following Christ faithfully. Do you live with that fear of anyone you are truly concerned about? If not, perhaps that is because you have not really tried to be a disciple-maker.

II. Disciple-making requires speaking a certain kind of message (v. 16).

Illustration: In the dark days of the 2008 financial crisis our nation faced, some members in Congress formed a bipartisan group called the CPA and Accountants Caucus. It was formed to focus on fiscal responsibility at the federal level. After four years the group disbanded due to lack of interest. Presidential candidates understand that dealing with our national debt is not a winning message.

Application: Paul understood that the message of the disciple-maker is very different from the message of the politician who seeks reelection. The Great Commission lays out that message this way:

1. All authority is given to Jesus Christ in heaven and in earth. He should rule your life, not you.
2. If you claim to know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you should be baptized.
3. Let's take some time to learn together the commands of Christ so that we can better obey Him, including the command to make others disciples now. Around here, we call that a *Foundations* study.

Somewhere along the way, the disciple-maker and the one disciplined are going to bump into a truth that the one disciplined has trouble welcoming into his heart. It is a truth that is going to completely change his life. It is going to cost him friends. It is going to require his sacrifice. It is not going to be fun. It is going to be hard. It is going to mean the need to confess and forsake sin.

As disciple-makers it is very important for us to speak these demanding and difficult truths in the right way. The word Paul uses translated *tell you the truth* is used one other time in our New Testaments: “But *speaking the truth* in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15; note the context of vv. 11-25). We need to speak truth in love, and we need to do it unto the edification of the body in love, the local church.

As those under the ministry of a disciple-maker, watch out for the fleshly tendency of the human heart to view with suspicion someone who tells you a truth you do not want to hear. Remember the right answer to Paul’s question, “Am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?”: “No, you are the kind of friend I really need.”

III. Disciple-making requires commitment to a certain kind of selflessness (vv. 17-20).

Illustrations: There are few more powerful demonstrations of selflessness than the work that a mother does in the birthing room. Some of us husbands have seen that work. The mother greatly suffers in love for her child, hoping to see him born healthy and well. I have never seen my wife so injured as she was the day Brandon was born. The joy I felt over the birth of our son was greatly tempered by the harm that I had to see my wife go through.

Application: Paul says that being a disciple-maker is like that. It takes that kind of selflessness. YouTube videos do not do that. Famous authors do not do that. Popular preachers on radio and TV do not do that. The evangelist with his traveling crusade bus does not do that.

Only local church disciple-makers do that. These other things can become the distraction from the truth that the

Galatians were experiencing from others who wanted a following in their day. But these were unwilling to travail in labor with the Galatian people in an ongoing way until Christ was formed in them.

Who are we selflessly serving this way until Christ is formed in them? You cannot be a disciple-maker and be selfish, and our passage gives us a barometer to test whether we are willing to be selfless in this way.

1. Do we seek a friendship with someone that includes them with Christ and His people or excludes them from Christ and His people? (v. 17). Watch out for the disciple-maker with whom the closer people get the further away they get from the local church ministry. These influences were friendly to the Galatians while excluding them from Paul, the true church, and ultimately from Christ (5:4).
2. Do we seek a friendship with someone that points them to Christ whether or not we are in the picture? (v. 18). For example, are we happy to see a new believer find a good church elsewhere? Paul was clear that disciple-making was not about being “of Paul” in a divisive way (1 Cor. 1:12). He was clear on this count: “Paul was not crucified for you” (v. 13). Christ was crucified for people. We make disciples who follow Him for His glory.
3. Do we seek a friendship with someone that is going to require an investment of time? (v. 20). Without that investment of time, we are little better than a YouTube video. Of all the indicators of selflessness, this is probably the clearest. How much time have we spent praying for that one, teaching that one God’s Word, getting to know that one, loving that one?

Conclusion: Paul finishes the paragraph by referring to what we must call the disciple-maker's doubt (v. 20b). Sometimes as we endeavor to make disciples and see people respond the way they do, we are going to have to scratch our heads with Paul and simply say, "I don't get it." That is the disciple-maker's doubt, and it is part of the nature of the work.

But if we are willing to commit ourselves to enduring that certain kind of fear, to speaking that certain kind of message, and to caring for one with that certain kind of selflessness, there is a promise for the disciple-maker that we never have to wonder about or doubt. Jesus said, "And Lo, I am with you always; even until the end of the age." We need to get that.

In his times of doubt in the work, Paul remembered that promise, I'm sure. The resurrected Christ was with him. That was enough for him to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as [he] knew [his] labor was not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Let's do the same for our Lord.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*