

Sound in the Faith

by Bob Pulliam

Lesson 1

The “Disciple”



Memory Verses: John 8:31; II Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

One of the most common terms (in scripture) used to describe a convert to Christ is “*disciple*”. It is used 272 times in the New Testament (KJV-some uses of John’s disciples). The word “disciple” literally meant, “*a learner*”¹. The disciple wasn’t just a student. The disciple took all that the master taught, and faithfully applied it to every aspect of his life. This is far different than the concept of the teacher-student relationship we think of today. The master controlled the life of the disciple, and it was shameful for the disciple to question his master (see Mt 16:22f; Jn 8:31). The disciple was expected to be active on behalf of what the teacher had taught. And so, the apostles (who were first of all disciples) were expected to “*bear much fruit*” (Jn 15:8).

Bearing fruit is usually understood to mean “converting others”; but that actually is not it’s only meaning. We are to sow the seed of the kingdom (Mt 13:18-23; Acts 8:1-4), which is the word of God (Lk 8:11). But everything we do to serve and glorify God is a bearing of fruit. In fact, even if the people we have taught never obey the truth, we have borne fruit by teaching them. Jesus taught that the teachings of false prophets were their fruit (Mt 7:16-20); and from this we may conclude that the teaching of the faithful would be good fruit. So, just by teaching others we bear fruit in the kingdom; whether they ever turn from error, or not. In other references, the righteousness of our lives is called a fruit yielded to God (Heb 12:11); and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22f).

It is important that we all work on talking to others about the gospel. The earliest disciples were concerned with telling others about Jesus (Jn 1:40-45). And as we read about the multitudes flocking to see Jesus, we

¹ W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1985) p171

should remember that there was no radio or television advertising to inform them. It all came about by word of mouth. Neighbor telling neighbor, and friend telling friend, was the means of gathering crowds. We will not convince everyone we tell. In fact, most of us will have some very disappointing failures in this respect. But we must keep telling others about the truth, and not allow our discouragement to crush our enthusiasm.

Question Set Number One

- 1) What does the word “disciple” mean?
- 2) What was it shameful for a disciple to do?
- 3) What were apostles (and disciples) expected to do?
- 4) If we never convert anyone, we have never borne fruit... T F
- 5) What were the earliest disciples concerned with doing?
- 6) By what means did the multitudes gather to hear Jesus?

So what can you do to teach others? If you’ve only just learned the truth, it might seem like there is little you could tell others; but that is not so. You know what you have learned, and you understand what you have obeyed. You have shown a love for the Lord’s kingdom, and are a citizen. What can you do?...

A) Invite other people to Bible studies and worship services...

Unfortunately, most people will politely decline. But don’t let that crush your enthusiasm. Countless people have been turned to the Lord by an invitation to services. The best prospects for winning souls to the Lord are the personal acquaintances of all the members. Leaving the work of telling others to the preacher alone might be likened to all the rowers on a ship leaving the rowing to the guy calling the rhythm.

Beware of the trap where one begins to trade out worshipping God for attending the denominations. It is easy to deceive yourself into believing that missing services, to attend theirs, is a *fair* trade. But when you do this, you are doing the following:

- 1) Discouraging the people at home by your absence.
- 2) Confusing your prospect by equating attendance at their services with attendance at home (after all, you did miss yours to go to theirs)
- 3) Encouraging the members of their church with your willingness to miss services to be with them.

If you wish to “trade out” services, select special events that their church holds, which do not conflict with your attendance at home. We all know that these “trades” seem helpful; but we must be careful that we not become carried away in *attending*, without ever doing any *teaching*.

B) Select scriptures and topics that you can ask others about...

People love to give their opinions, and so, this becomes a great way to bring up Bible topics for discussion. Just remember that their opinions won't always agree with the Bible. Use what might be “safe” topics to begin with (because you don't want to begin your conversations with people by making them think you're trying to “pick fights”). By “safe”, I mean topics that most people will agree on. And if you are doing so by asking them a question, here is an example from John 12:42 & 43:

(you): “I was reading in John last night where a lot of the religious rulers actually believed in Jesus, but they wouldn't confess Him because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Do you suppose those rulers were saved, even though they wouldn't confess Him?”
(possible reply): “I wouldn't think so. It seems to me that they would have to acknowledge Jesus by confessing Him. Otherwise, John wouldn't have said anything about their unwillingness to do so.” **(you):** “I think you're right. I just found it so interesting, because so many people teach that all you have to do is believe to be saved.” **(possible reply):** “Well, that's true; but I think if you truly believe, you're going to confess Jesus.” **(you):** “I sure can't argue with that. Believing that doesn't do anything isn't much of a faith, is it?”

If the conversation were to take this course (and no one could guarantee that it would), a few days later, you might strike up a conversation in the following manner:

(you): “You remember those rulers we talked about a few days ago?”
(reply): “Sure do.” **(you, pulling out paper with scripture written on it):** Well I've got a passage to go along with what we were thinking on the subject. James wrote, ‘But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not

by faith only.’ That’s in James 2:20-24.” **(possible reply #1):** “Well, that seems to tell the story pretty good.” **(you):** “Yeah, but that just makes me wonder even more about teaching that we are saved by faith only.” **(possible reply #2):** “That seems to go along with what we were talking about; but I don’t think James is really talking about being saved in that passage.” **(you):** “I figured he was, since he said we are ‘justified’ by works, and not faith only. Isn’t the doctrine of justification about being saved?”

You never know which direction a conversation like this might go, and these are just illustrations. If you are unsure of what to say, simply say, “That’s a good thought, I’ll have to do some study on that.”

C) Begin a weekly Bible study in your home...

Invite your friends, co-workers, neighbors, and relatives. Invite other members of the church to come, as well. If you’re not ready to lead the study, ask the preacher, or one of the elders to do so. When those conversations, referred to above, seem to be prompting enough interest in Bible study, invite those people.

D) Encourage acquaintances to listen to radio programs, and give them copies of the bulletin...

This is not a substitute for specific efforts to talk about the truth with them, but it does help to familiarize them with the work that the church is doing. In the long run, this effort can bring surprising results. I don’t encourage handing out tracts of specific points of disagreement, at first.

Always remember to be patient and kind with people. Never get into a heated argument. The hard, or hurt, feelings produced will destroy your ability to get the truth across as it should be conveyed. It’s alright to disagree (and sometimes necessary), but you’ve lost the “battle” if you’ve raised your voice, or spoken unkindly toward them. Never say things like, “That’s so easy a fool could see it.” Even if it’s true, you have no business calling someone a fool; and that is exactly what you’ve done if you imply as much. These kinds of remarks are nothing more than an effort to belittle the person you’re trying to win to Christ.

Every effort you make to win others to Christ is out of sincere love for them. Some teach others so that they can exercise their “superior knowledge” in scripture, wanting to show others to be inferior. They need to stop teaching and work on their attitudes until they can go to the work for the right reason. Others teach simply to be seen by others. They also

need to stop and correct their attitudes before handling the souls of others. And then there are those who teach others out of a genuine concern for their souls. This is the reason you should have as you work to teach others: a love for their souls.

Question Set Number Two

- 1) What other efforts can you think of to teach others?

- 2) Give three reasons not to miss services to go to someone else's church:
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

- 3) Why should we avoid heated arguments in teaching others?

- 4) What reason should we have for teaching others?

Before you can become truly effective at teaching others, you must become knowledgeable in the word of God. Unfortunately, most people today don't really see the need for this. People have convinced themselves that having a good knowledge of the Bible is for preachers, pastors, ministers, or priests (depending on the denomination they are in). But there are five very important reasons to be personally knowledgeable in the scriptures. The first is that "faith comes by hearing" the word of God (Rom 10:17). People talk about wishing they had faith, when all the while the tool for building it is setting on the coffee table in their living room, gathering dust. Studying the word of God is for your health in the kingdom. The second reason is that you should never trust anyone else to be completely accurate with the truth. I think we all would agree that everyone makes mistakes. And when it comes to God's word, there are a lot of errors and misconceptions floating around. This doesn't mean you shouldn't digest what is presented by others (*e.g.* these lessons); but you must always be willing to "prove all things" by the word of God (I Th 5:21; Rom 12:2). Don't be cynical, but do allow the word of God to be

the final word on any matter. The third reason is that you will never be as effective a teacher as is possible without a careful study of the word of God. The truth must be within us, before we can give it to others (II Tim 2:2). And there is a point at which each of us ought to be teachers of God's word (Heb 5:12). The fourth reason is that we need to know the word because it is the law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2). We cannot obey the perfect law of liberty (Jms 1:25) if we do not know what is in that law. The fifth reason is that a thorough knowledge of God's word enriches our love for God. We obey God because we love Him (Jn 14:15). The more we love God, the more fervently we will serve Him. And this truly is the prime motivation for our service to God (Mt 22:37-40).

Bible study should become an important part of your life, if it isn't already. Even under the Old Testament law, the Israelites were commanded to make the scriptures a daily part of their lives (Dt 6:6-9). And under the law of Christ, the word of God should be held dearly. Peter told his readers to long for the word, like a newborn babe longs for milk (I Pt 2:2). We must be diligent to study the word (II Tim 2:15). In this way we know God's will, that we may do it, and thus present ourselves approved unto Him. And only by this study can we rightly divide (or understand) the word. If Paul commanded Timothy to study that he might rightly divide the word, then it is obvious that the word can be wrongly divided. We must be careful to understand God's word the way He gave it, rather than the way we want to take it.

Question Set Number Three

- 1) What must you do before you can become truly effective at teaching?
- 2) Who do most people think Bible knowledge is for?
- 3) List five very important reasons to have a personal knowledge of the scriptures...
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)
- 4) Christians are to long for the word like _____
- 5) What must we do that we might rightly divide the word?

It is quite common for people to conclude that being baptized is the beginning and the end of their effort to get to heaven. One preacher coined it as their believing they have a “ticket fer heaven”. But the scriptures abound with warnings to be faithful, and to beware of falling away:

A person may fall from grace (Gal 5:4).

We also may “drift away” (Heb 2:1).

We can fall short of entering His rest (Heb 4:1).

We can depart from the living God (Heb 3:12).

All men reap what they sow (Gal 6:7-9).

Paul was careful to avoid being disqualified (I Cor 9:26f).

Those who think they stand must beware of falling (I Cor 10:12).

And many more....

The truth of the matter is, we can fall away after we have been saved. Some honestly believe that salvation cannot be forfeited once it has been given by God. They will use passages like John 10:29, which says of the disciple that “*no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.*” But this passage is not about a person falling away from God. Jesus is using the illustration of sheep in a fold, and them being taken away by a thief. The thought of a sheep wandering off is not in this text. Jesus did refer to that in the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:4f). And after offering another parable, adds to these the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). The prodigal wandered off, and was away from the care and blessings of his father by his own choice. To receive his father’s care and blessings, he had to return to his father (repent), and act like a son once again (obey).

A very good picture of our situation when we stop serving God is given by the apostle Peter:

“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

(II Pt 2:20-22)

Notice, first of all, that these people have *escaped* the pollutions of the world. Some would say that they were never actually saved. Think for a

moment about people who are lost, **but** have escaped. This text is meaningless without understanding Peter to mean that they were saved. After all, it was “*through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*”. How can the latter end be worse than the beginning. If they were never actually saved, then their present situation would be no different than their original situation. So they were saved, and then fell away. Having known the truth, their sin now places them in a far worse circumstance than their original condition (before they were saved). How do we look, to God, when we return to the sin we once repented of?... We are as a dog returning to his vomit, or a sow returning to the mire after being washed.

Jesus told the saints at Smyrna to “*be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev 2:10). We must abide in the word of the Lord, or we are not truly disciples (Jn 8:31). You have begun the life of a disciple, in the service of Jesus. Always remember who your Master is, and give Him the loyal service He so richly deserves.

Question Set Number Four

- 1) What can a Christian fall from?
- 2) What can we fall short from entering?
- 3) Those who think they stand should beware of what?
- 4) Jesus said that no one could **snatch** the saved from where?
- 5) Does that mean we can never **wander** away?
- 6) Those who fall away must do what to return to the Father?
- 7) What would it have been better for some to not know?
 - a) Rather than have done what?
 - b) Illustrated by a dog doing what?
 - c) And a pig doing what?
- 8) How long were the saints at Smyrna told to be faithful?
- 9) What would Jesus give to those who were faithful?
- 10) Jesus said that, to truly be a disciple, one must do what?