



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 TIMOTHY 3

JULY 2017

Competent Disciples

“ . . . that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:17

All Christians are aware that we are called to be disciples of Jesus. Many of us don't know what that means. We have gotten lost in trying to plant and grow local churches, seeking to influence our culture, and holding civil leaders accountable to their callings. We have tried to apply the industrial revolution's assembly line approach to our own demise. We have often settled to have church attenders who think more like the secular culture than Bible-based believers.

Here is a working definition for a disciple: *One who hears and obeys the Shepherd as he or she lives for his glory.*

The key dynamic is hearing the word of the Lord and living accordingly. Though the whole New Testament is about being a disciple of Jesus, maybe the clearest text on the subject is found in Paul's letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:10–17). There are several vital insights in this text that we will explore.

It is obvious discipleship best happens in a trusting relationship. A model is very valuable. We tend to copy what we see more than we apply what we are told. Paul had willingly and intentionally been a model for Timothy. *“You . . . have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life . . . my persecutions . . .”* (vs. 10–11).

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Timothy had watched Paul in good times and bad. He had seen the miracles—as well as the rejection—that accompanied Paul's ministry. It wasn't all pristine living. Paul had laughed, cried, prayed, been thrown in jail, hungry, cold, and depressed. He was not afraid to let his disciple see him in the journey of life. Sadly, we have created an impossible standard for our shepherds. They can't admit failure or even struggles, so they hide and pretend. This has contributed to the rise of the "celebrity shepherd." Resorting to building corporations rather than leading sheep, these leaders have learned how to delegate in such a way as to be isolated from the sheep (except for the staff whose position and often job depends on the pleasure of the leader). This easily leads to deception and elitism. Shepherds lead the sheep. They don't just point to green pastures and clear water. They go there.

Trusting the one who leads and feeds is important. When the people don't know enough about the life of their leader, they are left to determine on their own what food is nourishing and

what is poison. But when they know and trust the shepherd, they can more easily embrace the teaching and the lifestyle. Shepherds could be wolves in sheep's clothing for years in many churches because the people have little access to know and watch the leader live out his or her faith. *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it . . .*" (vs. 14).

It is the shepherd's role to assist the sheep in hearing the word of God through the scriptures.

The central element in following Jesus is hearing his word. God has made it very clear that his word is central. He created the universe with his word. He sustains it with his word. When he sent his Son to earth, it was as his Word. What he says determines everything. Without hearing his word, we have no chance to succeed in the world he created. Therefore, we must make every effort to hear clearly his word.

Paul emphasizes that the reading and interpreting of scriptures are essential. “. . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (vs. 15).

A true disciple of Jesus has already been **born of imperishable seed of God's word.**

It is through the scriptures that we are introduced to the Jesus who fulfills all promises from God the Father. The Bible is not just for the purpose of knowing an account of history, but for leading us to personal faith in the resurrected and living Lord. Paul as a leader was important in Timothy's growth, but Paul could be jailed (2:9). The word of God can't. Paul could die. The word of God can't. It is the shepherd's role to assist the sheep in hearing the word of God through the scriptures. Then, the disciple can discern the sound of the Spirit as well as evaluate the input of the faith community. Without a proper

understanding of the scriptures, the voice of the true shepherd sounds very fuzzy. Note the instruction to Timothy in how he should handle the scriptures: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2:15). We cannot afford to treat the interpretation and application of the scriptures lightly. If the disciples are not being attached to the scriptures, they will cling to the leaders and become false disciples. If they can read and interpret the scriptures as God's word for themselves, they will resist being manipulated.

A true disciple of Jesus has already been born of imperishable seed of God's word. His inner being cries for the sound of that word because it builds faith and hope. It delivers from deception and defeat. It equips for the task of being a faithful witness of the resurrection life of Christ. It makes one competent for every task assigned. The fire of life that burns deep inside can be fanned into hot flame (1:6). The shepherd can help with that. Those fears that paralyze us

can be identified and eliminated by the light of truth in Jesus Christ who has given us the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind (1:7). The same Spirit of God who inspired the writing and preservation of the scriptures lives inside the believer to make the story come alive, but it is our privilege to use the tools of interpretation (the same tools we use for all literature) to ascertain what the writings meant to their original audiences. Hermeneutics is a skill we learn, while illumination is a gift of the Spirit. Only the Spirit can make Jesus real to us in the scriptures, and we must rely on him to do so. But we must not ignore the basic tools of interpretation while lazily expecting the Spirit to do what we can do. Some have reduced the scriptures to a sort of magic book rather than a written witness of God's word and work through history culminating in the revelation of Jesus as the last Adam living in a new creation.

Equipped disciples are new creatures colonizing the old creation with the message of God's already launched kingdom. Captured by the gracious call

of God and committed to the spread of the good news to all the world, disciples are not just trying to be good to merit God's love. They are not waiting for rescue from the wicked earth. They are not just hoping for a good spot in heaven. They are aggressively subduing the ground on which they walk. Jesus is supreme. Prayer is vital. Joy is inevitable. They have abandoned the metrics of this world system. Like Paul, they have counted race, status, goodness, and achievements as manure in comparison to knowing Christ and his life. They are competent for every good work.



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