

• Theological and Practical Reasons for Following the New Testament Way of Life and Disciple Making •

I see a few levels or degrees of authority for things we believe and do. Here they are from highest to lowest.

New Testament mandate – This is something God commands us to do, such as “love your neighbor” or “don’t forsake meeting together”.

New Testament example – The Bible describes what people said and did. If people who were following God in the New Testament did something, we should take it as something for us to do, unless there is good reason not to. *When would we not follow that example?*

1. When it is no longer possible.

Revelation 2.6 – Jesus commended the church for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans. Today, nobody seems to know for sure what those practices were.

2. When that specific example of behavior is addressed in other scripture and is called a “matter of opinion” or is something that does not apply for Christians.

Sabbath observance is pointed out as a matter of opinion or preference. See Romans 14.5 and Galatians 4.10.

Peter and John go to the Temple at “the hour of prayer” at 3pm.

Galatians 4.10 talks about not observing days, months, seasons and years. Therefore, the NT directs us not to view certain times as sacred times while other times or dates are non-sacred.

Were Peter and John wrong to go pray at 3pm? No, but that specific example of their behavior is not required for all Christians according to Galatians 4.10.

3. When that behavior was sin or wrong according to Scripture.

Peter stopped eating with Gentiles and ate only with Jews (see Galatians). Paul confronted him about it because it was wrong. In Christ “there is no Jew or Gentile”.

Jesus said to go into all the world and make disciples.

The very first Christians stayed in Jerusalem, except those at Pentecost who went on home.

In Acts 8, persecution forced the believers to scatter, which is what they should have done in the first place.

4. When the example is about a very specific historical-cultural situation that does not apply “here and now”.

Paul tells the Corinthians (1Corinthians 7.26) that “in view of the present circumstances, it is better for a man not to marry”. That direction was provided in relation to those specific circumstances.

Elsewhere Paul says clearly that it is not wrong for a man to marry, but that married folks will face issues that single people don’t (1Co 7.28). He even says he wishes that all people were like him (single, no marital concerns), but it is fine to marry (1Co 7.7).

5. Wouldn’t any other reason for not following the NT example be driven by our own thinking, tradition, etc? If so, would we not be placing our thinking above the example of the NT? That sounds like the wrong choice, if the NT is indeed our rule of faith and practice... practice.... practice.

New Testament principle – There are principles in the NT that we must apply in our own lives. It may be difficult or impossible to find a specific example of behavior in the New Testament that is tied to that principle.

- “The fruit of the spirit is... self-control”
 - So, having 2 pieces of pie IS or IS NOT self-control?
 - How many cartoons can I watch on Saturday morning before I’m over indulging?
 - Are there NT examples of self-control that we can draw from?
 - Is it possible that the Holy Spirit will lead me differently than you?
 - Is it possible that God will work out the details with each of us, and we should leave those details between God and the individual?
- “show hospitality to one another”
 - Must we let a stranger sleep in our house?
 - Do we owe each visitor a meal?
 - What did “hospitality” mean in the NT world? How do we apply that today?
 - Are there NT examples of hospitality that we can draw from?

Old Testament mandate	...	must be viewed in light of the New Testament
Old Testament example	“	“
Old Testament principle	“	“

Our own research, thinking, tradition, etc. - if it contradicts the letter or the spirit of the New Testament, the New Testament must prevail. Otherwise, you are no longer seeking to follow Jesus as revealed in Scripture. Instead, you are creating your own religion.

The following theses are a work in progress. They are an attempt to plainly state key concepts related to living as followers of Jesus.

Working Theses:

1. The New Testament disciples (i.e. followers of Jesus as presented in the NT books) provide **principles** and a **prescriptive example** of how we should live for all time.
2. Any decision **to omit** something from the NT example must be based only on compelling reasons, not on tradition or convenience.
3. Any decision to **add to** the NT example must be based only on compelling reasons, not on tradition or convenience.
4. The way of life and disciple-making seen in the NT is **relational and interactive**, not event-driven and hierarchical.
5. The disciples we see in the NT were **missional**; they understood the mission of Jesus and of his Body. That mission was and is the ministry of reconciliation; it is making disciples (followers) of Jesus.
6. The **clergy and laity** distinction we are familiar with is unfamiliar to the New Testament. The NT does not show a “clergy class” or “priestly class” of highly gifted, professional ministers who do all the ministry to the “not so gifted” laity.
7. **Elders** provide spiritual direction for groups of disciples much like a father in a family. **Deacons** help with the physical aspects of serving the needy (like distribution of food to widows).
8. **Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers** are gifts given to equip or train disciples for works of service/ministry. These terms indicate ways in which people are gifted to serve.
9. The **doctrine** and mission of the NT disciples were closely linked. In the Book of Acts they devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine. The believers were continuing to stay on mission. In Paul’s letters, he often reminds the believers to lay aside distracting myths, matters of opinion, etc. and stay mindful of the gospel they had received.
10. **Disciples** or **followers** are what the NT believers made. This was normal, to connect believing with how you lived. All who followed Jesus were the true disciples, living letters, with the Word of God being seen in how they lived. They did not debate religion; they lived the truth of Christ living in us and through us.
11. The Apostle Paul took the gospel to different cultures and demonstrated that the true gospel can be spoken to and lived within **various cultures**. He “became all things to all men” or was willing to draw a line between gospel and culture, and not let culture get in the way of the gospel.
12. There is **no Scriptural precedent** for the church:
 - a. Being a government agency, being owned by government or funded by government
 - b. Owning property
 - c. Having special buildings for conducting church activities
 - d. Paying professional ministers to do all the ministry to people
 - e. Viewing a big meeting once a week with group singing and a sermon as the core of believers’ spiritual life
 - f. Spending contributions on anything other than supporting “those who preach the gospel” and redistributing to/helping the poor

13. There **is Scriptural precedent** for the church:
 - a. Being called: the family of God, the Body of Christ, followers, disciples, The Way, soldiers, living letters, The Bride of Christ, saints
 - b. Interacting with one another
 - c. Each bringing something to share (a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation) when they gathered
 - d. Meeting/gathering in houses (this appears to be the most common place to gather)
 - e. Meeting/gathering at times in other places: the Hall of Tyrannus, Temple Courts
 - f. Eating a meal together with the bread and wine (communion) as part of it.
 - g. Preserving unity
 - h. Sharing their stuff – and money - with one another as someone had need
 - i. Jesus and Paul receiving contributions to support them as they preached the gospel
 - j. Contributions being used to help the poor (such as Jerusalem believers)
14. The NT disciples exhibited the **life of God** within His people, not just an outward form. We, too, must guard against becoming modern day Pharisees who love our forms (any form, even “house church”) more than the living Jesus among his people.
15. **Signs, wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit** were normal for the NT followers of Jesus. There is no indication that these were supposed to wane or die out.
16. If we think, believe and do as the NT disciples did, our actions and words should evoke the **same responses** from the world around us. In the NT, disciples’ lives provoked both wonder and persecution. Does yours? Does mine?
17. Never make money a prerequisite for ministry. Be willing to **earn your living** in business forever.

Why house gatherings? There are two groups of reasons. We’ll call them “theological” and “practical” for lack of better terms. Theological reasons are reasons that fit **the New Testament pattern** of making disciples and please God based on what I see in the Bible. Practical reasons are reasons that show how the NT way of disciple making is **effective** at accomplishing the mission and goals God has established for the Body of Christ.

THEOLOGICAL REASONS:

These are reasons I believe THE NT WAY OF DISCIPLE MAKING is **the New Testament pattern** and pleases God based on what I see in the Bible.

- **Meeting In A House**

Clearest scriptures indicating this was an intentional practice:

Acts 5:42

42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 20:20

20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

Rom 16:5

5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

1 Cor 16:19

19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

Col 4:15

15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

- **Meeting In Other Places**

meeting with the general public, the interested, and the curious

Acts 17:17 – 17 So he (Paul) was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, **and in the market place** every day with those who happened to be present.

meeting with disciples in the lecture hall for discussions; same principles, just in a different place (not a house)

Acts 19:9-10 – 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily **in the lecture hall of Tyrannus**. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

temple courts were a common meeting place outside of the temple itself

Acts 5:42 – 42 Day after day, **in the temple courts** and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

clearly there were times Paul met “publicly”

Acts 20:20 – 20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you **publicly** and from house to house

The disciples met in homes from day 1. Persecution didn't drive them into homes. Persecution stopped their larger, public meetings.

“Publicly” may well have been when Paul was in town, or leaving town and he wanted to address elders from all around a particular area an once, as in Acts 20. In other words, the Acts 20.20 quote may be from one of those “public” meetings.

- **Exercising gifts as seen in Scripture doesn't happen – or very, very rarely happens - in a big group.**

1 Cor 14:26

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

Eph 5:15-20

15 Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **Eating Together**

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:46

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

2 Peter 2:13

13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.

1 Cor 11:20-22, 33-34

20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. 34 If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Paraphrased: "When you come together for the meal, don't just scarf. If you must scarf, scarf at home. The fellowship meal is more about fellowship than the food. The food is a part of it; a vehicle for it."

PRACTICAL REASONS:

These are reasons that show how THE NT WAY OF DISCIPLE MAKING is **effective** at accomplishing the mission and goals God has established for the Body of Christ, for us.

How do you do the following things by attending a church service once a week? How can you do them without sharing your life with others, including small gatherings where you can talk, pray and see that people truly care for each other?

- **Training is normal for Christians:**

1 Tim 5:1-2

5:1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

Titus 2:1-8

2:1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. 2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

6 Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

1 Peter 5:1-7

5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

- **Unity of purpose overcomes petty differences:**

Matt 28:19-20

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

John 17:22-23

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

These scriptures make plain that Jesus wants us to make disciples – that is THE purpose for the Disciples of Jesus (the Body of Christ) for all time. Further, God's glory among us enables us to be one. Our unity (of heart, of purpose, of action) will tell the world clearly that Jesus was sent by God and loves the people around us.

- **The "One Another" Scriptures**

John 13:34

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35

35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Rom 13:8

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

1 Peter 1:22

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 John 3:11

11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

1 John 3:23

23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

1 John 4:7

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:11

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:12

12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

2 John 5

5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.

Rom 12:10

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Rom 12:16

16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

1 Peter 3:8

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Rom 14:13

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Rom 15:7

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

2 Cor 13:12

12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1 Peter 5:14

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Gal 5:13

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Eph 4:2

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Col 3:13

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Eph 4:32

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1 Peter 5:5

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."

Eph 5:19

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

Heb 10:24

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Col 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

1 Thess 5:11

11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Heb 3:13

13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

James 4:11

11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

1 Peter 4:9

9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 John 1:7

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

"One anothers" don't just happen in a gathering, but as we live life together.

- **Spectator Christians**

Unless people get involved, active and engaged they will just watch. Just watching other people "do ministry" is not how you make disciples! Jesus never told his disciples to just watch him. They did watch him, but then he sent them out to go do what he had been doing. 1 Corinthians 14.26 cannot happen if everyone is just a spectator. It's hard to follow when you are sitting down.

All my Christian life I've found people who feel like God has more for them to do, to experience as a follower of Jesus. However, they don't see how to get involved with the church service

because A) they don't sing, don't preach, don't usher & will not do children's ministry or B) those slots are all filled up. So, they sit. Then they get bored. Then, they get critical, cranky and restless. NOT so with the NT way of disciple making! There is all the opportunity for involvement you could imagine.

What if you start to feel hungry for more than the group you meet with each week? It may be time to start another group on Thursday night! Who do you work with that may be close to coming to faith? Pray for them; have the disciples you gather with pray for that person. Look for opportunities to talk with them. Once they come to faith (or even before), you ask if they have other friends who would want to discuss spiritual things. Then, you go to his/her house with a friend of yours (two by two, remember) and you just got involved in expanding the Kingdom of God! There is no way to do that and be bored!

There is absolutely no NT precedent for much of what people do in the name of "the gospel" and "church" today. If the NT is truly our "final rule of faith and practice" – if the New Testament is the final authority for what we think, believe and do as disciples of Jesus...

... why would we not do something the early disciples did unless we had a good reason?
... why would we add something to what they did unless we had a good reason?

So much of the Church throughout the world is distracted, bored, bloated and don't really know why. Is it possible we have not stayed on the mission Jesus himself gave us? And is it possible that we have become so inbred and inward looking that we have forgotten the harvest is white and needs laborers to bring it in? Is it also possible that we no longer travel lightly through this world of temporary things? Lastly, have we forgotten the reality of the final judgment, of heaven and of hell?

We can live the same reality, the same gospel, with the same effects that we see in the Book of Acts. We can live in everything Jesus and the NT writers speak of. It will never happen if we cling to tradition over scripture. It will happen when we learn to simply follow Jesus, his words, his spirit, his way... no holding back.

Let's go.

- Steve Queen