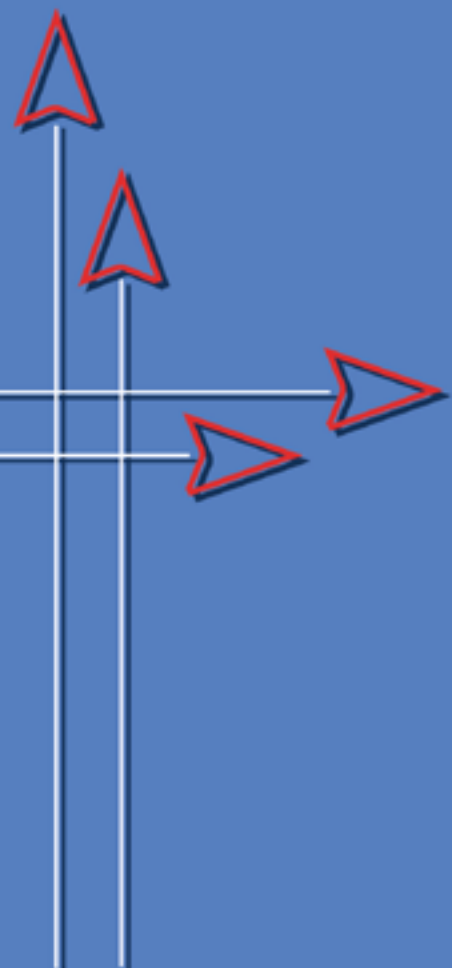


P R I M E R

# THE DISCIPLESHIP GOSPEL

WHAT JESUS PREACHED—  
WE MUST FOLLOW



**Bill Hull & Ben Sobels**

A Discipleship.org Resource

# **THE DISCIPLESHIP GOSPEL**

**What Jesus Preached— We Must Follow**

**PRIMER**

**Bill Hull and Ben Sobels**

*The Discipleship Gospel*

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## Introduction

# THE IMPORTANCE OF A DISCIPLESHIP THEOLOGY

“As egg-headed as it may sound, our basic problem is our theology. The problem is our doctrine of salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

—Dallas Willard

Why must we define the gospel today? Let’s start with a common scene that takes place in the counseling chambers of hundreds of pastors every day. Someone comes to the leader’s office and says, “I’m divorcing my mate”:

“I’ve fallen in love with someone else, and I’m no longer happy. I need to do this.”

The pastor protests, “You can’t do that—it’s wrong! You don’t have a good, biblical reason to divorce. If you follow through, you’re committing adultery, and whomever you marry again will become an adulterer, as well.”

The person looks at the pastor, almost whimsically, and says, “Of course I can. You’ve been teaching me for years that God will forgive all my sins—that was handled on the cross. All my sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven. I’m going to heaven when I die, anyway, so

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no one can snatch me out of the Father's hand. I am secure in Christ because it's all about grace."

At this juncture, it's "game, set, match" for many church leaders. We don't have much to say because the person is merely repeating to us what we have taught them. Of course, they are misconstruing our teaching, but the damage is already done. You could try to protest and say, "No, God won't forgive you! At least anytime soon, unless you repent of your sin, which includes turning away from this new relationship."

Or you could give a convincing presentation about, "reaping what you sow," or about how God's discipline will bear upon them one day, and they will have a long, hard life if they continue on this path. Chances are, though, they will ignore your advice, divorce their spouse, and marry this new person. In a few years, they'll be serving, teaching, and leading people at another congregation like nothing happened.

You know what happens next, don't you? They will ask God to forgive them for the wrong they've done, glorying in the fact that, "God worked all things together for the good." They will rejoice in how much happier everyone is—both them and their ex-spouse—and how the children are "just fine."

In my many years of pastoral experience, the scenario is all too common.

This kind of rationalization is possible, though, because the primary gospel preached in America, by default, is the forgiveness-only gospel, which is almost exclusively focused on sin and atonement.<sup>2</sup> The "forgiveness-only gospel" is the idea of saying a magic prayer that gets you into Heaven one day. It's sort of a transaction between you and God, where you get a salvation ticket. Behavior in this "gospel" is



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in no way connected to this initial transaction. As long as your theological barcode is correct, *beep*—you’re allowed through.

This kind of teaching leads people to think they believe the gospel because that’s what they’re taught. It’s an innocent error, though, because *emphasizing forgiveness is part of the full gospel*. The problem is that they don’t really believe Christ; they only profess faith in Christ. It is a grave error to equate profession of faith to belief. That’s why it’s important to set the record straight, rebuild our gospel, and crack the code of the gospel that Jesus preached—what we’re calling the “discipleship gospel.”

We wrote this book as a primer for a full-length book, *The Discipleship Gospel*.<sup>3</sup> In this primer, our purpose is twofold. First, we introduce the problem with preaching non-discipleship gospels that don’t call people to be disciples. As such, these false gospels don’t lead people to make disciples. Second, we show that the New Testament Gospel writers made very clear to their audience seven essential elements of the gospel Jesus preached. Jesus’ gospel led his disciples to make disciples. As you read this primer, keep in mind that the seven elements do not comprise a definition of the gospel. They do, though, provide the critical framework for defining the gospel, which we explore in the full-length book. Read this primer to grow in your understanding of the gospel Jesus preached. We must be sure to preach Jesus’ gospel, which is a gospel of discipleship, because the longer we preach non-discipleship gospels, the more we delay the fulfillment of Christ’s great commission.

## Chapter 1

# **THE DISCIPLESHIP GOSPEL (A.K.A. THE KINGDOM GOSPEL)**

New Testament scholars agree that Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God more than anything else during his earthly ministry—more than one hundred times.<sup>1</sup> To explain its mysteries, he used many parables and metaphors. But to say that people today are a bit fuzzy on the meaning of “the gospel of the kingdom” is an understatement. Confusion abounds, so let’s simplify the meaning here by addressing what Jesus was asking people to do—namely, follow him as a disciple.

The way to get a handle on the kingdom and its vast claim was by repenting of sins, believing in Jesus as the messiah, and following him as their rabbi.<sup>2</sup> People today, too, need to repent of their sins, believe the good news about Jesus as Savior, and follow him as teacher and Lord. To join his kingdom, we must become disciples or “apprentices” of Jesus, people who actually do what Jesus did. That is why we are calling the gospel of the kingdom the “discipleship gospel.” “Discipleship”—or following Jesus—is an essential part of the good news he preached.

The good news of the kingdom is that eternal life begins now—the moment you repent, believe the good news of Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, and start following him.<sup>3</sup> Those elements go together.

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God never intended them to be separated out (as if that were possible). The kingdom is holistic: you enter a new realm where “all things are become new.”<sup>4</sup> When you start following Jesus, you prove that you believe what he says. This is quite different from what is commonly taught as the gospel—that if you believe the right religious facts, you’re saved, and following Jesus is just an option. What we must teach, however, is that Jesus started with the call to follow him; his disciples, then, started believing in him and grew spiritually in stages. We defy any experienced follower of Jesus who says that growing through a gradual process is not an accurate description of their life in Christ. Life in Christ doesn’t begin with instant maturity and immediate understanding.

Our deepest human desires are revealed by our daily life and habits. The Anglican preacher and evangelist John Wesley had it right when he started out his disciples with behavior that led them to later deepen their belief. Although the original five disciples gathered around Jesus in faith, his disciples grew in their faith after he turned water into wine: “This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”<sup>5</sup> As they followed the one who had called them, the disciples’ belief progressed from their initial belief. Simply put, we are believers first, and we form our beliefs through the practices, traditions, and habits of our lives.

Don’t misunderstand us, though. On a certain level, believing produces behavior. It must be that way; otherwise, each of us would draw the line of conversion in different places. Only God knows what true belief is—that’s why we’re not the judges. One thing is clear, as we say and explore throughout this book: Following Jesus is an actual, existential behavior that demonstrates the reality of one’s faith in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

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At the heart of the gospel of the kingdom is the simple question, “Are you doing the will of God?” This comes from Jesus’ message about the vital role of obedience for one’s entry into God’s kingdom: “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.”<sup>7</sup>

This passage reveals to us that living in the kingdom is the same as being a disciple of Christ, someone who does the will of God. When you decide to follow Christ, you enter a new realm, where his will is done. Recall the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”<sup>8</sup> This passage, too, shows us that following Jesus is vital to entering into the kingdom of God. So, even in The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples that heaven is where God’s will is done, and wherever his will is done on earth, the kingdom exists.

The same is true for us today. We must obey God; otherwise, we don’t really understand the gospel Jesus preached. That is why the word “discipleship” is crucial—because we are following a living Christ. We appreciate the sobering words of German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”<sup>9</sup> A faith that’s not lived out through action is not faith; it’s a life without Christ. Plain and simple, if you want the living Christ, then you must follow him. That is discipleship, and that’s why we call it the “discipleship gospel.”

## Chapter 2

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO FOLLOWING JESUS?**

**M**ost of Jesus' apostles were in their late teens and early twenties. They were products of orthodox Jewish homes and local synagogues, where they had learned the Scriptures. They were conversant with the great messianic passages from the prophets. What they knew of the kingdom came from what Jesus taught and showed them.<sup>1</sup> To them, he was the king, the promised messiah. Right from the beginning, their actions aligned with what he advocated.

In fact, the Gospel of Mark includes the call to follow Jesus in Jesus' earliest preaching in Galilee: "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"<sup>2</sup> Then they took the most logical action possible: they followed him and became his disciples.

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and followed him.<sup>3</sup>

The disciples' response to Jesus' call was connected to his preaching of the kingdom. They heard his message, followed him, and became his disciples.

## Connecting Faith and Action

It's impossible to separate belief from action. They are the same thing. When the disciples followed Jesus, they existentially made themselves his disciples. They entered into a new realm, and that's when eternal life began for them. God's will was being done in their lives on earth as it already was in heaven. He began to teach them how the first thing in life was always to seek first the kingdom of God:

Don't worry about these things, saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.<sup>4</sup>

For Jesus, and his disciples as they grew in their faith, the kingdom of God was central to eternal life. That's why it was part of the good news he preached.

Through his many parables, Jesus worked out the implications of the kingdom into every facet of life. Yet the full reality of the kingdom was still somewhat of a mystery, even after Jesus' resurrection. That's what Luke's words in Acts 1:6-7 reveal to us: "[The apostles] kept asking him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?' He replied, 'The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.'"

Many a disciple has wanted the kingdom in all its fullness right now. Even Jesus was in the same position as his followers because he didn't know when the kingdom would be restored. Yet he wanted the fullness of the kingdom in the present with his disciples. It's why he cried out over the city of Jerusalem.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen

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protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. And now, look, your house is abandoned. And you will never see me again until you say, "Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>5</sup>

Despite Jesus' cries, his Hebraic world said, "no" to the kingdom, and God responded, "Okay, no kingdom for you now, not yet—but I will be back!" (The church—made up of Jews and Gentiles who have become one in Christ—experiences the blessings of the kingdom, which Christ inaugurated during his first coming.) The apostles themselves were a bit confused about this whole thing and, as we saw in Acts 1 above, asked Jesus for a definitive answer at the very last moment before he ascended.

### **Where Is the Kingdom of God?**

The main thing to remember about kingdom talk is that we don't know very much about the kingdom. The restoration of the kingdom here obviously had something to do with military and political power. The apostles said this even though none of them could remember a time when Israel was free from the Roman yoke.

Jesus not only led people into the kingdom, but he showed it to them as he explained to the general populace and demonstrated it daily in his teachings and works. When Jesus arrived at his hometown of Nazareth, he went to the synagogue and made his announcement in a straightforward and startling way:

He stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has



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come.” He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!<sup>6</sup>

It seemed as though Jesus’ fellow Nazarenes appreciated his words. In fact, they were amazed that a young man from such humble origins could be so bright, so professional. Jesus, however, was a contrarian by nature, so many rabbis would have taken in the accolades and moved on, but not Jesus. He knew them well—he knew their pride and their prejudice. So he presses into their unspoken criticism: “You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself’—meaning, ‘Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.’ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this statement alone wasn’t what got under the skin of the city fathers; it was his historical reference about prejudice that sparked their ire:

Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian.<sup>8</sup>

This scripture implies that the citizens of Nazareth will not see the miracles done in their village because they will not honor its native son as the anointed one, the messiah. They will only get a small bit of the good that could have been theirs through humility and faith. Jesus was saying to them, “God will send me, the Son of God, to other places, where minds are open and hearts prepared.” Jesus’ accusation angered them:



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When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.<sup>9</sup>

The kingdom of God is where God's will is done. Jesus told the disciples that God would send him to other places, even to—and maybe especially to—Gentile regions. He would, as Elijah and Elisha did, bless the unwashed and despised Syrians because they were more open to God than the Jews.<sup>10</sup> God's will could not be done in Nazareth; it could, however, be done in other places—more unlikely places. Those unlikely places were the land of the unwashed, the half-breeds, and outcasts.

## Chapter 3

### **DISCIPLESHIP ISN'T OPTIONAL**

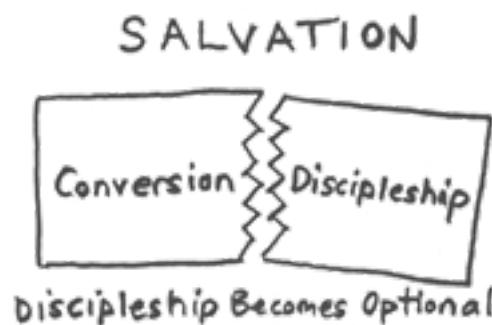
**T**he contemporary church is quite human and behaves very much like Jesus' fellow Nazarenes. The kingdom of God has had as much trouble getting underway in the contemporary church as it did when Jesus did great work in his hometown. The citizens of Nazareth couldn't see past the boy Jesus to the messiah Jesus. They were so prejudiced against God showing any favor to any group other than them that they were ready to kill him. It's a human tendency to take the blessings of the gospel—which should lead us to receiving Christ's love and sharing it with others—and hoard them selfishly (even violently!) for ourselves. Doing this distorts the gospel from being others-focused to being self-focused.

The church's greatest barrier today is her distortion of the gospel. This comes, in part, because of what we preach and what we leave out of our preaching. The most common gospel preached in the developed world—in places like the United States, Canada, Western Europe, parts of Africa and Asia, Australia, and New Zealand—is the forgiveness-only, consumer gospel. The problem with this gospel is that it's only part of the truth.

## Gospel Distortions

Those in the developing world, however, don't quite have it down either. In our experience, the most common gospel in underdeveloped countries is the prosperity gospel, which makes discipleship almost impossible to teach as an essential part of the good news. This kind of gospel turns everyone into a consumer of religious goods and services.

Neither version includes discipleship as a normative part of what it means to be saved. Both the forgiveness-only gospel and the prosperity gospel make no room for the ways and means that Jesus passed on to his followers. Neither has a serious connection to character transformation, and neither expects everyone who is "saved" to actually follow Jesus. Moreover, these "gospels" don't set the precedent for making disciples who make disciples. The idea that every believer in Christ is a follower of Christ is not part of his or her theology, program, or curriculum.<sup>1</sup> In other words, both of these gospels have a fatal flaw—they separate conversion from discipleship and make discipleship optional.



Through our work with The Bonhoeffer Project, we have made a lot of noise in speeches and in print about two important statements

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that are both vital to the message of this book:<sup>2</sup>

1. You can't make a Christlike disciple from a non-discipleship gospel.
2. The gospel you preach determines the disciples you make.

These statements mean that even a very aggressive missional effort over the next fifty years that preaches the gospel to the ends of the earth—if it is the wrong gospel—would leave Jesus still waiting to return. Jesus said, “The Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.”<sup>3</sup>

A false gospel says, “Jesus died for your sins, he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he will return someday to gather his church. Everyone who has agreed with this set of religious facts is a Christian. By the way, you don't need to do anything about it; in fact, you *can't* do anything about it because it is all by grace.”

As the late theologian and author Dallas Willard once quipped, “We have not only been saved by grace, we have been paralyzed by it.”<sup>4</sup> The church today is truly paralyzed, and it's largely because of its view—even deification—of grace. As a whole, the church lacks commitment to making disciples through its ordinary members on a global scale. Making and multiplying disciples is not expected of us, so it has not been done. As long as someone preaches the wrong gospel, Jesus' work won't be completed, and only a small fraction of lives will be changed.

Non-discipleship gospels may be advanced through many powerful forms of media, but they won't multiply through transformed lives of disciples who are making still more disciples. They can't. The ways and means that Jesus prescribed have not changed: People with discipleship DNA are needed for reproduction and multiplication.

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They are a must, no substitutes. Converts as far as the eye can see will never accomplish what a few committed and multiplying disciples can do given enough time.

If we continue down the path we're on, the world will be awash with nominal Christians who will be shaped by a gospel that doesn't reproduce, doesn't transform, and doesn't represent the true gospel. False gospels will insulate and corrupt nations and those gospels will fail to accomplish God's will.

When that gospel is preached to all nations, however, Jesus said the end would come: "The Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come." Disciples who make other disciples who in turn make still more disciples multiplied throughout the earth will preach this gospel. Søren Kierkegaard has a pertinent observation here: "The main difference between an apostle and a genius is that a genius does not speak with authority but has to rely on skill."<sup>5</sup>

The spread of this gospel will come from ordinary people who have the authority of the gospel. These people will accomplish more than what the most innovative and technically savvy group of genius Christians without gospel authority could ever fathom. As we hold up the gospel that Jesus preached, we have power to penetrate every part of society and every corner of the earth. Let's start today by truly understanding the gospel, then proclaiming it broadly into a world of lost souls who desperately need all that God has to offer, including the call to follow Jesus in obedience.

## Chapter 4

### GOSPEL CONFUSION

“A general fog of confusion swirls around [the gospel] these days. When it comes right down to it, Christians just don’t agree on what the gospel is—even Christians who call themselves evangelical.”<sup>1</sup>

—Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?*

A number of years ago, a neighbor invited me (Ben) to a barbecue in his backyard one Sunday afternoon. We had lived next door to each other for a couple of years, and we had a lot in common: We were about the same age, shared tools with each other, and had come to know and like each another. His name was John, and he wasn’t a Christian. He didn’t attend a church and never talked about “religion” unless I brought it up.

As we stood barbecuing meat in his backyard, I was pleasantly surprised when he said to me, “So, Christians are always talking about ‘the gospel.’ You’re a pastor.” Then, looking directly at me, he asked, “What is the gospel?” For months, I’d been praying that he would be open to talking about Jesus. What an amazing opportunity! The problem was—in this incredible evangelistic moment—my mind went completely blank. I bumbled and stumbled and eventu-

ally shared the gospel with John. The experience, however, left me startled (and humbled) at my inability to succinctly communicate the gospel.

## What Is the Gospel?

It seems like such a simple question, doesn't it? But if you ask ten Christians, it's likely you'll get ten different responses. Some people will respond with one-word answers, others with a long rambling speech, and still others with a silent, awkward stare. Why is this? If Christians should be crystal clear about one thing, it should be the gospel, right? The gospel is supposed to be "of first importance," isn't it? As Christians, we're meant to be "unashamed of the gospel," aren't we?<sup>2</sup> But how can you be unashamed of the gospel when you're not crystal clear on what the gospel is? Unfortunately, it's all too common for arguments to erupt among Christians when you ask the simple question, "What is the gospel?" A lack of clarity about the gospel has led to a lot of disunity in the church.

This lack of clarity rears its ugly head in various forms in local churches and Christian settings. For example, a new Christian high school once asked me to review the rough draft of a doctrinal statement. While their statement did include a declaration of the gospel, the declaration made no reference to Jesus' resurrection. A gospel declaration that doesn't include Jesus' resurrection is no gospel at all.<sup>3</sup>

Another time, a young man on our church staff team was going through our ordination process to become a pastor. As part of this process, our elders asked him to preach a sermon and succinctly articulate the gospel. The pre-selected Bible passage was primed for a gospel message, but he didn't do it; in fact, he said he *couldn't* do it.

Afterward, when he was asked to summarize the gospel in writing, he turned in a ten-page paper!

Several years ago, we were interviewing a potential new elder in our church and asked him, “What is the gospel?” He looked at us like a deer caught in headlights. The look on his face reminded me of what I felt when my friend John asked the same question at the barbecue in his backyard.

The problem isn’t that Christians aren’t talking about the gospel—we are. It seems like everything in the Christian subculture of America is tagged with “gospel-driven” this and “gospel-centered” that. We talk a lot about the gospel, but if you really listen, that’s exactly what it is—it’s just talk *about* the gospel. There’s lots of talk about the gospel in general terms, but precious little about what the gospel actually is! This gospel “talk” has left many people in churches all across America thinking, *we know the gospel*, when, in fact, we don’t. We may have become numb to it. Something is really wrong when Christians are confused about the gospel or numb to it.

### **Increasing Confusion and a Lack of Clarity**

The first-century church wasn’t confused about the gospel. They were crystal clear about it, as New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd writes: “No Christian of the first century had any doubt what [the gospel] was.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus passed on the gospel he preached to his apostles. Even Paul—who wasn’t one of Jesus’ original twelve but became an apostle later—received the gospel from Jesus himself. Then, Paul made it known to the other “pillar” apostles, who affirmed his gospel was from Jesus himself.<sup>5</sup> Jesus’ apostles then passed on the gospel to faithful men and women who passed it on to others.<sup>6</sup> The first-century



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church knew the gospel with precision; they had a clear understanding of it and could communicate it succinctly. They defined it to the point of transferability. In other words, they knew when they had passed it on to others and when it had been received.<sup>7</sup> When the first-century church leaders preached the gospel with this level of clarity, the power of the gospel was unleashed. It began changing the world.

Something has changed in the church since then. The gospel that was crystal clear to the first-century church and began a world revolution isn't clear to the twenty-first century church. Not only is there confusion, but the church's lack of clarity has also led to an escalation of churches that preach a false gospel. If this is true—and we believe it is—that reality should cause us all to want to drop everything and pay much closer attention to the gospel.<sup>8</sup> If it doesn't make you drop everything, just read the Apostle Paul's double-curse warning against those who preach a different gospel in Galatians 1:9: "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." We need a gospel renaissance.

## Chapter 5

# THE PROBLEM WITH DIFFERENT GOSPELS

Somewhere along the timeline of history, our churches drifted from preaching Jesus' gospel to peddling different gospels, which are nothing more than cheap, powerless imitations. In my book, *Conversion and Discipleship*, I (Bill) have identified five different “gospels” being preached today: the forgiveness-only gospel; the gospel of the left; the prosperity gospel; the consumer gospel; and the gospel of the right.<sup>1</sup>

They all sound different, emphasize different theological preferences, and call people to different responses. None include discipleship. They all separate conversion from discipleship, thus making it optional. This separation should be deeply disturbing to us. Not only are we cloudy about what the true gospel is, but we're also surrounded with all kinds of different false gospels, which are really no gospels at all.<sup>2</sup>

### Different Gospels

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Forgiveness Only | 4. Consumer        |
| 2. Gospel of Left   | 5. Gospel of Right |
| 3. Prosperity       |                    |

## A Discipleship Revolution

If we're going to see revival in twenty-first century churches across America, we're convinced it's not going to happen without a discipleship revolution. This revolution needs to happen everywhere—in Baptist churches in Missouri, Anglican churches in Arizona, Pentecostal churches in Pennsylvania, and non-denominational churches in California. We need a discipleship revolution in churches of every stripe and every location. This kind of discipleship revolution, however, will never happen unless and until the church returns to preaching the gospel that Jesus preached.

Unlike the gospels listed above, the gospel that Jesus preached didn't separate conversion from discipleship. For Jesus, discipleship wasn't an optional add-on. His gospel didn't just call people to pray a little prayer for their sins to be forgiven so they'd get to heaven when they died. (When you read the Gospels in the New Testament, do you ever see Jesus call people to respond to his gospel like this?) Jesus' gospel called people to follow him—unconditionally and with no excuses—no matter the cost and to the end. Jesus never taught that you could be a Christian and not be his disciple. In fact, he warned against such teaching. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked the penetrating question, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?"<sup>3</sup> The gospel Jesus preached was a gospel that not only called people to be disciples but to *make* disciples. His gospel was a discipleship gospel.

## Assumption 1

As we stated earlier, this book has two underlying assumptions: The first is that *you cannot make Christlike disciples from a non-discipleship gospel*. This means we need to understand that the primary call

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of Jesus' gospel is encapsulated in two words: "Follow me." It also means that the longer we think people can be Christians without being disciples—that they can believe in Jesus without following him—the more we'll have to get used to our best disciple making efforts failing (no matter how sincere we might be or how much money we might spend). We can hire a discipleship pastor, buy the best discipleship curriculum, invite the most dynamic discipleship speakers to our church, and encourage the whole congregation to start making disciples—and it might work for a while. But if we continue preaching a non-discipleship gospel, even though some of our discipleship efforts might begin with a blaze of glory, they'll soon burn out. I know this because I've lived it.

The church where I (Ben) have been the senior pastor for the past seven years (Cypress Community Church in Salinas, California) is also my first experience as a senior pastor. When I arrived, I knew we needed to start making disciples, but I had very little idea of how to make that happen, despite having a master's degree in theology and ten years of ministry experience. So I prayed, read books, and talked to other pastors. I found that I wasn't alone in being a pastor who didn't know how to create a disciple making movement. I should have waited longer. I didn't. I went ahead and rolled out a new discipleship initiative like a red carpet for our congregation.

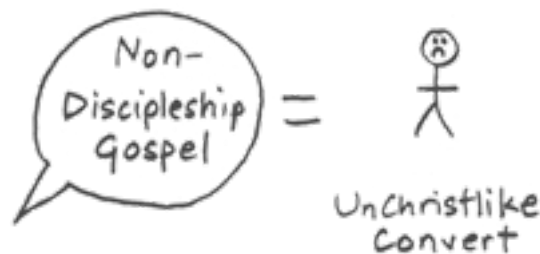
The discipleship initiative at Cypress began with a short six-week, high-energy sermon series on discipleship. It climaxed with a discipleship weekend with a national discipleship expert, who came to the church and led a discipleship seminar on Friday and Saturday, then preached on Sunday. Our expert did an excellent job. It was awesome! I was so excited—as were a lot of people in the church.

Our church staff signed up almost one hundred people into discipleship groups. We bought them all the best discipleship curriculum

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money could buy, gave them a page of detailed instructions on what to do, and set them loose on an incredible disciple making adventure. Overnight, our church went from zero discipleship groups to more than thirty. It was great!

Within a year, however, only three groups were left. None of the original groups had multiplied. That wasn't great. I was disappointed and disillusioned. In hindsight, I realize there was a fatal flaw with my amazing, well-funded discipleship strategy: I hadn't started with the gospel. I hadn't begun with a close examination of the gospel I was preaching. As a result, we were trying to make Christlike disciples while I was still preaching a non-discipleship gospel.



### **Assumption 2**

The second underlying assumption is *the gospel you preach determines the disciples you make*. If you preach a forgiveness-only gospel, you will make forgiveness-only disciples—people who think they don't need to obey Jesus' commands (or can go on sinning) and God's grace will abound all the more.<sup>4</sup> If you preach a consumer gospel, you'll make consumer disciples—people who "believe" in Jesus only so long as they get something out of it and it doesn't make them too uncomfortable. As soon as consumer disciples feel like following Jesus is too

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hard or inconvenient for them, they tap out. If you preach Jesus' gospel—which we are calling the “discipleship gospel”—then, and only then, do you have the opportunity to make Christlike disciples.

Understanding our two underlying assumptions helps us realize that when we connect the gospel and discipleship, as Jesus did, it empowers disciple making in our church. It also helps us see the continuity between belief and obedience. When Jesus called people to believe in the gospel, obedience wasn't detached from belief, but rather the fruit of it.<sup>5</sup> When we preach a gospel that calls people to be disciples and make disciples (as Jesus did), we unleash the power of the gospel and witness the maturation of Christlike disciples.

Now, if you've got alarm bells going off in your head because this sounds like works-salvation, a return to the old lordship-salvation debate, or an attack on God's grace, you're wrong. The discipleship gospel is none of these. Rather, it's a call for the church to return to the gospel that Jesus preached, a gospel that has seven essential elements.

## Chapter 6

# **THE SEVEN ELEMENTS OF JESUS' GOSPEL**

“My plea is that we go back to the New Testament to discover all over again what Jesus’ gospel is.”<sup>1</sup>

—Scot McKnight

When we speak of the gospel that Jesus preached, it’s critical that we examine the New Testament Gospels because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are inspired records, which reveal Jesus’ gospel to us. While we could use any of the four Gospels, we have chosen to use Mark’s Gospel for the purposes of this book. Biblical scholars generally accept that Mark wrote his Gospel before the others, giving us the first written record of Jesus’ life and teachings.<sup>2</sup> Another reason, and more to the point, is Mark’s Gospel reveals the gospel that Jesus preached in two specific passages: Mark 1:14-17 and Mark 8:27-31. These two passages make it clear that there are seven elements essential to Jesus’ gospel. Each of the seven elements is not only imbedded with discipleship, but also leads to it. In this chapter, we’ll start by examining Mark 1:14-17, where we discover four essential elements of the gospel Jesus preached.

## Four Elements in Mark 1:14-17

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus began his public ministry by preaching the gospel. We find this account in Mark 1:14-17. As you will see, these four verses are extremely important for understanding Jesus' gospel. Their specificity is rare in the four Gospels. Generally, the Gospel writers tell us *that* Jesus preached, not *what* he said.<sup>3</sup> Pay careful attention to what Jesus says:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.<sup>4</sup>

Before we consider the elements of Jesus' gospel in this passage, first take note that verse 14 expressly states that Jesus was "proclaiming the gospel." It couldn't be clearer—this is a gospel passage. In other words, Jesus reveals four elements of his gospel. People may say all kinds of things are part of the gospel by proof-texting and taking Bible verses out of context. Because it actually says that Jesus was "proclaiming the gospel," Mark 1:14-17 is different.

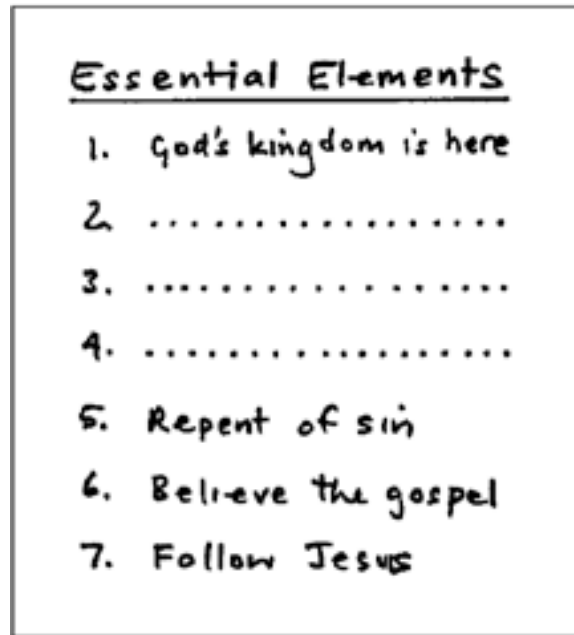
## Content and Call

The four elements of the gospel revealed in Mark 1:14-17 are: God's kingdom is here, repent of sin, believe the gospel, and follow Jesus. These four elements fall into two categories: content and call. The *content* of Jesus' gospel, at this point, was exclusively about the king-



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dom of God. The call of Jesus' gospel involved repentance, belief, and following Jesus. (We will discover three more elements of content to Jesus' gospel in Mark 8:27-31 below).



Jesus' declaration that the kingdom of God is here served as the content of the gospel in Mark 1. It's significant that Jesus spoke of the gospel as "the gospel of the kingdom of God," revealing that the coming of God's kingdom is essential to the gospel Jesus preached.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' gospel, then, was first about God's kingdom. How many times have you shared the gospel without mentioning God's kingdom? If we aren't saying anything about the kingdom of God, are we preaching Jesus' gospel?

The second category these elements fall into is the *call* of Jesus' gospel. In Mark 1:14-17, Jesus called people to respond to his proclamation of the gospel by repenting of sin, believing, and following him. The call and the content go hand-in-hand. The gospel isn't just about information; it's about transformation. Jesus didn't just pro-

claim that the kingdom had come; he also called people to respond to that proclamation by repenting, believing, and following. As such, both the content of Jesus' gospel and his call are part of "the gospel." Someone might argue that Jesus' call to follow in Mark 1:17 is separate from his call to repent and believe the gospel. When we, however, understand repentance and belief in the broader contexts of the Gospels, they are the first steps of a new life of following Jesus.

Mark 1:14-17 reveals four essential elements of Jesus' gospel, but there are seven total. We now turn Mark 8:27-31 for the other three elements.

### **Three Elements in Mark 8:27-31**

The second critical passage revealing Jesus' gospel is Mark 8:27-31. In the context of this Gospel as a whole, Mark 8 is not only at the middle of the book, but it's also the turning point—theologically, geographically, and also as it relates to Jesus' revelation of the gospel. Jesus reveals three more elements of his gospel in Mark 8:27-31.

Scholars agree that Mark 1 and Mark 8 have a two-year gap between them. This means that for two years Jesus had been proclaiming part of the gospel—that God's kingdom was at hand—before he revealed the three other elements of gospel content.

A lot happens in Mark 8, and it's all triggered by one thing—the Apostle Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. Read carefully for the three other elements of gospel content that Jesus reveals here:

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered Him, "*You are the Christ.*" And He strictly charged them to tell no one about Him. And He began

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to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and *be killed*, and after three days *rise again*.<sup>6</sup>

These verses represent a major moment of gospel revelation. Jesus reveals three more elements of the gospel: that he is the Christ and that he would die and be resurrected.

In the first eight chapters of Mark's Gospel, people had expressed various opinions about Jesus: His family thought he was out of his mind; the scribes said Jesus was possessed by Satan; the people of Capernaum called him a teacher; the people of Nazareth couldn't think of him as more than a carpenter; King Herod believed he was John the Baptist raised from the dead; others said he was Elijah; and still others one of the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

Surprisingly, Jesus' disciples hadn't said anything about who they believed him to be up until Mark 8. That's fascinating, isn't it?<sup>8</sup> But here in Mark 8:29, Jesus asks the Twelve, point blank, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response is powerful—so powerful: "You are the Christ." This is the first time in Mark's Gospel that someone calls Jesus "the Christ." When Peter makes this theologically loaded statement from the Old Testament, it's a profound moment in the Gospel of Mark.

To first-century Jews, the word "Christ" was a holy word, reserved exclusively for the long-awaited messiah, God's promised savior for the world. ("Christ" is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for "messiah.") Because we're so far removed from their culture ("Christ" is a cuss word in our day), it's difficult to grasp the full weight of this title or the significance of what Peter says here. For them, though, to profess Jesus as "the Christ," as Peter does, was to proclaim Jesus as the one about whom all Scripture had been written and the one who fulfills all Scripture. This was huge! Peter's confession triggers

so much critical change in Mark's Gospel. For example, Jesus begins speaking to the Twelve about his death and resurrection, a topic he had never before broached.

It's as if Peter's confession trips an alarm wire. As soon as one of his disciples confesses him as the Christ, Jesus immediately begins teaching the Twelve about his impending death at the hands of the Jewish religious establishment and his third-day resurrection. In fact, he teaches the Twelve about his death and resurrection three times in three successive chapters (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33-34). The three predictions of his death and resurrection begin with Peter's confession, which also signals a massive shift in Jesus' discipleship strategy with the Twelve. From Mark 8:27-31 onward, Jesus spent his time almost exclusively with the Twelve, teaching them the true cost of discipleship (for example, Mark 9:30-31). Taking all of this into consideration, we begin to get a sense for how critical a turning point and how theologically weighty Mark 8:31-34 really is.

The three elements revealed in Mark 8:27-31—that Jesus is the Christ, he died, and he was resurrected—complete the list of seven essential elements of Jesus' gospel:

Essential Elements

1. God's kingdom is here
2. Jesus is the Christ
3. He died for our sins
4. He was resurrected
5. Repent of sin
6. Believe the gospel
7. Follow Jesus

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Now, if you were paying careful attention to Mark 8:27-31, notice that the word “gospel” doesn’t appear anywhere in that passage. Mark 1:14-17 expressly states that Jesus was “proclaiming the gospel,” but Mark 8:27-31 is not as clear. It’s obviously a theologically stout passage, but it doesn’t explicitly state that it’s a *gospel* passage. This is, in part, because Mark 8:27-31 was a *prophecy* of Jesus’ death and resurrection. (Jesus hadn’t actually died and been resurrected yet.) It wasn’t until after Jesus’ resurrection that these three elements were understood to be (and confirmed as) essential to the gospel. How, then, can we know for certain that the three elements we’ve identified in Mark 8:27-31 are truly essential elements of Jesus’ gospel?

While Mark 8:27-31 doesn’t specifically state it, 1 Corinthians 15 does: In fact, it is no overstatement to say that 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 is one of the most important gospel passages in the entire New Testament, and as you’ll see in the next chapter, it confirms that the three elements revealed in Mark 8:27-31 are, indeed, essential elements of Jesus’ gospel.

## Chapter 7

# THE IMPORTANCE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Simply put, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 makes it crystal clear that the three elements we noted in Mark 8:27-31—Jesus is the Christ, he died for our sins, and he was resurrected—actually are essential elements of the gospel. Look carefully at the inspired words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to [Peter], then to the twelve.<sup>1</sup>

Paul declares here the core of the gospel—that Jesus is the Christ, that he died on the cross for our sins, and that he was raised on the third day.

Much has been written about the theological importance and historical significance of this passage (more than we will unpack here). We find it hard to underscore just how important it is, especially as

it relates to the gospel. Yet Paul's words here are critical for a proper understanding of the gospel and vital evidence for Jesus' resurrection—the linchpin of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> This passage has the marks of being an early creed of the church, which means it functioned as a sort of mnemonic device to help people recall the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

In the first verse, the Apostle Paul expressly states he is writing about “the gospel”—just as Jesus did in Mark 1. He reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he had preached to them, which they had received, and by which they were being saved. He states quite emphatically that the gospel is of “first importance.” Significantly, just as Jesus does in Mark 1, Paul not only explicitly states that he's talking about the gospel, but also explains what it is—the actual message of the gospel.

Stunningly, what we find in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 is almost an exact mirror of Mark 8:27-31, only expanded more fully with greater theological significance. For example, we're told that Christ not only died, but also that he died *for our sins*. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 are important because they confirm that the three elements we noted in Mark 8:27-31 are not only essential elements of Jesus' gospel, but the very essence of it—the gospel's core!

Before we move on, it's worth highlighting the repeated phrase “in accordance with the Scriptures” in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. It's not merely a nice tag at the end of these verses or just a mnemonic device to help people memorize this creed-like statement of the gospel; rather, it invokes the whole Old Testament story of the Christ with this statement about Jesus, which climaxed in his death and resurrection. Jesus is the beautiful fulfillment of Israel's story.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, the repeated phrase “according to the Scriptures” is not a throwaway line; it calls upon the whole Bible, confirming that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ.

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1 Corinthians 15:1-5 is a passage of profound significance as it relates to the gospel. The Apostle Paul states the core of the gospel message, which confirms that the three elements Jesus revealed in Mark 8:27-31 are, indeed, elements of Jesus' gospel. This also means that each of the seven elements we've explored has strong exegetical support, each finds its origin in Jesus himself, and each is revealed in a passage that expressly states that it is about the gospel.

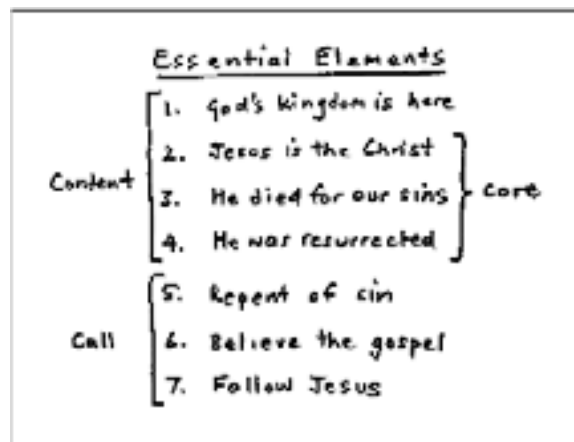


## Conclusion

In this short primer, we have discussed the problem and proliferation of different, non-discipleship gospels. Any gospel that disconnects discipleship from conversion—thus making discipleship optional—is a non-discipleship gospel. We’ve emphasized the truth that you cannot make a Christlike disciple from a non-discipleship gospel.

We have also discovered the seven elements of the gospel that Jesus preached, which form what we have dubbed the “discipleship gospel.” We’ve learned that each of the seven elements has its origin in Jesus himself with strong exegetical examples from passages expressly stating they are about the gospel. There are four elements of gospel *content*. The first is that the kingdom of God has come as we saw in Mark 1. We gleaned the other three elements of gospel content from Mark 8, including that Jesus is the Christ; that he died for our sins; and that he was resurrected on the third day. A brief exploration of 1 Corinthians 15 confirmed these three elements and also helped us understand them as *core* content of the gospel.

Jesus’ gospel has content, even core content, but there is also the *call* of the gospel. Jesus makes the gospel call clear in Mark 1. In response to the gospel, Jesus calls us to repent of sin, believe the gospel, and follow him.



## The Full-length *The Discipleship Gospel*

Listing the seven elements of Jesus' gospel is helpful in many ways, especially for evaluating the gospel we believe and preach. While it's critical to identify the seven elements of the gospel, it's just as important to recognize that these seven elements do not form a definition of the gospel—they just outline it.

In this primer, we've *mentioned* the seven elements. We dig deeper into their *meaning*, though, in the full book, in which we show that each element of Jesus' gospel not only leads to discipleship but is also imbued with discipleship. This will help us glean what the late, great Dallas Willard meant when he wrote “discipleship to Jesus [is] the very heart of the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

In the full-version of this book, we also wrestle with the questions the discipleship gospel raises, such as: What exactly does the kingdom of God have to do with the gospel? Is repentance really necessary for salvation? Doesn't adding “following Jesus” to the gospel make it salvation by works? And why didn't the Apostle Paul mention the four gospel elements Jesus revealed in Mark 1 as part of the gospel message in 1 Corinthians 15?

Also, in the full book we offer you a one hundred-word gospel definition. This definition of Jesus' discipleship gospel centers on the core content of 1 Corinthians 15; includes all seven elements of Jesus' gospel; and connects conversion and discipleship. We believe this definition of the gospel will help you (and those in your church) get crystal clarity on the gospel and be equipped to answer the “What is the gospel?” question with confidence.

We even make space in the full book to discuss how Jesus' discipleship gospel can incite a discipleship revolution in your own life and how it can create a disciple-making movement in your church.

## *The Discipleship Gospel*

For now, remember this: 1) The gospel you preach determines the disciples you make; and 2) you can't make a Christlike disciple from a non-discipleship gospel.

# Epilogue

## **DIETRICH BONHOEFFER: AN EXAMPLE OF A CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLE**

The content of this book is vital for the church today. We know the impact of a proper understanding of the gospel because of the example of a young, influential German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (the inspiration for the name of our organization, The Bonhoeffer Project).

By the early 20th century, the non-discipleship gospel had failed Germany, reflecting on the dead orthodoxy of what used to be. That gospel had even failed to reach the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It has had the same effect as it does on millions today in nearly every nation of the world. In the modern western civilization, we have tried hard to make the gospel easy to believe and even easier to acquire, but today's easy-to-believe gospels don't resonate with the deep cry of our souls. They just amuse us—for a while.

We need what finally reached Bonhoeffer: a full-bodied gospel filled with passion and social justice from the Abyssinian Baptist Church. This is the kind of message that engaged Bonhoeffer while he was living in New York City. It was a gospel that required following Jesus, one that expected people to show this transformation by their lives. Bonhoeffer returned to Germany a changed man.

He soon engaged in the struggle against Adolf Hitler and his Nazi war machine, spending the last two years of his life in prison. On the

day of his execution, a camp doctor, H. Fischer-Hullstrung recorded his impression of Bonhoeffer just prior to his execution:

On the morning of that day between five and six o'clock, the prisoners were taken from their cells. The verdict of the court martial was read to them. Through the half-open door in one room of the huts, I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer before taking off his garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this loveable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

Fischer-Hullstrung observed a man who didn't just write about denying himself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus. He actually lived it—even in death. Bonhoeffer was willing to follow Jesus to the very end with neither conditions nor excuses.

We close with Bonhoeffer's belief about the nature and effect of the gospel that Jesus preached: "The only person who can be justified by grace alone is the person who has left all to follow Christ. Such a person knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace and that the call is inseparable from grace."<sup>2</sup>

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# Endnotes

## Introduction

1. Dallas Willard, “State of Discipleship in the Church Today,” *Renovating the Heart: Forming the Christ in Me Identity* (Christ Church of Oak Brook, Oak Brook, IL, November 4, 2005), MP3.
2. Bill has written on this topic extensively in *Conversion and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).
3. This book includes material from the introductory chapters of *The Discipleship Gospel*, forthcoming from HIM Publications.

## Chapter 1

1. Scholars like N.T. Wright in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), Scot McKnight in *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) and *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), and George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1959). For examples from the New Testament, see Matthew 3:2; 6:33; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:45; John 3:5.
2. For passages on God’s kingdom restoring all creation see Psalm 145: 8-13; Mark 1:15; Matthew 6:9-10.
3. For more about how eternal life begins in our present life in the kingdom, see Mark 10:30 and John 3:3, 36; 10:10.

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4. 2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV.

5. John 1:35-51.

6. James 2:14-20. In his work *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* Dr. Matthew Bates claims, “Faith in Jesus is best described as allegiance to him as King” (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017) 77.

7. Matthew 7:21-23.

8. Matthew 6:10. Matthew uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” and Mark and Luke use “kingdom of God”, and both phrases refer to the same reality.

9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 59.

## **Chapter 2**

1. It should be noted that Jesus had spent over three years teaching them about the kingdom of God being near them, within them, and a reality not primarily of this world. It would, however, come to the world gradually, but eventually in full regalia after his return and the judgment.

2. Mark 1:14-15.

3. Mark 1:16-18.

4. Matthew 6:31-33.

5. Luke 13:34-35.

6. Luke 4:16-21.

7. Luke 4:23-24.



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8. Luke 4:25-27.

9. Luke 4:28-30.

10. For Elijah and Elisha's story, see 2 Kings 6:8-22. Jesus fulfilled this through the apostles, who went to the nations.

### **Chapter 3**

1. For a complete treatment of this subject see the Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Conversion and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

2. Bill is co-founder with Brandon Cook of The Bonhoeffer Project which is devoted to creating disciple making movements in local contexts. Ben helps Bill as they train ministry leaders toward this end.

3. Matthew 24:14.

4. A personal conversation Dallas Willard had with the author (Bill).

5. This is a summary of Kierkegaard's thoughts in the words of Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard, A Single Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) 151.

### **Chapter 4**

1. Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) 17.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 1:16, ESV.

3. 1 Corinthians 15:17.

4. C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching & Its Developments* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 76.

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5. Galatians 1:11-2:2.
6. 2 Timothy 2:2.
7. 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.
8. As in Hebrews 2:1.

### **Chapter 5**

1. *Conversion and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) 33.
2. As Paul says in Galatians 1:7.
3. ESV.
4. See Romans 6:1.
5. Mark 1:15.

### **Chapter 6**

1. *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 29.
2. For reasoning about Mark as the first Gospel written, see John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books) 99.
3. For example, Luke 20:1 says, “Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel,” which tells us that he preached but not what he said (ESV).
4. Mark 1:14-17, ESV.
5. Luke 4:43, ESV. We go into much greater detail on the importance of the kingdom of God and its meaning in the full version of this book.

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6. ESV (emphases ours).
7. Mark 3:21; 3:22; 5:35; 6:3; 6:16; 8:28.
8. The only thing the Twelve had said about Jesus' identity before Mark 8 is found in Mark 4:41, when they asked, "Who is this?"

### **Chapter 7**

1. ESV.
2. Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona do excellent work in extrapolating these things in their book, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004).
3. Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004) 52-53.
4. *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 51.

### **Conclusion**

1. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) xvii.

### **Epilogue**

1. Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010) 532.
2. *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 51.

## About the Authors

### **Bill Hull**

Bill has devoted his adult life to pastoring, teaching, and writing about Christ's command to make disciples. His primary means for pursuing his mission as a discipleship evangelist has been through pastoring for twenty years, teaching in more than fifty countries around the world and authoring more than twenty books. Bill is now the leader of The Bonhoeffer Project, which is devoted to the creation of disciple making leaders. You can learn more about Bill's work at [TheBonhoeffer-Project.com](http://TheBonhoeffer-Project.com) and [BillHull.net](http://BillHull.net).

### **Ben Sobels**

Ben is married to Joni. They live in Salinas, California, with their five children. Ben grew up in Australia, but in his early twenties came to America to caddie for a good friend who is a professional golfer. During his caddying stint, God changed his life, and Ben began following Jesus. He graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 2000, earning a ThM degree. He currently serves as the senior pastor of Cypress Community Church in Salinas, California, where he has served since 2010. Ben has worked with Bill on The Bonhoeffer Project since 2015.

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### Bonhoeffer Project Resources

- *The False Promise of Discipleship* by Bill Hull and Brandon Cook
- *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* by Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington
- *Conversion and Discipleship: You Can't Have One Without the Other* by Bill Hull
- *Christian Leader* by Bill Hull

### Annual Gatherings

Don't miss the opportunity to gather with like-minded discipleship-first leaders at Discipleship.org's National Disciple Making Forum and the Bonhoeffer Project's Annual Member Meeting (membership not required). [Register here](#). Use Promo "Bonhoeffer." (At the time of distribution for this primer, the next one is November 9-10th, 2017 in Nashville, Tennessee.)

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- *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman and Bobby Harrington with Josh Patrick
- *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?*, Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington
- *Stay the Course: Seven Essential Practices for Disciple Making Churches*, Brandon Guindon
- *Discipleship that Fits*, Bobby Harrington and Alex Absolom
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Podcast Episodes: [The Disciple Maker's Podcast](#)

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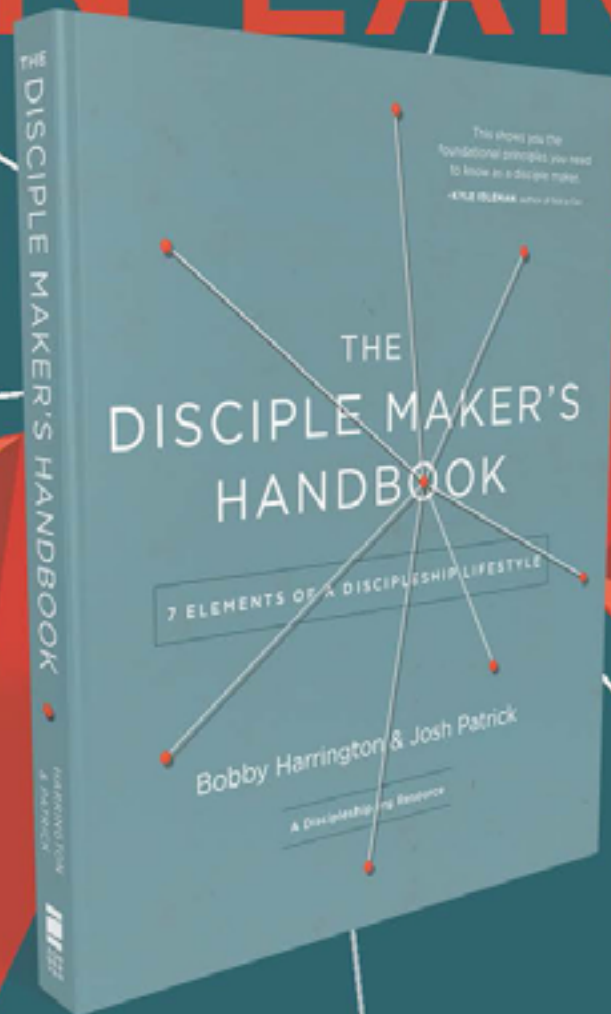
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