

Paul H. Dixon
Christ Above All in Discipleship, Part 2
circa 1993

Unedited Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Christ, above all, in discipleship. I personally believe that there are few things closer to the heart of our God than evangelism and discipleship. In our last session together, we started looking at the doctor of discipleship and saw that, as John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." And at 2nd Timothy 2:2, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." The whole principle in Paul's life of getting involved with Timothy, and training Timothy, and passing on the body of truth to him as he said in 2nd Timothy chapter one, and then in chapter two. "Now, Timothy, this deposit of truth that I've given you, you are responsible to pass it on to others and do it in such a manner of depth and training that they will in turn pass it on to others."

Paul H. Dixon:

The greatest example of discipleship was the Lord Jesus. We saw in our last study together that the Lord Jesus called out the 12 to be with him, and out of the 12, he selected three. And basically, during his brief earthly ministry, he concentrated his efforts on discipling a few men. Robert Coleman said, "Jesus came to save to this world, and to that end, He died. But on His way to the cross, He concentrated His life on making a few disciples." As we move into the New Testament, we see that this was the emphasis of the early church. Obviously, the early church practiced it, or there would not have been such rapid growth and impact on their known world. They knew the value of spiritual multiplication. I fear that today, too often, we are adding in the church when we ought to be multiplying, and the only way that you multiply is through discipleship. We would not have a New Testament today had the early church not believed in discipleship, because basically what the New Testament letters are, they are follow-up letters.

Paul H. Dixon:

We find that the apostle Paul would go in, he would win people to Christ, he would establish a church. When he would leave to go someplace else, he'd write an epistle back to give them some instructions as to how they were to grow, and to deal with problems in the church. It was this commitment to discipleship. 24 times in Paul's epistles, he expresses concern about how the saints are doing. Let's just briefly take the book of Acts to be reinforced from the New Testament as to how important discipleship was. If you would turn to the book of Acts in the 15th chapter, the 36th verse. "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we've preached the word of the Lord, and let's see how they're doing." Does that surprise us?

Paul H. Dixon:

The church is just getting off of the ground. Most everyone in the world knows not Christ as their Savior, a pagan world without Jesus. You would think they would be going into this community, winning all they could to Christ, establishing a church, going to the next city, the next town, establishing another church. That would be their plan. No. No. Establish a church, yes. Move on to another place, win people to Christ, establish the church, take the time, go back, check on how they are doing. It is not just winning. It is discipling that is part of the great commission.

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And as a reminder, it is so neat to hear what's going on in our campus, and since I brought my first message in this series, again, the reports come. Just a word girls, guys. I really don't appreciate you talking while I'm speaking. And by the way, I don't appreciate when anybody else is speaking either, or when the special music's going on. Just let me bear my heart. There's a measure of respect, not only here on our campus, but in local churches that just is lost today. And I really think when it comes to the word of God, we want to be very, very careful. I understand that there are things that come, and you got to say something, or something you see, or something that distracts you, but it's really important. In your local church, when you get out of here, when you go home this summer, when you're in the chapels, and when you're in your classes, just to give the utmost attention to what is being said.

Paul H. Dixon:

I think that when we look at this whole business of discipleship and what's going on in our campus, in the dormitories, and what's happening with some of you just one-on-one, and as you've related to me in your small group settings. It's how some of you're getting together, different dormitories deciding to get together for prayer meetings, and Bible studies, and book studies. It's thrilling to hear. But our burden is that not only this takes place in our campus and continues to grow over the next four weeks, but that when you go home this summer, you'll take that with you. When you're out on your gospel teams this summer, there'll be a discipling that'll take place, formally, informally. And for the rest of your life that you'll understand that this is what you're committing your life to. That you're committed to, if God gives you a family, to discipling your wife, to discipling your husband, to building into one in others' lives, to building into the lives of your kids, and having your kids build into your lives as parents, and oh how they do that. And having the opportunity to go to work, and be in your local churches, and be those who are committed to the biblical principle of discipleship.

Paul H. Dixon:

Go to Acts 18, if you would. Verses 22 and 23. "When Paul had landed at Caesarea and gone up and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he'd spent some time there, he departed." Went over all the country of Galatia, and Frigga, in order, systematically. And what was he doing? He was strengthening all the disciples. From what we could tell, Paul spent three years in Ephesus, possibly the same amount of time in Corinth, and possibly the same amount of time in Antioch, because Paul considered himself a spiritual parent. That's one of the phenomenal studies to me in Paul's epistles.

Paul H. Dixon:

Let's just look at how he refers to himself in 1st Corinthians 4:15. "For though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers? For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. I am your spiritual father. You may have many teachers, but I am the one who gave you the truth and brought you to spiritual life, and I consider myself your spiritual parent." Awesome responsibility that Paul sensed in being involved in the people's lives. Galatians 4:19. "My little children..." As you study his epistles, notice how many times he refers to the saints in those churches as his little children. "Of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." In the Corinthian passage, he viewed himself as a father. Here, he views himself as a spiritual mother, just like the mother has the birth pains and travails in birth. So Paul says, "That's what I am doing for you until Christ be formed on you, until you reach a maturity in Jesus Christ."

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In 1st Thessalonians chapter two, verse 11. There are many of these verses, but I wanted you to see just a few. "As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, just like a father does his children." So here we find the Lord Jesus Christ who set the example of discipleship. We find the apostle Paul who's committed to it, just like Christ called men around him to be with him. You very seldom find the apostle Paul alone. Generally, Paul has men with him as he's making his journeys. Why is he doing that? Because as he goes, he can build into their lives. He can do it privately, they can watch him, he's their example, he's their model. If somehow we catch that in our Cedarville College family, every one of us that we're going to spend the rest of our lives living for God and whatever we know, passing it on to somebody else, oh what God can do for His glory through us as a college family.

Paul H. Dixon:

But what kind of people do we have to be in order to do this? If the first part is the doctrine of discipleship, I've entitled the second the demands of discipleship. It is a very demanding task. I referenced this verse last time, but I'm not sure whether we took the time for you to mark it in your Bibles. Would you turn to Proverbs 27:17? "Iron sharpeneth iron. So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Just as putting iron upon iron takes that knife, gets that flint, you sharpen it, so as we relate to one another, men with men, women with women, men with women, God says that's our responsibility to hone one another, to be the best that we can be for His glory. And so the first thing that I would suggest if we're going to be involved in this ministry of discipleship, is discipleship demands holiness.

Paul H. Dixon:

I appreciate Professor Coleman referencing the sad news that's in the morning newspaper, on the wire service, about someone who's sung on this platform. I never forget the time when I was ministering in Nashville, Tennessee, two or three summers ago. My wife said, "Honey, while you were out walking around, I heard someone on TV sing a song that I just sat there and cried." And later we found out that Michael English was doing this song with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, and we got the disc and sat in our home, listened to it together and wept. Michael English, as he sang with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, with the Gaither Vocal Band, and many of you of course have his disc where he sings alone, has been a blessing to many of us. It is so sad that he gave back his double awards and says that he is not going to be singing Christian music because he sinned against God and had an affair with a woman in one of the other gospel groups. Both are married.

Paul H. Dixon:

That's a Christian musician. But how many of our pastors, how many of our friends who are Christian leaders, have gone the same way? And we've talked about it. We've had entire series on it about moral purity. And as I've told you over and over again, the challenge isn't just to you, it's to us, the administration, and the faculty, and the staff. And praise God that Michael, along with others, have dealt with it, and he's dealing with it. And then we pray that his family will be salvaged, and the other woman's family will be salvaged, and we'll just have to wait and see what happens for the future.

Paul H. Dixon:

But the point is it doesn't make any difference how old we are, what we've accomplished, our notoriety, how much money we have. Listen, you can do well for so long and all of a sudden sin can just mess up your life, and your testimony, and your family, royally. And if you want to live a life that's worth living,

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not the life that's in the Christian headlines, whether you're a preacher or a singer, an athlete or anything else, but just the life that really matters to God, you want to be involved in discipling others. And that demands holiness day-in, day-out, week-in, week-out, year-in, year-out until God calls you home. Oh, that we would all finish the course and finish it well. McLaren said, "It isn't the much that you say you possess that shapes character, but the little you habitually live."

Paul H. Dixon:

Turn with me to Philippians 3:17, where again, the apostle Paul, who is so concerned about those he's led to Christ and about this matter of discipleship, says, "Brethren, be followers together of me and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example." And the challenge is if we want to be involved in discipleship, we want to walk lives that are holy lives, godly lives. Because Luke 6:40 says that the student is going to be like the teacher. The disciple is going to be like the discipler. We produce ourselves whether we like it or not.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number two, discipleship demands humility, not just holiness. We are so depraved. Young men, young women, we are so wicked, that the devil gets in in the best of things. And even when we start committing ourselves to discipleship, if we're not careful, we get vain, and arrogant, and prideful about that. I always warn this. I remember when I was a college student at Christian college, I periodically would be asked to preach and I would often deal with this, because we had the group that thought they were so spiritual, and I'm sure that in many respects were, but they beat up on everybody else. They beat them over the head with their Bibles. Don't do that.

Paul H. Dixon:

Don't ever get that spirit as a student. Don't ever get that spirit as a faculty member. Don't ever get that spirit as a staff member. None of us, as administrators. If someone doesn't do it exactly like you do, if they don't have the same interest you do, in fact, it may not seem that they're even walking with God like you do, pray for them, but don't you dare start becoming judgemental and arrogant in your spirit about them. Because at the same time that you're doing that, you're violating the word of God. One of my favorite passages that you've often heard me reference is 1st Corinthians 4:7, and it says, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? What has thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why does thou glory as if thou hast not received it?" Everything we have is from God. We can take no credit for it.

Paul H. Dixon:

I really want you to read this book. This is entitled "Daws." It's the story of Dawson Trotman. "Daws: A Man Who Trusted God, the Inspiring Life and Compelling Faith of Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators." It was out of print for many years. And when it first came out by in the mid 70s, I got it. This is my copy. I'm rereading it. This book God used to change my life.

Paul H. Dixon:

And 20 years ago, though I had come under the influence of a lot of Navigators when in college, and early in my Christian life when I was saved as a senior in high school, this book came out and just reading it challenged me so deeply about discipleship. Dawson Trotman was an unusual man. Incidentally, we have several copies that we ordered especially for you available in the bookstore. And I understand

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there's a special 25% discount for students who want to get it, but get it for your library if you're really interested in this matter of discipleship, and read a story and how he started the Navigators.

Paul H. Dixon:

One of my favorite stories about Dawson Trotman is the day the guy walked into his office and sat down in front of Daws and looked across the desk and he said, "Daws, I've got a problem." Trotman said, "What's your problem?" He said pride. And Trotman just leaned back in his chair, started roaring with laughter, then leaned across the desk and said, "What in the world do you have to be proud of?" And how true it is.

Paul H. Dixon:

Why should we be proud? And we must never, if we are going to be involved in the lives of other people, become judgmental of those we're endeavoring to disciple, or judgmental of those on our campus who just haven't made that their priority, or at this point in their lives have just not decided to set aside the time for it.

Paul H. Dixon:

Discipleship demands holiness, discipleship demands humility. Number three, discipleship demands discipline. One of the things that comes through time in time again with Trotman is he was such a disciplined man. He was considered legalistic in his day. There were those within his organization who said, "You are so regimented. You are so disciplined that you're legalistic." He said, "No, I'm not, because I am convinced that no one ever amounts to anything for God who doesn't build some disciplines into his or her life." And I agree.

Paul H. Dixon:

We are so afraid of legalism today, and there is legalism out there, but we're so afraid of it, I fear that we've lost the biblical principle of the disciplined life. A disciple speaks of being a disciplined person. One of the demands, if we are going to be involved in discipleship, is to be disciplined in the word of God. Jesus used the Old Testament 160 times in the presence of his disciples to impress upon them the importance of scripture. Ezra 7:10 says, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements." He started by seeking the law himself, and then practicing the law, and then teaching the law. We need to think God's thoughts after Him.

Paul H. Dixon:

Many people are critical of Bill Gothard. There are things that I do not agree with with Bill Gothard. I think there's a great deal of proof texting that goes on in his teaching, but I have a lot that I admire about Bill Gothard and think that Bill Gothard has accomplished a great deal within the body of Christ in the last 15 years or so. I'll never forget the one and only time that Pat and I went to hear him in Chicago on the campus of Wheaton College. I walked way after the first session, and this is what I said. "I've never heard anyone who thinks God's thoughts after him like that man. That man has been in the word of God."

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I regret that I was not here for the Steve Green concerts, but every time Steve Green hits this campus, we usually have about 15 minutes together and I always tell him, "Steve, I can tell you've grown in grace since you were here last time." The guy's in the word. It just comes through in his music. He will not sing music that is not biblically, theologically oriented. I remember when he told me how there were those who pressured him and said, "Steve, you got to move into the new realm. You're singing this old stuff." He said, "I don't care what they say. They may not buy my records. They may not buy my disc. They may not want any of my music. All I know is I have to sing music that is true to the word of God and that glorifies God." Bill Gothard, Steve Green, somehow for all of us, there needs to come this kind of commitment that I am going to be disciplined in the word of God.

Paul H. Dixon:

Dawson Trotman, if he ever left you, if you were working on a street meeting, on a street corner, if you were in his home, his motto was, "God's word the last word." You wouldn't leave Dawson Trotman with a, "See you later" or a "Goodbye." It was always a verse of scripture. The last thing you ever exchanged was the word of God. He and his wife had a practice that when they went to bed at night, the last thing they said to one another was not, "I love you," but a verse of scripture. The word of God. Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest work that you and I will devote our lives to is discipleship. The demands of upon us are great to be holy, to be humble, to be disciplined in the word of God. May God help us to undertake this task with His strength and for His glory, and have a great day.