

**The church would be better off if Christians were less impressed.**

“I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me; 13 you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. 14 You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

15 Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? 17 They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. 18 But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner — and not just when I am with you. 19 My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. 20 I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don’t know what to do about you.” -- **Galatians 4:12-20** (CSB)

**The church would be better off if Christians were less impressed.**

As we had an opportunity to get away this week, not be surrounded by projects to complete at the house, I had extra time to look out the window and think about God... but also the prevalence of media and our inability, seemingly, to escape it.

Specifically how it pertains to how we think about issues, how we face life that is right before us, and where some of our silliest ideas come from! The sway certain voices can have over us... influencers.

“Ever since the creation of the World Wide Web in 1991, like-minded users have gathered together, first on web forums and bulletin boards, then on blogging sites, and more recently on social media. In the early 2000s, canny marketers started approaching influential bloggers and forum moderators, asking them to promote products in return for freebies, and later for cash. This process became supercharged with the founding of YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, and in 2010, Instagram – which is now most influencers’ platform of choice. Today, there is an army of influencers: social media users – mostly women – with a

large, devoted following, who give their followers access to a carefully curated version of their lives.”

“By the end of 2019, the influencer marketing industry was worth some \$8bn a year. One recent report by Insider Intelligence predicted that it would grow to \$15bn globally by the end of 2022.” The Week

Of course the church doesn't have a great track record of avoiding the systems and strategies we are surrounded by, this same influencer culture has infiltrated the church. We have our big names, our bestsellers, and the elite... usually far off but “they so get me!”

Just the right angle of a Bible next to a cappuccino and we will take in what they suggest with glee. Whether it be deconstruction, misplaced hopes, or more law to be “real.”

And since we are in an era of shaking for the church, polarization, loss of salt and light... all symptoms of a crisis of discipleship.

This is not new. In fact I think it is the very thing, on a less technological scale, that is happening in the Galatian churches. And with today's text I want us to pull back a bit and think of the relationship Paul has with the churches, the lengths to which he will go for their good and perhaps claim some of that for ourselves. That it might be our thing, what drives us.

We know the situation well. False teachers are on tour and arrived in Galatia preaching a reclaiming of the law - to be a real Christian you must embrace the Mosaic law, things like feast days, and ritual, specifically circumcision which is a new concept for Gentile believers.

The false teachers lay out a fashionable way of so-called Christianity. Not preaching the teaching of Jesus, but telling weary sinners that the way to salvation was through more work.

It is not like these people from Jerusalem are outwardly abusive. They are respected, they come from good stock, their way seems obtainable... They are the impressive Christians looking for more followers - wanting to be pursued.

Paul is different. And I think if we take a break from a lot of the noise of our day, we will see we need more Pauls.

## **Be Discipled by Someone Willing to Die**

Let's define our terms; what do I mean by discipled? What is a disciple?

Merriam Webster "one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another."

"In Christianity, disciple primarily refers to a dedicated follower of Jesus. In the ancient world, a disciple is a follower or adherent of a teacher. It is not the same as being a student in the modern sense. A disciple in the ancient biblical world actively imitated both the life and teaching of the master.[1] It was a deliberate apprenticeship which made the fully formed disciple a living copy of the master."

So a disciple is a follower of Jesus who makes more followers... This is Paul. He says elsewhere "imitate me as I imitate Christ." The mission of all disciples.

Paul wasn't unlike these Judiazers. He once was a Pharisee, good at keeping the law and quick to attack the Way of Jesus.

But Jesus met him and everything changed for Paul.

The mission from Jesus comes through Ananias, a disciple in Damascus.

"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." -- **Acts 9:15-16** (CSB)

So Paul has a mandate from Jesus to preach the gospel - the good news of salvation by the work of Jesus for us. And Paul gives his whole life to it.

But he recognizes he is not alone in the work.

"The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. 11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of

ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head — Christ.” -- **Ephesians 4:10-15** (CSB)

So it is the work of the church - empowered by the Spirit - to bring disciples to maturity in Christlikeness. This is why Paul has made his journeys, to preach and establish churches that send out more to further reaches preaching Jesus.

But it wasn't always easy going. Paul faced beatings, banishments, and near-misses where he barely escaped with his life. And that colored his ministry. He is the weak, unimpressive, leather worker with a message of hope and freedom from sin and death.

He learned how much he would suffer for the name of Jesus! And you noticed it in his ministry and letters to the churches. Even to the Galatians, he preached the gospel because of a weakness in the flesh, a physical condition that was a trial for those under his leadership.

Yet he carries on. He doesn't shrink back, he continues to declare the truth and stand up against those that would preach lies and bondage.

This whole letter is his attempt to disciple, spiritually parent the churches back into the gospel and away from the garbage of the false teachers.

“Paul is writing this letter to them so that they will rediscover grace and not be lured by the flattery of those who are enticing them (v. 17) to believe that they can mature spiritually through more self-distinguishing observances of the law.” GTB

He stands as a living example for the church, “become like me,” come back to the freedom you had at first.

Paul's ministry reveals his willingness to give himself for these believers. He doesn't give up on them, when they go crazy he doesn't belittle or harass, he pleads, he begs them to return to the grace of Christ.

He won't water anything down - the truth is his message and he won't shift it to be more appealing. He is not interested in what the churches can do for him but what Christ can do for them.

Willing to suffer labor pains until these children in the faith reach maturity... aching to be close to them, in proximity so he could share the truth face-to-face.

This is what we should be after and I think it would be a huge remedy to the draw of influencers.

To be discipled, shown more of Jesus, by men and women willing to die to themselves, in sacrifice for others that they would grow up in Jesus trusting his grace and living in his freedom. Equipped with Kingdom values and priorities.

They don't have to be pros. I have the 'coming in weakness' down, and I will go on preaching Jesus as our One thing, but discipleship happens on the ground where you are, the truth applied in relationship. We need people willing to do that, giving themselves over to discipleship.

Because it is what we are called to.

“The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” -- **Matthew 28:16-20** (CSB)

As you go, make disciples. Not merely converts, but disciples, followers, being brought to maturity in Christ, protected from false teachers, unimpressed with production but awed by reliance on Christ.

Who do you have that says “become like me?” Imitate me as I imitate Christ? May the Lord give us more disciplers and less influencers.

And he might just do it by you becoming willing to die to self.

## **Be Willing to Die for Those You Disciple**

If it is the commission we all do it. It is the strategy for the expansion of the Kingdom, for the spreading of the Way of Jesus.

It's how that matters... “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it.” -- **Matthew 16:24-25** (CSB)

This is not untethered from discipleship but a key part of it. Learning to sacrifice in order to point others to Jesus. To give less value to my own preferences so that others will come to maturity, give of my time, my energy to witness others see Jesus more in their lives.

I wonder if we even have a category in our minds of discipleship in our lives. Who am I discipling? Sure, my kids, maybe my spouse... but the “as I go” bit, who else is being disciplined? And I wonder if our inability to have this category relates to an unwillingness to “die” for others.

What am I willing to set aside so that those around me would meet Jesus and grow in faith?

Maybe I have made a political “truth” more important than the grace of Christ. Maybe I am so stuck on my “rights” that to surrender them is anathema.

The gospel is meant to free us from the salvery to these things, slavery to self, and when we get it, we give ourselves away to it.

Back to Paul’s example.

“Although I am free from all and not anyone’s slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law. 21 To those who are without the law, like one without the law — though I am not without God’s law but under the law of Christ — to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every

possible means save some. 23 Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.” -- **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** (CSB)

Bearing with the weakness of others, spending ourselves for them, setting aside our perceived rights so they are not a stumbling block for others.

Oh that we would be up to the challenge.

Have hope, increasingly we will, because this is Christ formed in us.

That is why Paul will go to the mat for these churches. It's why he takes on labor pains for them until "Christ is formed in you." Until you so get grace that you are spreading it everywhere you go. Where your hope is settled and secure in Christ alone.

We find disciplers willing to die for us, we become disciplers that are willing to die, because Jesus died for us.

### **All Because Jesus Died for You**

“No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

17 “This is what I command you: Love one another.” -- **John 15:13-17** (CSB)

That Jesus would come while we were still sinners and give his life for us. Setting aside his rights to take on a cross we deserve. Giving his righteousness, adoption, a new mission for life, that we would take up our own crosses because he is worth sharing. Because his way is life, it is freedom, it is glorious.

That we live under the constant keeping of wave upon wave of grace for all of life. We can't stand back and just be intellectually warmed by the idea of Jesus. When we meet the real Jesus who sees all of who we are and still calls us his own, calls

us his friend, then his Kingdom is our prize, to be in his presence, living his way, taking on his light burden and easy yoke.

When we embrace his death for us, dying for others is not a weak response to difficulties, it is the fruit of His Spirit's work in our hearts. It is bearing the reflection of our King. And eventually the influencers and shiny distractions won't be impressive to us, but Jesus alone will be what makes us stare with wonder.

Jesus won't be an add-on, or a hashtag, he wants to be your all and he gave his life for it.

It's freedom, purpose, and passion to do more than pass him on. It is to become like him so others will meet him and be free, that his kingdom, his peace would go forth.

The Galatians were tempted to pursue the fame of the teachers and their false claims, but Paul goes on inviting; begging them back to Christ and his grace.

We can be tempted to pursue the same teachers in our day, neglecting one another, but as Christ is formed in us we will have a settled assurance that this is the life for us.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is what Paul has to offer. He is our hope. And we are better off because of it.

*“Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.”*  
Acts 25:19

*A Certain Jesus* - Matt Pilgrim

“There is a certain Jesus  
Who bleeds controversy,  
Who chills men to their bones  
With His wrath and His mercy.



A certain Jesus quite distinct  
From all the imitations  
Who please our eyes and ears  
But will never rule the nations.

For this certain Jesus  
Has a Shepherd's way  
Of using the tiniest stones  
To make giant's legs sway

He walks the straight and narrow road  
Between truth and grace  
Never straying from the perfection  
All others merely chase.

And you say this certain Jesus  
Is one you'd like to find?  
Perhaps He is the King toward whom  
every heart is inclined.

Well, you won't find him in the places  
You've been told to look,  
He's not preaching on a stage somewhere  
Or writing His next book.

He's not meditating on a mountain top  
He's not sending sons to war.  
His name's not on your next ballot  
Or a corner office door.

No, this particular Jesus,  
The one you hope to meet,  
Is more likely to be found out back  
Scrubbing dirty feet.

He loves the smoky, musty air  
Of upper rooms filled to bursting  
With sweat-soaked, foul-mouthed fishermen

For life and glory thirsting.

And if you can't find Him there  
To the open road He'll have fled  
Having chosen the life of the pilgrim -  
Noplace to lay His head.

After all, He came as a servant,  
The plan from the beginning,  
Putting his life and privilege in hands  
That never could stop sinning.

Foolish. Even reckless, you say?  
Well, take it up with Him.  
It's He who filled and drank the cup  
Of wrath filled to the brim.

Now there's a certain Jesus  
Worth investigating a bit more -  
Worth swimming to with all our might  
As he cooks fish on the shore.

A certain Jesus who stands alone  
Above and beyond the rest,  
With grace and judgement and eternity  
Beating in his chest."

May Christ be formed in us. He is our blessing. Worth it all.