



Pastor's Update

And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach (Mk. 3:14).

Last Sunday in our (ZOOM) evening service, we commenced a series of studies on Discipleship. We are using the book "4 Chair Discipling: Growing a Movement of Disciple-Makers", as a guide for our studies. Each study will consist of a simple structure as follows. The first twenty minutes or so, I will give a summary of one chapter of the Book. We will then unmute ZOOM for a period of discussion and then close in prayer. Lord willing, we will conclude this series of studies on December 5, 2021.

During our discussion last Sunday, someone asked a question relating to evangelism and discipleship. "What is the difference between evangelism and discipleship?" I trust that the response which I offered was satisfactory. Nevertheless, I thought it would be useful if in this week's update, we would clarify the distinction of the two terms, evangelism and discipleship.

Let us begin with a definition of each of the two words. The words "evangelism" and "gospel" are derived from the same Greek root, euangelion, which means "good news" or "gospel." The gospel then is the good news of God's provision of salvation for the world through Jesus Christ. Evangelism means the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ through various means. An evangelist is a person who proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The second term which concerns us is "discipleship." The English word disciple is a transcription of the Latin word discipulus, which means "learner." The Greek word which you will find in the New Testament, since the New Testament was written in Greek, is the word mathetes meaning "learner." Now, where there is a learner there is also a teacher. A disciple then is a person who follows one's teaching. A disciple is not merely a pupil, but an adherent; they are imitators of their teacher (see Jn. 8:31; 15:18).

When we consider the definitions above, we can discern the primary distinction between evangelism and discipleship. While the main thrust of evangelism is proclaiming the gospel, discipleship however, involves teaching about the person and work of Jesus Christ. In other words, whereas Evangelism focuses on the salvation of souls, the goal of discipleship is the training of a person to follow Jesus Christ so that they might become more like Him. The upshot of all this is that discipleship requires a longer, sustained period of time than does evangelism. In fact, an evangelist may never come in contact with the person he/she evangelizes, as in the case of "Mass Evangelism." But the matter of discipleship is very different. Discipleship involves pupil and student spending face-to-face time together. Jesus spent three years with his disciples.

We can illustrate the distinction between evangelism and discipleship through the Billy Graham Crusade. The famous evangelist Billy Graham (1918-2018), as is well known, proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to millions across the world. Many gathered to listen to him in stadiums, arenas, on the radio and television. At the end of these meetings, the magnetic evangelist would call people to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. This was known as the "Altar Call." Many responded. But this was only part of the strategy of the Crusade. Among the attendees at these crusades were ushers, believers from various churches who were trained to do personal evangelism. These trained ushers were responsible for identifying those who responded to the Altar Call and collecting their personal information such as name and address so that they could direct these "new believers" to local churches. The purpose of this was to connect these "new converts" with a local church where they can be discipled. That in a nutshell was the essence of the Billy Graham Crusade. Those who were present in the massive crowds at these crusades never met the celebrated evangelist personally. For he was involved in Evangelizing them from a distance. The responsibility of discipling these "new converts" fell upon the local churches."

To sum up, evangelism and discipleship are two distinct aspects of ministry. While evangelism focuses on the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost and may be a one-time meeting between two people who can be strangers; discipleship is a process involving a believer who is trained by another believer to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord.

By God's Grace and for His glory,

Pr. Francis