

The Practice of Learning the Bible

a sermon in the series

The Apprentice: An Analysis of What it Means to be a Disciple

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Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

The first condition required to be a disciple of Jesus is the denial of self. Our Lord says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself.” Two weeks ago on Sunday evening I brought a message titled, *The Doctrine of Self*, explaining self-denial. I also explained it in the beginning of this series on discipleship several months ago.

When dealing with self you must remember that the self is not flesh. Self contains flesh but self and flesh are not synonyms. Self can be easily defined as simply—you, your-self. You are your-self. It is the whole you; it is another way of speaking of your person or soul. This is the way Jesus defines self. Therefore to deny yourself is to mean to deny yourself the right to trust in you so that you can solely trust Jesus with your life. You are no longer the director of your life, Jesus is.

That’s not always easy to do because there is something about self, that is, something about you and me, that thinks we know what is best for ourselves. For example, how many students listening to me have had the experience that you think you know better than mom and dad what it means to be cool. You are absolutely sure that mom and dad are far behind in the cool department and you know what’s best.

But it’s not just teenagers and children that have this affliction of believing they know what’s best for them. Oh no, parents are afflicted also. How many of you have had the repeated experience that you knew better than the boss on what needed to be done. What’s frightening is that a few of you are the boss. You second-guess yourself; therefore, it’s even easier to second-guess authority.

How often I have heard someone say, “I don’t care what that doctor said. I know what is wrong with me and I know what I need to do.” That’s incredible to me. Here is someone who never did pre-med, or medical school, or a residency and yet they are so proficient in diagnosing diseases; even better than a professional. Amazing!

I know quite well this experience. I know that right now I am preaching to a room full of experts who know exactly what this church should be doing and how to do it. It is the nature of self to

rely on self, it's built into every one of you, but if you are to be a true disciple of Jesus you have to know how to deny yourself the right to rely upon yourself so that you may be able to rely in full confidence on Jesus. In other words, you have to trust Christ with you, *self*. It is as we said last week, offering yourself to God as a signed blank check, saying, "Whatever is good to You, so be it."

Last Sunday evening I demonstrated from Ephesians 5:18 that the only way you can deny yourself and bring yourself under the submission of Christ is to be filled by the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is the representative of Jesus. It is He who dwells within, and as He dwells in you He is the life of Christ in you. When the Apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," he means for us to know that Christ is in us by the person of the Holy Spirit. And it is to the Spirit to whom we submit ourselves. He is our Advocate. It is He who will guide us and be to us as Christ was to the disciples on earth.

How are we to be filled by the Spirit? I answered this last Sunday evening in the message on the command to "not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." Paul is not saying we are to be filled with the Spirit, meaning content, like you pour water into a glass, but we are to be filled by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who does the filling. That's the actual construction of that sentence. We are to be under the influence of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who is to be filling you. And as there are different degrees of the influence of wine, depending on how much of it you drink, there are different degrees of the Spirit's influence, depending how much you trust Him and surrender to Him. To the degree you bring yourself under His leadership that's how much the Spirit will influence you.

The question is what is He filling us with? The answer is in the book of Ephesians. He's filling you with the fullness of God in and through the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Spirit is the One who is Jesus in us and to the degree we submit to the Holy Spirit you are submitting to Christ. That is the content with which He influences us. He is influencing you with the very life of Christ, which perfectly fulfills the Vine and branch metaphor that Jesus gives us in John 15. We'll talk more about that in a few moments.

Today, I want to continue talking about spiritual disciplines that a disciple practices in order to be like Jesus. You will never be like Jesus or live on this earth like Him unless you do the same things He did. Jesus said that.

What did Jesus do? He fasted, prayed, served, and worshipped, but today I want to answer the question about Jesus and learning Scripture by approaching it from this question: how does the Spirit of Jesus fill us or influence us with the fullness of God in the person of Christ so that we live like Him?

To answer that question, I want to direct your attention to:

I. An Amazing Similarity

When you compare the context of Colossians 3:16 with Ephesians 5:18-19 you see an amazing similarity. The two epistles were written at the same time by the Apostle Paul, delivered by the same man to cities in the same region about 20 miles from each other. Paul wanted to say some of the same things to each church. Starting from Ephesians 4-6 and Colossians 3-4 you see this amazing similarity: different verses written almost word for word like the other.

A. The Context of Each Verse.

1. *Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."*

compared with:

Ephesians 5:20, "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. *Colossians 3:18, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."*

compared with:

Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

3. *Colossians 3:19, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."*

compared with:

Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,"

4. *Colossians 3:20, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."*

compared with:

Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

I could do this all the way through the chapters but I think you get the point. Let's now go back to our text and Ephesians 5:18-19:

Ephesians 5:18-19, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,"

compared with:

Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

It doesn't take much intelligence to understand that verse 19 of Ephesians 5 is almost word for word the same as the last half of Colossians 3:16. But it also doesn't take much intelligence to notice that verse 18 of Ephesians 5 and the first half of Colossians 3:16 are nothing like each other. There is no similarity at all.

B. A Right Conclusion.

Having said that, however, I say to you there is no change of message here. There is no difference. "Being filled by the Spirit" is equal to letting "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

I learned as a young child growing up that the Bible is its own best commentary. The more you read Scriptures the more you see how the Bible will answer many of its own difficulties. Here is one of those examples. In Colossians 3:16 Paul is explaining what he means when he tells the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit. He's actually telling you how the Holy Spirit fills or influences us. Paul contrasted the influence of wine with the Holy Spirit's influence: you must be strongly influenced by the Spirit. But how does the Spirit do this? He does it by you obeying this one command, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Yes, these are commands and the conclusion is that to be filled by the Spirit is not necessarily a sensational or supernatural experience. Rather, it is an willful act of obedience.

I would not minimize any experience either you or I have had where we've experienced the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. God is a God to be experienced. But the problem today, especially in American Christianity, is making our experiences the standard. There are those who have had an experience with the Spirit of God and have made that experience, whether it's a gift or manifestation, the pattern of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's no surprise that many true Christians have been caught up in this trap seeking these kinds of experiences because most American churches do not have the activity of the Holy Spirit. All the time I hear people who have visited churches say they're as dead as a doornail and that there is no life in them.

Every true Christian is hungry for God, they want an experience with God and along comes someone who seems to have an answer for the hunger in their soul and they get caught up in that and before they know it they too are seeking the same experiences. Listen to me, I'm thankful for the experiences God grants us but Paul does not tie being influenced by the Spirit of God to an experience or emotion. You may not feel the influence of the Spirit and be perfectly filled and directed by Him. The question is are you obeying this command to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly? If you are, let no one dispute that you are led, guided, and filled by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter what gifts you do or do not have, if you are doing this command be assured it is what it means to be filled with the Spirit. How can I say that? Because the contexts are identical! Paul says when you are filled with the Spirit you will begin to speak to one another

in songs and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord in your hearts. He says the exact same thing in both epistles. Both things have the same result, therefore it has to be the same thing.

II. The Holy Spirit Fills Us With His Influence By the Means of the Word of Christ

A. The Spirit of God Influences With the Word of God.

How does God direct us, lead us? By the Word of Christ. This does not mean God never gives us personal, subjective experiences where He gives guidance. But I am stating the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God. This will disappoint some of you because you would rather God do the work for you. In your opinion it would be easier if the Holy Spirit just robotically took over and we always did what He wanted us to do no questions asked. But He doesn't do that. Demonic spirits will do that, but not the Holy Spirit. Because you are created in the image of God He wants you to be like Him and make choices. He wants you to choose to love and obey Him and deny yourself and submit to Him. Therefore, the Spirit of God influences you and does not kidnap your will. And He influences you with the Word of God. This is exactly what Jesus promised the Holy Spirit's function in our lives would be.

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;"

How do you know the Spirit is leading you? He's directing you into the Word of God and the Word of God is being illuminated to your understanding. You're getting it and perceiving it, not perfectly, but it's happening. He's directing you into what? Emotions? Experiences? No. He guides us into the truth by the Truth. Jesus continues:

"... for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."
(John 16:13-14)

In other words, Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit is going to do exactly the same thing that Jesus did while He was here on this earth. What did Jesus do? He listened to His Father and whatever the Father said that's what He did. The Holy Spirit has been given to us, which is the life of Christ in you, and He is now going to be listening to the Lord Jesus Christ and He is going to speak everything the Lord Jesus Christ says. You and I will be led and directed by Christ in this way. This is exactly what Jesus prophesied.

B. The Life of Christ is Bound Up in the Words Christ.

If you are to know the activity of Jesus in your life you must know your Bible. There is no other way around it. This is why I said many of us are not experiencing the activity of God because we want God to zap us so we have this experience of feeling the Spirit and therefore we are made

to do the right thing. God says, “No way, I will not do that. That will keep you stunted and you will not grow and it will not be able to be said of you, ‘As Christ was on this earth so were you.’” Jesus listened to every word the Father spoke. He kept his ears tuned. How did He do that? Two ways. By knowing the Scriptures and listening to the Spirit illuminate those Scriptures, the same way it’s to happen to you and me.

Jesus connects His spiritual life with the vitality of His teachings. He said, “My words are spirit and they are life.” John begins his gospel not as the other gospels. He says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” What does that word *Word* mean? It’s the Greek word *logos*, which means, *the spoken revelation of God*. Before the second person of the Godhead became a man, Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God spoke the will of the Father into existence. For example, God the Father created the heavens and the earth. How did He do it? He spoke it! He spoke it through the Logos, through the spoken revelation of God. The Spirit of God put into action the words of the second person of the Godhead. He still works the same way. His words are spirit and they are life.

Listen to these conclusive words and how He says them:

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” (John 15:4)

We know this verse quite well. Jesus is the Vine, we’re the branches, His life is to be in us and we are to abide, remain, dwell in Him. But notice how He says the exact same thing in a different way,

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” (John 15:7)

He doesn’t say in verse 7, “If you abide in Me, and I abide in you...” which He could have said and it would have been accurate. Jesus is making a point to these disciples that the way they remain in Christ is by allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in them richly. The Word of God has to be active in my life if Christ is to be active in me. This is how you abide. This is how you’re filled with the Spirit. This is how you experience the relationship you have with God. It’s all through the Word of Jesus Christ.

C. The Word Must Have Ownership of Us.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)

Let’s look at the word *dwell*? It comes from a word that simply means to be at home. In other words, to let the word of Christ dwell in you means to let the word of Jesus have ownership and not just occupancy.

All of the bedrooms at our house are filled up. There are no vacancies. But if we were to have a vacancy and you needed a place to stay you would be most welcome. But if you were to stay with us you would be occupying not owning. What Paul is saying is that you are not to treat the Word of God like a guest. The Spirit of Christ in you is not a guest. He's come to take ownership. He is to have His way with you. He can go into the kitchen and into your cupboards; He can snoop around in the closets and go down in the basement or up into the attic to see what you've hidden away. Why? Because it belongs to Him. You are His. He bought you with a price, a price so high that if you could understand it you would never dare contradict Him again.

Therefore we must not only know the Bible but know it abundantly.

Paul uses the word *richly*. You must have a good working knowledge of Scripture. The Holy Spirit takes the truth we know and influences our lives with that truth. He can only do so to the extent to which you know the truth, the Word.

I have bad news and good news. The bad news first. The bad news is that He will not just put Scriptures into your mind that you've never read or studied. The good news is that if you have read and studied your Bibles He will use the Word all the time. This is the way He guides us. I don't need a feeling to know God is guiding me. I can know God is in control of my life by simply submitting to the Word. The life of this truth is my life, it's the life of Christ in me.

Without the internalization of the Word of God you cannot renew your mind.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

So many Christians are still thinking like the old man that has been crucified because they have not redeveloped, reprogrammed the mind's abilities and thought patterns. You have to do that. God will not take out the junk of your mind and insert the truth—you have to do that. That's why He says in Philippians 4 to "think on these things..." More about that in a few moments.

There is no wonder why so many of you can't remember the last time you really had an experience with God like we heard about this morning, because it's been so long since you've done with your Bibles what you should be doing. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty; I'm just stating the facts. We'll get to the good news and the hope and the grace in a few moments, right now it's time for stating the facts.

A true story about an elderly Scottish woman tells that she lived in abject poverty in her Scottish village. Several years before what I am about to relay to you took place, her son immigrated to America and had become very successful. This poor mother would never see her son again.

On the day that this story occurred a friend visited the lonely and poor mother in her very meager home. The guest asked the mother if she heard from her son, to which the woman replied that she from time to time received letters.

“Doesn’t your son ever send you money to help with your needs?” she then asked.

All the poor woman could do was shake her head in the negative and whisper ashamedly “No, but He does write me nice letters, though. And he sends me the most interesting pictures!”

The listener was quite angry with the situation because she knew this impoverished lady’s son was quite wealthy. Not wanting to criticize the son in front of his mother the visitor asked, “May I see the pictures?”

The mother walked over to a desk and pulled the pictures of a drawer. To the visitor’s astonishment, they were not pictures at all. They were expensive bank notes from America totaling thousands of dollars. For decades, the Scottish mother had been needlessly living in poverty. The problem? She did not know the value of those “interesting pictures.” She owned the bank notes, but she did not possess them.

Many of my dear brothers and sisters own Christ, He’s in you, but you don’t possess Him because you do not know the value of Christ in you. Christ is living in you but you don’t know the value of His life within because you don’t know the Word of God. The only way you’re going to know the value of Christ is by reading about Him and through this Word you understand how you are to interact with Him and follow Him.

“Christians must realize that just as a fire cannot blaze without fuel, so burning hearts are not kindled by brainless heads. We must not be content to have zeal without knowledge.” (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, p. 222)

“To be central in our hearts He must be foremost in our minds. Religious thought is the prerequisite to religious affection and obedient action,” so said R. C. Sproul.

What did Jesus say? “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, and all thy mind.” It’s both the physical and the spiritual. You can’t get by without using the brain God gave you and applying it to the understanding of Scripture?

How do you do this?

III. Developing the Disciple of Learning the Bible

As I said about prayer, I say about the Word of God. You must establish a daily time.

A. Establish a Daily Time.

I would recommend it not being late evening. If that's the only time you have, so be it. But I suggest you do not limit it to right before going to bed in the evening. Why? Because if you're like me, I don't have problems with temptation while I sleep. I don't have challenges when I sleep. The devil doesn't usually bother me while I'm unconscious. I don't need the Word of God right then. But when I get up in the morning, believe you me, I'm tempted, challenged, and come against by spiritual forces of darkness. I say you need to begin your day and establish that time where you get alone with God and soak in the Scriptures.

How often do you face challenges, temptations, and setbacks? The answer is simple—everyday. Seeing this is true, shouldn't you prepare your heart daily with the Word of God to know how to confront these menaces and tests? How often do you need instruction, guidance, and comfort? Again, the answer is everyday. And where else other than the Bible can you get these necessities? Nowhere else. God has given us all we need in the Scriptures for our soul's consolation, our mind's ease, and our emotion's comfort. And how often do you need the voice of God and His blessing? How often do you need an encounter with the living God as you live in pursuit of His will in a world that is contrary to His will? Everyday and all day long. Then in light of these facts, why the daily neglect of the Bible? Why do you think you can get enough grace here in one or two sermons to last you your entire week?

What if you approached food in the same way? Could you get enough to sustain you if you ate only one meal every week? No more can you live that way physically can you live that way spiritually. You cannot get enough grace in one sitting to last an entire week. Your spirit is not like a camel that can go weeks without water. Daily you need fresh infusions of truth to sustain you.

Set a time to do this daily and regularly.

B. Meditation of Scripture.

You need not only read your Bibles but also meditate on them. Meditation on Scripture is an absolute must. What is meditation? It's when you take a truth of Scripture and you look at it from different angles. Some call it musing, some call it mulling it over or turning it over in the mind. It's like a microscope where you examine a verse or passage close up and far away and try to get out of it all there is. I don't chew gum very much but when I do, I don't chew it for very long. I chew until I get all the sugar out and then I spit it out. That's what meditation is. You keep chewing until you get everything you can possibly get out of it and then you go on.

Thomas Watson, the great Puritan, said, "The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is, because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation."

Don't just read your Bibles. There's no magic in just reading. The power is in thinking and pondering it through meditation. Most of you know what God told Joshua when He said if he would meditate on the Word of God he would be successful. "The book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do all that is

written in it.” God is saying to Joshua if he will meditate in the Scriptures he will end up obeying them. If you will think about what you are reading you will be more likely to obey what you read. Then God promises success, “Then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.”

Of course we all know about the godly man of Psalm 1 whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in that law he meditates day and night. All day long he is thinking about the Word of God, consciously and unconsciously. If you get the Word of God into your spirit it is working under the radar whether you realize it or not. What happened to the man from Psalm 1? Like Joshua, he encountered success, “He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” Why does success come? Because the more you know God’s Word the more you know God’s ways.

C. Scripture Memorization.

Some of you are arguing inside saying it’s not necessary to memorize Scripture. I want to beg to differ with your disagreement. Here we come back to Jesus. This has come full circle. This is all about being His disciple. Do you know that Jesus memorized Scripture? The very One who wrote it memorized it. You say that He got a head start because He wrote it, but Jesus as a *man*, with finite mental abilities, hid the Word of God in His heart. I know that to be true because the whole education system for Jewish boys was based in the Synagogue memorizing Scriptures.

I know it as well because we see Him as a man at thirty fasting and praying 40 days and 40 nights and the devil comes to Him to tempt Him. What does Jesus do? He quotes Scripture. He was all the time quoting it. He had to know it because He didn’t carry a scroll in His back pocket. He didn’t have the luxury of pulling out a Bible or smartphone and looking up a verse within 15 seconds. And all the time His enemies the Pharisees were coming and twisting Scripture and He would have to say, “No, no, no, you misquoted it, the Scriptures really say *this*.” How did He do that? Because as a man, not as God but as a *man* He did the hard work of Scripture memorization. I know it’s hard. I once memorized half the book of Romans. It took me a few short months to do it and I was quite happy I had done it, in fact a little proud that I had gotten it under my belt and learned it well. A few months went by and I didn’t review the chapters and I lost all that I memorized. It is hard work. If you don’t use it you lose it. We have to be “disciplined” about this, but isn’t that what the word *disciple* mean, a *disciplined one*?

I’m pleased to announce that in order to help us memorize Scripture that RTM has created an app for you, a Scripture memorization app that will be on your smartphones. If you don’t have a smartphone it will be in the bulletin each week. We’re getting ready to release the Apple version of the app hopefully next week, and for those of you with Android based phones, we’ll have an Android version soon. Right now we’re waiting for Apple to approve the app. It’s called *Disciples Academy Verses*, part of the ministry of Disciples Academy from Real Truth Matters. It will be based on memorizing one Scripture per week. That’s all you’ve to do. You can carry it with you on your smartphone, open that app up and there it is. Every four weeks you’ll be reviewing the

three weeks prior so that you don't lose it. We need to start hiding God's Word in our hearts if we're going to be like Jesus.

Jesus memorized Scripture. He knew what had been written about Him. How could He have survived if He had not done so? Think about it. How could our Lord have survived the cruelty of men and their twisted, demented torture without it? How did He survive the Father's indignation and wrath? He survived because He knew what the Scriptures said about Him and He knew that the Father had a reward for Him. He kept the recompense of that reward before Him at all times so that what was written about Him would be true about Him.

Beloved, whether you're a saint or sinner, I address all of us. Your eternal salvation hung in heaven's pendulum based upon how effectively Jesus had hidden the Word of God in His heart. There was a moment when He hung on that cross for you, bleeding profusely, His life flowing out of His wounds, when the Father God Almighty turned His back on Jesus and rejected Him leaving Him to hang there all alone. Alone. What kept Him strong when He didn't even have His Father to turn to? The answer, the Scriptures tucked away in His broken heart. The Scripture He had hidden in His heart sustained Him. He remembered what was written of Him and for the joy set before Him endured the cross. He knew if He submitted to what was written about Him what was written about Him would be true.

Do you realize that your life, your hope of heaven is based upon Jesus remembering Scripture and clinging to it, trusting it when His Father turned His face away? How much more important is it for us who have no deity about us to have the Word of God in our hearts? You need to know what this Book says about you so it can be true what is written about you. If you don't know the blessing and power that God has already given to you and bequeathed to you, you will walk in constant defeat. Your sins will dog your heels; you will seem to grow little, because you don't know what's been written about you.

You mean it's just that simple? Just read and think about and memorize the Word? On the authority of this Book I say: absolutely. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom! That's how the Holy Spirit will fill you, influence you and guide you into the victory that is already yours because you learned the Book and put it into practice trusting the Author, who is the Spirit of God in you. Then it will become true what is already written about you.

How can you be saved today if you don't know Christ? You believe what's been written about you, that you're a sinner and there's no way you can get into heaven without God. You cannot be good enough or religious enough. You can preach sermons and do what I did, pastor churches, all the while not being a true Christian, but that didn't get me to heaven and neither will it you. You have to believe what God has said. But how do you know what He has said? I'll tell you what He said concerning you.

The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-10)

If you believe that right now the power of that truth can work in your heart as you trust it and submit to it.

Christian, it's no different for us. It's the same principle that happened to you the day you were converted, you just continue the way you started, giving yourself to the influence of the Spirit by hiding this Book in your heart and letting God influence you through that Word. May God help us to do that. Amen.