

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

Our Anabaptist forefathers were deeply concerned about the restoration of a church that would parallel the first century church. They aimed at purging the errors and accumulation of traditions of the past. They desired to embrace the New Testament pattern, bringing the church back to the principles, structures, and life of the first century church. The records of that time give evidence that they succeeded in this goal.

At the heart of the Anabaptist movement stood the concept of discipleship. Dr. Harold Bender has said: "First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship . . . The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship" (Guy F. Hershberger, ed., The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, pp. 42-43).

This dynamic expression of Christianity by the Anabaptists in a life of discipleship lasted approximately 50 years. Then slowly, but surely, as they moved into traditional patterns and came to be tolerated by the world, the dynamic was lost and discipleship changed to a formal routine, and ultimately, in many instances to a deadening legalism.

It was out of such a spiritually sterile condition that the founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church moved. Again there was the desire to follow the New Testament pattern, to experience the reality and power of the life of discipleship as demonstrated in the first century church. For this we are grateful.

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It is, however, the tendency of any spiritual movement to go in the direction of traditionalism--legalism--deadness. Therefore, it is important for each generation of believers to come to grips with the fundamental principles of discipleship, to test the traditions of the past in the light of these principles, and then to make application of these principles to the present situation.

This is never an easy task. The application of the principles of discipleship usually take the form of rules, either implied or written. These rules, over a period of time, tend to become the core of tradition. Tradition, in turn, has a way of becoming more dominant than the principles from which they evolved. Thus the rules relating to the principles of discipleship tend to take the place of the principles themselves, and to become a legalistic bondage that makes radiant, productive Christian living difficult. So we need to check traditions--these applications, or rules--regularly, seriously, and relentlessly, in the light of the basic principles of discipleship as revealed in God's Word, especially in the New Testament.

I. The Principle of Commitment to Jesus as Lord

A. The Principle Explained

The word "disciple" is found about 250 times in the Gospels and in Acts. There are references to disciples of John (John 1:35), and to the disciples of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15,16). In these instances the word is used in its simple, basic meaning--a learner, a person who learns the teachings of a man or a group and accepts these teachings as a guide for his life.

In the great majority of instances the word "disciple" is used of the followers of Jesus. Sometimes the word is used in a general sense. We have an example of this in John 6. Here the multitudes who followed Jesus, the popular teacher and healer, are called disciples. Many of them, however, were disciples only in name, for when Jesus began to teach them what it really meant to follow Him, there was strong reaction from them. They said, "This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such words?" And as a result, "From that time on, many of his disciples withdrew and no longer went about with him" (John 6:60,66 NEB).

The word "disciple" is usually used in a more specific sense. It refers to those who honestly committed themselves to Jesus Christ and seriously sought to follow him in response to his call. Here it was much more than the relationship of a pupil to a teacher. It was more than accepting some teachings of Jesus as a way of life. It was a vital person to person relationship in which the very spirit and life of the Lord Jesus became a part of the heart, life, and mind of his followers. It was an identification with him in his life and in his death.

The meaning of the word "disciple" thus leads us to the first principle of discipleship, namely, commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

These words of Jesus indicate that there are a number of aspects to committing oneself to Jesus as Lord. "Let him deny himself." Phillips translates it this way: "He must give up all right to himself." It is an identification with Christ in His death. It is death to the "I" on the throne of life, to my own will, ambitions and plans.

This commitment also means taking up my cross daily. The "cross" does not refer to the troubles and trials which we share in common with the human race. It means commitment to the will of the Lord and the "veneration, persecution, self-sacrifice, suffering, even unto death" which may be involved in doing that will.

Then Jesus said, "Follow me (that is, cleave steadfastly to me, conform wholly to my example, in living and if need be in dying also)" (Amplified).

Thus discipleship means putting aside all personal ambitions, plans, and concerns, committing oneself daily to Jesus as Lord, to do his will, and to fulfill his purpose for me. It means that this commitment takes precedence over all other relationships.

In Luke 9:57-62 this truth is presented in a series of contacts that Jesus has on his last journey to Jerusalem. One man came to Jesus and volunteered to follow him. Jesus told him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

What did Jesus mean by such an answer? He was saying that following him would mean having the same attitude toward material possessions as he had--one of detachment from them. It meant that no earthly thing held him back from freely, joyously, and fully doing the Father's will. That is what it must also mean for us. Commitment to Jesus takes precedence over houses and lands, over bank accounts, and all other temporal, earthly things.

Another man whom Jesus met on this journey was challenged with the words, "Follow me." The response of this man was, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." He did not mean by this that his father was dead or even about to die. It was a statement to express devotion and

attachment to his father. He meant, "I don't want to leave home." The answer of Jesus was very emphatic, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Here Jesus makes clear that even the closest and most tender of human ties must take a secondary place to his claims and commands. It is put very strongly by Jesus in another instance. He says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

A third man also was a volunteer. He said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." The Lord's answer was sharp, clear! "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

What Jesus here declared was something he himself pursued. Jesus had steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) to die. He had put his hand to the plow and was not looking back. It was the will of the Father for him to go this way. It was Jesus' commitment to do the will of the Father that steadfastly held him on this way.

"So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

B. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

Principles must be applied to daily living if discipleship is to be meaningful. However, one of the problems we face in such applications is that of equating traditional patterns of behavior with the lordship of Christ. For instance, if I go to church regularly, learn to give right answers to certain questions that may be asked at the time of baptism, and faithfully follow the do's and don'ts I have been taught, then I manifest the lordship of Christ.

It certainly is true that committing oneself to Jesus as Lord may include the above things, but they must never become the basis of that lordship. Jesus Christ himself must be Lord because discipleship is not primarily following a set of rules but following Jesus Christ.

A biblical example of the problems of equating, or even substituting traditional patterns for the rulership of the Lord, is given in Matt. 15:1-20. Here Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes that they were making void the word of God for the sake of their tradition. We are not exempt from such dangers.

What then can be done in an honest effort to apply this principle to our lives? Let me suggest a few things.

1. Meaningful, personal fellowship with the Lord through serious devotional Bible study and committed prayer. It is here that the way of obedience will be made clear and the power to go steadfastly forward will be generated.

2. Participation in the life and work of a church where sound Biblical teaching and preaching is the rule. Subjecting our personal concepts to the insights of others in a fellowship of believers will guard our commitment to Jesus as Lord from degenerating into mere individualism.

3. Recognizing that the Lord is able to guide and keep each true follower of his. We need to refrain from the temptation of judging those who do not see eye to eye with us on all details, or who do not become identified with our particular group of believers. Peter, when given a specific commission by Jesus after his resurrection, turned to John and said, "Lord, what about this man?" So we are inclined to judge the lordship of Christ in another man's life by what it means and involves in our

own. Jesus' words apply to us as well as Peter: "What is that to you? Follow me!" (John 21:21,22). In the questions of Christian liberty Paul discusses in Romans 14, the attitude toward fellow believers expressed there applies also in this relationship. "They are God's servants, not yours. Let him tell them what to do. They are responsible to God, not you, and God will help them do what is right" (Rom. 14:4 LL).

II. The Principle of Commitment to a Body of Believers

A. The Principle Explained

Discipleship is a personal matter, and in a very real sense something that can happen only between the Lord and the individual. He calls the individual and the individual must respond. However, the life of discipleship is not lived in isolation. There are others who are disciples, and as they hand together for worship, fellowship, and service, they constitute a local church, a visible body of believers. If the life of discipleship is to function adequately it must find a sphere of interaction in such a body. Therefore, any believer concerned about the life of discipleship will not only commit himself to the Lord Jesus but also to a visible body of believers.

One passage of Scripture presenting this truth is Eph. 4:1-16.

We quote in part:

"God gave a special gift to each one of us, in proportion to what Christ has given. It was he who gave gifts to men: he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service; to build up the body of Christ. And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature men, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature . . . Instead, by

speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love" (v. 7,11-16).

Such a commitment to a body of believers means the honest recognition of the need one has for the fellowship of such a body--for the help, strength, and understanding it provides. It means participation in the responsibilities of that body--sharing in the mutual encouragement, exhortation, and witness of such a body. It means the exercise of the spiritual gifts each member of the body has been given for the building up of that body. It means participating in the discipline such a body exercises, both in administering it and receiving it.

It was this kind of commitment to a brotherhood that constituted a vital part of the dynamics of the Anabaptist movement. Robert Friedmann makes a penetrating comment on this matter in some notes and discussions "On Mennonite Historiography, and on Individualism and Brotherhood" (The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XVIII, No. 2, p. 121).

It is neither collectivism nor individualism (in the sense of independence), nor is it "mere" fellowship, that constitutes the Anabaptist Gemeinden as well as the later Mennonite groups. I would call it essential fellowship, something which to a certain extent might be compared with family relations where the "I" and the "we" supplement each other. It is a group life, individual and free (as far as conscience is concerned), and yet of a kind of self-commitment (underlining mine) which by far surpasses all sorts of pious co-devotion. And above all, it lets one forget this much advertised individualism, be it that of men's conscience or that of man's independence. In living with the brother, one does not care so much for this kind of freedom (from coercion by the group) which as a negative concept cannot be viewed as the final value of life.

7. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

It is possible in committing oneself to a body of believers, to come under an authoritarian type of leadership that allows little room for the Holy Spirit to work freely in and through that body. A leadership committed basically to the perpetuation of tradition will be authoritarian and hinder the experience of a true life of discipleship. A leadership honestly committed to the Lord will heed the words of Peter. "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:2,3).

Another difficulty one may face here relates to group decisions in matters of conduct not clearly dealt with in the Scriptures. Such decisions need to be made for the guidance and help of the members of the group, but they ought not to be invested with authority equal to the Scriptures. Sometimes we deal with infractions of these man-made rules more severely than we do with disobedience to clear Scripture teachings. For instance, we may discipline a person who smokes, but leave untouched a person who is contentious and unforgiving toward a brother.

What then, are some of the things that will help us in practically working out this principle of discipleship?

1. A vital concern for adequate leadership in our local churches. This is not taken care of automatically. It is not decided merely by the casting of ballots for or against a man (usually on the basis of personal tastes). It comes as a result of concerned prayer for such leadership and the choosing of men under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

according to the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (I Thess. 2:4-12 is an example). Some examples of Spirit guided selection of leadership are found in Acts 6 and 13.

2. The honest effort we make at caring for each other as members of the body. No person seriously committed to a body of believers can heedlessly say, "We don't need this man or that person."

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you' . . . But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12:21, 24-27). "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24,25).

Concern for one another is shown also by the willingness to participate in the exercise of and submission to discipline.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17). "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1,2).

3. Serious participation in the finding of God's will for the life and work of the church. Good direction is given in this area in the paper Consensus and Change in Our Brotherhood, by Frank Peters.

III. The Principle of Obedience

A. The Principle Explained

"As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-20). In this account we have demonstrated another principle of discipleship. It is that of obedience to the call of Jesus. Obedience to this call related itself to a particular kind of responsibility and activity, that of being made fishers of men. Discipleship for them meant participation in the task of bringing men to Jesus-- the task of evangelism.

This responsibility of evangelism is also one which has been given to the church, and any local body of believers concerned about discipleship must seriously get involved in it. The command of the risen Christ to the church is specific: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). A parallel passage in Acts 1:8 says: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

The book of Acts is the account of the first century church living in obedience to the Great Commission. Beginning in Jerusalem and Judea, the gospel message was spread throughout the earth in the first century.

Not only were the Apostles involved in this witness, but all the believers. Those who were scattered from their normal surroundings by persecution "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

So the local church is responsible today to get its membership involved in evangelism, and to provide the training and opportunities for it. Discipleship can be meaningful only when there is a genuine involvement in obedience to the Great Commission.

B. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

An older problem relates to the separation of "home" and "foreign" missions. "Foreign" missions has been invested with a peculiar sacredness, so that money given for such missions has been considered unique in its contribution. That missions abroad must be given a place of priority in the church certainly is true because of the great needs existing in such fields. But that such separation of "home" and "foreign" missions is valid, is doubtful. Often this dichotomy has produced a feeling of satisfaction in having done our part when we have given liberally to "foreign" missions, even though we have never cared about witnessing to unsaved neighbors about Christ.

Another problem is our unwillingness to receive into our churches those of different backgrounds and cultures. Even when we do reach some of these people in the church community we hesitate to welcome them into our churches as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are afraid they may spoil our comfortable religious-culture security.

A newer problem is related to equating all religious activity with evangelism. All things, from handing out packages to needy people in the name of Christ, to participating in protest meetings and marches in regard to social concerns, are called evangelism. That such participation in the

needs and problems of the underprivileged is a valid activity for believers, and that such activity may lead to open doors for evangelism, is not to be doubted. But when such activity itself is called evangelism, we miss the mark. Evangelism has to do with the clear presentation of the saving gospel, so that a person will understand how to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and be given the opportunity to do so.

How can a local church help its members to make this principle practical?

1. By giving its members the opportunity to train and serve in the work of fishing for men. Much material is available from our denominational offices and from other sources to help the local church in this great task in its community. We simply need to get at the task and the blessings of God will be manifested.

2. The local church needs to foster, with increasing emphasis, the challenge of evangelism abroad through our missionary enterprises. A strong missionary emphasis, reflected in sacrificial giving and in the response of young people to missionary work, will characterize a local church concerned about discipleship.

IV. The Principle of Love

A. The Principle Explained

A lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matt. 22:36). Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is

like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

Again, in the intimate fellowship of the passover, Jesus told his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34,35).

This love is demonstrated in many ways. It will be expressed in love for the Lord Jesus. Certainly this includes a sense of warmth and attachment to Jesus so that we can honestly sing, "My Jesus I love thee, I know thou art mine!" But it is much more than that. It is a life of practical obedience, for Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments . . . He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; . . . If a man loves me, he will keep my word . . . He who does not love me does not keep my words" (John 14:15,21, 23,24).

Again, it will be manifested in love for fellow believers. It is this which Jesus particularly enjoins in John 13:34,35. He calls it a "new" commandment. It was not new in the sense of time, i.e. in the sense that it had not been commanded before. It was new as to form or quality. This newness was expressed in the words "as I have loved you." Thus, a new dimension had been added to the concept of love. Jesus Christ, by his coming, by his life, and by his death, demonstrated what love really meant. And this is the kind of love the disciples are commanded to have toward each other--a love marked by concern, by understanding, by endurance and forgiveness.

It will be shown in love for the world. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." If God's love is in us we too will love the world. The "world," in this instance, refers to people. This involves a compassion for them in regard to their need of salvation, whether they live next door or across an ocean.

This love for the world also finds practical expression in the effort to help alleviate suffering, improve the lot of the underprivileged, sharing the burdens and concerns of people who are in need. Love seeks the welfare of all and works no ill to any. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law . . . Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8,10).

Finally this love will also be expressed to enemies. Jesus said, "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Paul says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; . . . No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19-21).

B. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

1. The concern for a genuine expression of love within our brotherhood. How many attitudes of bitterness and malice, how many expressions of judgment and destructive criticism circulate within our local churches and the larger brotherhood. It is inconsistent to testify to a non-resistant love for our enemies when we lack love for our brothers in Christ. We need to work seriously at practicing I Cor. 13 in our fellowship of believers. Ephesians 4:31,32 needs to be obeyed: "Let all

bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Where such love is obviously not practiced the church needs to exercise appropriate discipline.

2. The opportunity of expressing our love to others by doing good. Some of these opportunities are afforded us through agencies like MCC and MDS. Other acceptable avenue need to be devised so that in a day of an awakened social conscience we may find opportunities to demonstrate our love to our neighbors. We need to be careful however, that we do not equate love with tolerance of error or participation in unlawful activities to gain supposedly lawful ends.

3. The concern for non-resistant love, expressed particularly in the refusal to participate in the institution of war. For the opportunity to live in a land where such a position is recognized and where alternate forms of service are provided, we are grateful. There has been a tendency however, to become somewhat militant about our non-resistant position and to seek to impose upon a basically worldly government the principles of non-resistance. When non-resistance tends toward the direction of becoming a political stance it moves away from its only reasonable base, the experience of the love of God in our hearts through salvation, toward the contradictory position of a militant non-militant movement. We need to learn to keep non-resistant love in its proper sphere and practice.

4. The concern for keeping a balanced position in relationship to all of these aspects of love. It is possible to become concerned about non-resistant love to the exclusion of love for the brethren or love for those who need Jesus Christ as Saviour. When the part is taken for the whole we become unbalanced in our views and often extremely intolerant of others.

V. The Principle of Separation

A. The Principle Explained

When a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, he is by virtue of that fact, separated to Jesus and separated from the world. What separation to Jesus means has been pointed out under the principle of "commitment." That there is a separation from the world is made very clear in the prayer of Jesus Christ just prior to his death. He prayed, "I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14-16). This separation from the world does not mean separation from people, but from the pattern of life, attitudes and concepts that dominate people who are not dominated by the Lord. This truth is consistently maintained throughout the New Testament.

Just a few examples of this meaning of the word "world" should be given.

"And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the

prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3). "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:15,16).

Further applications on this point are found in passages like Galatians 5:16-22 and Mark 7:20-23.

What is the issue in the principle of separation from the world? The issue has to do with a basic set of mind; or values. We don't want a set of mind that approves or accepts as a matter of indifference things like adultery, drunkenness, violence, evil thoughts, disregard for law, hatred, bitterness and the multitude of other ways in which this world lives. The fact of the matter is that much of our literature, many TV programs, and the vast majority of movies are geared to give us such a set of mind. The appeal, by these avenues, is made over and over again to the aberrations of human behavior. Paul has some very specific things to say about such matters.

"Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ--assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness . . . But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named

among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no foolishness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret" (Eph. 4:17-24; 5:3-7, 11, 12).

Rather than getting the mind set of the world we need constantly to be transformed by the renewal of the mind, "we need "to set our minds on things above," we must heed the exhortation of Paul when he said, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

3. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

Now, in the life of discipleship the problem arises as to how this basic principle of separation is to be carried out in a practical way. Sometimes people have withdrawn from this kind of world. Individuals have gone into monasteries. Groups of believers have moved into sheltered communities where this world could not approach. Is that the answer? According to Jesus' prayer it is not. He said, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world." How could the disciples in any generation be the salt of the earth or the light of the world if they were not in the world?

How then can separation be practically carried out? How can a person be in the world but not of the world? How can a church help believers to find this fine balance without becoming either legalistic or permissive? Let me suggest a few ideas.

1. Stress should be placed on the basic principles of discipleship. Church rules should not be emphasized apart from these basic principles. I agree with the position taken in the paper The Church, Its Regulations and the Individual Member, by Marvin Hein, on the need for church rules. But these rules should always be related to the basic principles.

2. The disciplined life needs constant emphasis. The need for this is greater in our permissive society than it has ever been before. Often Christians clamor for more freedom to follow personal, selfish inclinations. The arguments given to pursue questionable courses of conduct in the name of realism are mainly excuses to give room for satisfying the lusts of the flesh. Jesus insisted that following him meant denial of self.

3. We need to be consistent in the application of the principle of separation. To insist that all movie going is wrong, without saying anything about TV viewing, reading, or the thought life, is inconsistent. It would be consistent to say that TV viewing, reading, thought life, and movies that appeal largely to the base desires of the old nature, are wrong and do not belong in the life of the follower of Christ. It would also follow that those things which are constructive, sensible, meaningful, in any of these areas, are acceptable. When, however, a church definitely feels that movie going, for instance, is not to be practiced

by its members, those becoming part of that church ought to abide by these convictions. The personal liberty I may feel to do something must be tempered by my concern for the whole body of believers and the weaker brother. Personal liberty must never become a bondage which makes me say, "Since I feel I have the liberty to do it, I must do it."

4. The application of the principle of separation includes more than the world of entertainment. It includes the impact of this materialistic age on the church. The self-discipline which the disciple of Jesus Christ must practice, and the discipline the church should exercise, must relate to those who are entangled in materialism as well as those entangled in the pursuit of worldly pleasure.

- Arno Wiebe