

Creekside Community Church  
*Counterfeit Christianity: Paul's Letter to the Colossians*  
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### **Disciple-making** (Col. 1:24-29)

Although I grew up in the church, I didn't understand what real Christianity was until a girl I was dating in college became a Christian and began dragging me along to some student Bible studies. As I got to know her friends, I saw the difference Christ made in their lives and eventually asked Him into my life. It wasn't until I saw the truth of the gospel fleshed out in real people the gospel became real and I think that's true for most people. All the studies show that around 85% of people who come to Christ come because of a friend or relative – somebody they know. The gospel is like a cold; it spreads through relationships, and that's always been the case. Historians tell us that the reason Christianity became the dominant faith of the Roman Empire in a little over 200 years wasn't because of its impressive apostles or it's compelling debaters; but because average Christians shared their faith with their family and community. One of the big lessons we're learning from Paul's letter to the Colossians is that the way we begin in the faith is the way we continue to grow in the faith. Just as relationships with Christians are essential in becoming a Christian, so relationships with Christians are essential in growing to maturity as a Christian. Most people need to see the truth in another person before we can understand how to apply that truth ourselves. I have a question for those of you who are Christians. Is there anyone in your life whom if you hadn't know them, you would not be as far along in the faith as you are? Is there anyone whom God used in a significant way to get you where you are? I already know the answer, because Christianity spreads through relationships. Spiritual friendships are essential for a growing faith. Every Christian needs other Christians around them for encouragement, instruction, example and correction.

That is why just before Jesus returned to heaven, He gathered His disciples to give them instructions about what they were to do now that He has completed His part in God's great plan to rescue creation and people from evil and death. Matthew 28:18-20, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Jesus is Lord of everything.) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Now that Jesus was leaving, what were His disciples supposed to do? To make more disciples of Jesus, teaching people to obey Jesus and to follow Him as Lord. What's a disciple? In that culture, there were few institutions of learning. If you wanted to learn a trade or get an education, you became an apprentice or disciple of a master, living with that master and learning until you became just like him. These guys became disciples of Jesus. They left everything to be with Him, to get to know Him and to learn to live as He lived, to pray like He prayed, to trust God like He trusted God, to embrace His mission for their life. Now Jesus tells them, what I did for you, you need to do for others. Jesus loved them, taught them, encouraged them, challenged them and corrected them and now, they are to go do for others what He did for them. Truth spreads through relationships. Now, was this command only given to Jesus' original disciples? No, because if they are to teach His other disciples to obey all He has commanded, all would include the command to make disciples, right? According to Jesus, I can't be a disciple without also being a disciple-maker. We all need to be making disciples, helping others to follow Jesus as we follow Jesus. Yet this is one of the most neglected and disobeyed commands in the Bible. Most Christians are not making disciples or helping others to grow in their faith – even though we know how critical personal attention and spiritual friendships are for spiritual health and growth. Why is that? Today as we continue to work our way through Paul's letter to the Colossians, I want to look at how Paul obeyed the command to make disciples because his example addresses three of the major reasons Christians fail to make disciples today. They think disciple-making is too hard, they don't know how to do it and they believe they personally aren't able to do it. Leave it to the pastor, disciple-making is his job, not mine. But Jesus says that disciple-making is the responsibility of all of His followers and our goal at Creekside is that every person becomes both a disciple of Christ and a disciple-maker, whether it is as a parent or as a friend. Paul's example as a disciple-maker addresses each of the three reasons Christians today are hesitant to try to make disciples. First, real disciple-making *is* costly. Second, real disciple-making is Christ-centered. Finally, real disciple-making is Christ-dependent.

One reason most Christians today don't get involved in disciple-making is because they think it's too hard. They're right. Disciple-making is hard and it will definitely cost you. But what I hope you'll see from the example of Paul is that the reward is worth the cost. Paul writes to people he's never met. His buddy, Epaphras began this church in Colossae and has come to visit Paul in prison in Rome because this young church is turning from the real Jesus to embrace counterfeit Christs – which is why Paul wrote this letter. After telling the Colossians how thankful he is for their faith and reminding them about who Jesus really is, Paul now talks about his current imprisonment in Rome. Vs. 24, *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,"* Paul doesn't view his imprisonment for the gospel as something he really doesn't deserve. He views it as necessary suffering for the sake of the Colossians and rejoices in being able to suffer for them. It was Paul's commitment to preaching the gospel that landed him in jail and if jail is the cost of seeing people saved, for Paul it is a small price to pay. That's why Paul says he is rejoicing to be able to suffer for the sake of the Colossians and for all the other Christians in the world at that time. *"and in my flesh (meaning in his body) I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."* What does Paul mean? Notice that Paul equates his suffering to Christ's suffering; that his afflictions are Christ's afflictions. Why would Paul say that? Before Paul became a Christian, he was a deadly enemy of Christianity, arresting and persecuting every Christian he could find. But Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision and asked, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Not why are you persecuting My people but why are you persecuting Me?" Paul realized at that moment that He was on the wrong side of this fight; that Jesus was the Son of God, and Paul immediately repented and believed in Christ. He never forgot that because we are in union with Christ, because He is the head and we are His body, when we suffer, He suffers. That's why Paul can now say if I'm afflicted, Christ is afflicted. And Paul says that these afflictions are essential; that he has his own share of these necessary afflictions to endure for the sake of Christ's body, *"filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."* If we learn anything from the example of Jesus, we learn that suffering is necessary to accomplish God's will and to bring God's blessing to us. This week, I was reading in the second chapter of John and was puzzled by vs. 3-5. *"And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'"* This is a puzzling passage. Jesus, His disciples and His mom attend a wedding early in His ministry and the groom has failed to plan properly and runs out of wine before the reception is over. This is an embarrassing situation and Mary asks Jesus intervene and save the wedding. She obviously expects Him to perform some kind of miracle even though He, to my knowledge, has never performed a miracle before. The way He answers His mom and her response are both enlightening. Jesus replies literally, "What is this to you and me? My hour has not come." Throughout the gospel of John, "My hour" refers to the hour of His death on the cross." Jesus tells Mary, "I can't give them what they need until I die." However, Mary does not take this answer as a no because she instructs the servants to follow Jesus' instructions and He does perform the miracle of providing the wine that is needed. So what's this about? Wine symbolizes joy in the Bible and I think Jesus means that He cannot supply the deep joy and celebration people need until He completes His mission of dying in our place. *"They have no wine" indeed.* People cannot experience the joy and celebration for which we were created until we are reconciled to the God for whom we were created. That's why Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a wedding feast – a big, joyful party! Jesus suffered for my joy. He endured the cross not just so I could be legally declared innocent of my many sins and crimes, but so that I could have eternal joy. Jesus sorrowed so that we might be filled with joy. And just as Jesus suffered for us, so we are called to suffer for others, sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings both for our own benefit and for the benefit of other believers. That's why Paul joyfully accepts his imprisonment because he sees it as suffering with Christ for the benefit of the Colossians. But how did the church benefit from Paul's suffering? For one thing, Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon in prison. For another, Paul's integrity and character were proven by his willingness to suffer for Christ and to the gospel. And there are lessons which others learn when we suffer. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1:3-4 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* Paul says that because God comforts us in affliction, we're able to comfort others in affliction and that others are blessed by our suffering. We learn lessons others need to learn when we suffer and Paul was influential in changing lives because of his suffering. (personal illus) Here's what I want you to see. Paul is suffering because he is committed serving Christ by making disciples. Disciple-making is costly. That's why most Christians never start or quit after they do. Disciple-making takes a lot of time and effort. It is inconvenient. It takes lots of patience because people change very slowly. Disciple-making is heart-breaking. People you've poured time and effort and prayer and love

into frequently walk away. Disciple-making requires that we lay down our lives for others just like Jesus; to put other people's welfare ahead of our own; because seeing God's will done in their lives often requires suffering on our part. Yet Paul says, "I rejoice in my suffering for your sake," and he says it to people he's never even met. Paul is filled with joy because he's giving his life to something greater than himself and something close to the heart of the Savior; the perfection of His bride. There is a cost to disciple-making but there's a far greater reward. There is nothing more fulfilling than being used by Christ to change people's lives and then to see those people used to change the lives of others – and that is especially true when those disciples are your own kids.

The second reason most Christians don't make disciples today is because they don't know how. They think they need a theological degree or a degree in counseling and that they just don't know enough to help another believer to grow in their relationship with Jesus. However once we understand what real disciple-making is, it suddenly becomes much more doable. Beginning with vs. 25, Paul explains why he can suffer joyfully for the church. I know that vs. 24 sounds foreign to our culture. The idea of joyfully embracing suffering for the benefit of others goes directly against the current of individualism. I take care of myself and you need to take care of yourself. Why should I be inconvenienced or suffer for you? Ever feel that way? I read about Swedish immigrants to America writing home about how different life in America was. "You don't have to take off your hat for anyone here. Everyone is free to make of themselves what they can. But – they added – if you need help, you're on your own." American individualism is deeply engrained in the fabric of our nation. That's why Paul rejoicing for the privilege of suffering for Christ's church may sound strange to us. But Paul explains why he rejoiced in the following verses and it revolves around his sense of his own identity and who Christ had made him to be. *"Of this church I was made a minister (a servant; Paul saw himself as a servant of Christ and of His church) according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, (a steward was the servant the master put in charge of his household and a good steward was a great benefit both to his master and to the rest of his servants) so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* Paul says that God made him a servant of the church by making Paul a steward of a glorious mystery. In the Bible, a mystery isn't a "who-done-it." A mystery is something that was hidden in the past but now has been revealed and Paul says that the mystery God revealed to him for the benefit of the church but was not revealed in the Old Testament is that Christ is in us, the hope of glory. When the Old Testament believer read the Scriptures, he looked forward to the coming of Christ whom he believed would immediately set up God's kingdom on earth and reign, vanquishing sin and death and ruling the world from Jerusalem. What the Old Testament believer didn't realize was that Israel would reject the Messiah and kill Him and that there would be a period of time between Christ's resurrection from the dead and Christ's return to the earth to reign in which the good news of what He had accomplished for all people would be proclaimed throughout the world. That message is in the Old Testament but it is only hinted at. What the Old Testament believer couldn't see was the birth of the church – all those who trusted the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile, being united with Him spiritually to become the actual body of Christ in which Jesus lives between His first and second coming. Who would have imagined that God would come and live in His children? That's the mystery with which Paul was entrusted by God to take to the world, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" And it was because of this mystery that Paul was in prison. The Jews didn't mind Paul proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah nearly as much as they hated his teaching that Gentiles and non-Jews could have a relationship with God and the pressure they brought to bear on the Roman authorities is the reason Paul now sits in a Roman prison.

Paul summarizes the essence of the gospel as Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's why we often say that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship. Only one thing makes a person a Christian: not the church they attend, not the beliefs they claim to hold, not the rules that they follow; but the fact that Jesus lives in them. And because Jesus lives in us, we have the certain hope of sharing in His glory. He said that He would never leave us or forsake us and never includes after we die. The fact that we are permanently in union with Christ guarantees our future. Now because Christ in you is the essence of Christianity, this shapes the way we make disciples. Paul writes in vs. 28. *"We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."* (Col. 1:25-28) If presenting every person complete or mature in Christ is the goal of disciple-making, what does maturity look like? Maturity is measured by our relationship with Jesus who lives in us; knowing Him, walking with Him, trusting Him and obeying Him. If I am a disciple of Jesus, there is

not maturity apart from my relationship with Him. I can be a wonderful guy but I am not spiritually mature unless my life is all about knowing Christ, trusting Christ, obeying Christ and bringing everything in my life under His leadership. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and what Christian maturity looks like. Therefore Paul says, the way we help each other grow to maturity is by reminding each other of Jesus. *"We proclaim Him."* Our message isn't rules to live by or moralism or psychological principles or inspirational nuggets or "you need to become like me." Jesus and the gospel is the answer to every question and the solution to every problem and real disciple-making is Christ-centered; pointing people away from us and away from their own efforts to solve their problems to Jesus: who He is, what He has accomplished and how that applies to our life today. And just as we needed people to introduce us to Jesus before we became Christians, so we need people to help us get to know Jesus once we've become Christians. I have met very few mature Christians who didn't have at least one person who gave them personal attention and coaching to help them learn to follow Christ. That's what real disciple-making is: not teaching people to be like us but teaching people to follow Christ.

Here's a tool I've borrowed from other churches that helps us to do that and which we are incorporating into Creekside's disciple-making efforts. It's called a DNA group. DNA stands for discipleship = nurture and accountability. That's what disciple-making is. To grow spiritually we all need nurture – someone who's looking out for us, paying attention to our growth, encouraging us and loving us – and we all need accountability – someone to help us do what we say we want to do. So a DNA group is a group of 2 or at the most 3 believers who agree to meet regularly together either every week or every other week to help one another grow in their relationship with Christ. I have spent hundreds of hours meeting with men over the years, just listening to them tell me about their lives, and calling it disciple-making – but never really pointing them to Christ. This format is a great tool to keep us focused on Christ and getting to know Him. The great thing about a DNA group is that you and your Christian friend meet to help one another grow. One reason we resist disciple-making is because it sounds kind of proud. Who am I to think I can disciple you? The DNA format provides a structure by which you can encourage and disciple each other. Here's how it works. **Celebrate:** Share where you saw God this past week or how the gospel is good news for you this week. (Hebrews 3:13) Here's what will happen. Since you have to share where you saw God each week, you begin to pay more attention to God and what He's doing in your life. You begin to look for His hand and you begin to see Him guiding You and teaching you and protecting you in ways you've been oblivious to. As a result, your relationship with Christ deepens as you see how intimately involved in guiding your steps He actually is. Second **Encourage:** Share one insight from your SOAP devotions. (Col. 3:16) SOAP is a simple bible-reading plan which keeps both of you in the Scriptures where you can hear Christ's voice each day. You might agree to reach a chapter or more each day or the same book of the Bible, it's up to you. But as you read, look for what grabs your attention, what surprises you or what you hadn't seen before or what you don't understand and write that verse(s) down. That's the S of SOAP. The O is observation: write down why this particular verse got your attention. The A is application: how will I apply this to my own life? The P is prayer: what do I need prayer for in light of this application? Most Christians find it difficult to read the Bible daily unless somebody else is checking on them and one of the main reasons DNA groups help us to grow is they keep our nose in the Scriptures. Third thing you do when you meet together is to **REPENT:** Confess your sins to each other. *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another..."* (James 5:16) There are things about yourself most of us aren't comfortable in sharing in a small group, yet the Bible tells us to confess our sins to one another so that we can be healed. Confession is liberating because it brings our secret sins out into the light and breaks their power. That's why one of the most helpful aspects of a DNA group is taking time to be honest with where we're currently struggling. Developing the discipline of confession helps me to pay attention to my own walk and look for patterns in my attitudes and behaviors and began to break old habits. So as you meet together, you each share by answering the following questions. What sin are you struggling with? Then, to get to the root of the behavior like we talked about two Sundays ago, Head: What lie about God is behind this sin? Unbelief fuels all sin and so what am I not believing about God? Heart: What heart idols are leading to this sin? What are you loving more than God? What substitute for God am I trusting in? Hands: How is your sin showing up in your behavior? What are some of the consequences? Personal illus. What truth about God and the gospel do you need to turn to when you struggle? This is the difference between moralism and the gospel and focusing on Jesus. We need to remind each other who Jesus is and what He has done for us and how that applies to our struggle. How can I help you? Do you need me to ask you about this next week? Pray for you? Steal your television? **PRAY ...and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.** (James 5:16) Pray for one

another according to the needs you already identified and then pray for 2-3 people who don't know Jesus. Every Christian is called to be a disciple-maker. If you are a parent, you are called to disciple your children. If you are a Christian, you are called to disciple others – and I hope that if you are not doing that at this time, the DNA group will give you a place to begin. If you're a parent of a younger child, just reading through the Bible with them, praying with them, and teaching them to trust Jesus is the place to start. If they're a little older and can read the Bible on their own, the DNA format might work well as a way to talk with them regularly about their relationship with Christ. Remember, we're raising disciples of Christ, not just good, obedient, responsible children. Knowing Him, what He has done and how to walk with Him is the focus – not just being a good student so you can get a good job or being a good person. We're called to raise disciples of Jesus, who know Him and trust Him and rely upon Him. Our goal is to introduce our children to Christ and to impart a personal faith in Him to them. If you're not a parent and you're not involved in disciple-making, ask a Christian friend if they would be willing to meet with you weekly for a couple of months and work through the DNA material together; then evaluate after two months. See if meeting together to talk and pray about your relationship with Jesus has accelerated your spiritual growth. The DNA group is just a tool to get the conversation started, a way to help each other grow in our relationship with Christ. What you'll discover is that as you begin meeting regularly, Christ will meet with you and speak through each of you to one another. And that brings us to the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason most Christians don't make disciples. They don't believe they can. Because we know that meeting with another believer to help one another to grow is more than going through a set of questions. You're encouraging one another, counseling one another, challenging one another – and we think, "I can't do that. I don't know enough, I'm incompetent, who wants to hear what I think?" Notice the last thing we learn from Paul's example of disciple-making.

*"For this purpose - presenting each person mature in Christ - also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."* (Col. 1:29) Paul knows he is not alone in the labor of making disciples of Christ. He labors in Christ's power which mightily works in him. Jesus said that whenever two or more gather in His name, He is in our midst. His Spirit works through us in one another's hearts and lives. Ever been talking with somebody and they're talking but you know God is talking to you through them? Or have you ever started talking with someone and you realize it's not you but Christ who is speaking because you're saying things you've never even thought about before and thinking, "I ought to be writing this stuff down – it's really good." Christ builds His church but He uses the members of His body to do so. I can't change anybody's heart. I can't persuade anybody to trust Jesus or to obey Jesus. Only Jesus can do that but He uses people to speak and work through. Real disciple-making depends on Him but we'll only see Him use us when we put ourselves into a position to be used. That's why the simple act of committing yourself to meet with another believer regularly for your mutual growth unleashes Christ's power in your life. You will grow faster than ever before if you'll do this. In fact, I am convinced that in addition to meeting Jesus daily in the Scriptures and prayer, meeting with another believer regularly to help one another grow is an essential discipline of the growing and fruitful Christian. And once you get used to this discipline, you'll be competent to help younger believers to grow to maturity.

In Matthew 6:20-21, Jesus says, *"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* How do we do that? How do we store up treasures in heaven which will last forever? - by investing in people's spiritual growth. Disciples are the only thing Jesus is counting and if I make disciples, my life has an eternal impact. There is no more difficult yet rewarding service. I have no greater joy than people who are not only walking with Jesus but helping others to walk with Jesus because Christ used me in their life. Is disciple-making inconvenient? You bet. Is disciple-making heart-breaking and frustrating at times? Sure. Is there any more satisfying way to serve Jesus? I don't know of one. Because you get to labor with Jesus for the one thing He values most: people. What's the greatest thing that has ever happened to you? If you're a Christian, you'd have to say coming to know Christ. What's the greatest thing you can do for someone else? Introduce them to Christ and then help them to grow in their relationship with Him.

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