The Faith & Disciples

Believe Him and Pass It On

Acts 6:1-7 introduces us to some biblical terms that are worth a deeper look since the terms “The Faith” and “Disciples” show up here for the first time in the book of Acts. It’s worth noting that “The Faith” continues to be used in the epistles to the churches, but ‘disciples’ is only used in the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament. With this in mind we need to ask some important questions about both terms as we look deeper into this some of the terms in Acts:

* What is The Faith referring to?
* What is a disciple if it isn’t one of Jesus’ 12 disciples?
* If Disciple as a term isn’t used in the epistles, do they still function in the church?

Adam walked with God and God taught him truth that Adam could not have known without specific revelation from God. Other things God let discover or led him to discover for his personal understanding (hint: Eve was missing).  Today we're going to look at the intersection of doctrinal truth and growth as individuals and together as a body. We're going to look at The Faith and Disciples. Not just a faith, some faith, but The Faith. Not just students, but disciples.

In the Old Testament the saints were expected to believe what had been revealed up until that time.  Abraham, for example, didn’t have Moses or the Law, but he did have ‘the faith’ [Romans 4:11-12].  He believed God for what God had revealed to him up until that point. The same was true of the church in the New Testament. This idea is called “Progressive Revelation”. The church started in Acts 2 and the Holy Spirit began revealing truth that was new about a new spiritual people group who were not under conscience like Adam, Noah and Abraham, or Law like Moses, David or Jesus.

This new body that we call the church was formed when people gathered and believed in the person and works of Jesus Christ.  The followers of Jesus dedicated themselves to the teachings of, and about, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the church, as revealed through the Apostles [starting in Acts 2:42].   This group was originally seen as a sect of Judaism, but it became apparent rapidly that they were teaching something that did *not* fit into the Old Testament framework.

# The Faith

What they believed in was called "The Faith". The Faith is a term we will define as the collected teachings of the apostles. While the revelation was progressive over the establishing of the church during the time of the apostles, the teachings did not change; they gained clarity.  The faith is intimately entwined with our sanctification and spiritual growth.  We grow in what is true of us in Christ - and we find out what is true of us in Christ through the specific revelation provided in the scriptures. We find the phrase “the Faith” throughout the scriptures [Acts 6:7, 14:22, 16:5, Romans 4:11-12, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 1:23, Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 4:13, Hebrews 12:2, Jude1:3].

## Ephesians 4:13

Ephesians 4: 13 mentions in part a really critical issue: unity in the faith.

“11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 ***until we all attain to the unity of the faith***, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

This means that The Faith represents that which is:

* True
* Knowable
* Believable
* Something we should be unified in and on

## Truth

The doctrines presented in the Bible are true. God as the author of the truths in the scripture revealed truth and provided what the saints have needed to be saved since the fall. If we’re going to know and believe what is revealed we need to understand the truth there. We also need to understand God’s intent as the author through the Holy Spirit. Paul admonishes Titus to defend the truth of the faith in Titus 1:13.

## Knowable

As believers we’re able to read and study God’s Word and understand it. We can use proper hermeneutics and engage with what is revealed in the scriptures so that our faith is rooted in a solid understanding of what is written in God’s revelation of history, prophecy, poetry, instruction, and letters. We understand that God loved us so much as to have a relationship with us and He desires to communicate with us so that we can know Him through His Word. 1 John 5:20 speaks of the fact that what has been revealed is not just true, but it is knowable!

## Believable

While the secular world makes statements about ‘faith’ being a belief in that which can’t be proven much of what is recorded in the scripture is verifiable historically, culturally, linguistically, and carries with it the veracity that stands up to scrutiny. We believe God and what is revealed so that our faith is not just hopeful thinking. The doctrines presented in the Bible are generally simple as well. They can be understood by children and believed by children. Romans 3:21-24 speaks of the nature of the new doctrine being believable, and because of that we can be saved at all.

## Doctrinal Unity

One of the single biggest problems within church bodies today is the doctrinal division that exists. Instead of addressing doctrinal division head on many church leaders encourage a plurality of ideas in an effort to focus on the basics. What they fail to see is that by discouraging clarity they inadvertently erode their foundation for truth. At Holly Hills our doctrinal statement states clearly:

“We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted according to its grammatical and historical context, including that God, Who does not change, deals in a different manner with the Gentile nations, the people of Israel, and the God-created body of heavenly saints called “the Church”.

This method of interpretation has been taught before in the Sunday school classes and when used consistently removes major divisions because it is not subjective. The Holy Spirit can teach us through consistent interpretation and remove the division.

## Jesus is the Author of the Faith

Hebrews 12:2 tells us we should be, “…setting our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our (the) faith….” The definite article here isn’t translated into the English for smoothness of reading, but in the Greek there are actually *two* definite articles here nested to say “the the faith author”.

The problem we discover with finding out about ‘the Faith’ upon salvation is that we need to grow in our knowledge of what is in all of the Bible’s teachings, and it will take us our whole lives to do so. God has a multi-part solution for this, which we’ll look at. Firstly, God gave the Bible/Word [John 1:1] for our edification [Colossians 1:25; 1 Peter 2:2]. Second, God gave the Holy Spirit for our intercession [Romans 8:26] and sanctification [2 Corinthians 3:18]. Third, He gave us one another [Ephesians 4:16].

# Disciples

Assuming an established doctrine of truth, that there is a faith worth unifying around, how will the church reach unity? Studying by ourselves and growing all by ourselves? Sitting in pews to be told "the essentials?" There is a critical principle that appears throughout the New Testament. One that carries with it not only personal involvement, but body-wide involvement: making disciples. One that would create a body through time made up of individual fibers, strands, and coming together into a larger rope throughout time. The idea of making disciples should not be scary because it is focused on fellowship, spiritual growth, edification, and facilitating the next generation of the body until the return of Christ.

## Matthew 28:19-20

19 "Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Traditionally Jewish rabbis would be asked if they could be followed. The disciples would then, if selected, be submitting themselves completely to the rabbi. In a reversal of those roles Jesus tells His disciples to “in their going” be making disciples. Instead of coming to the teacher, the teacher would come to the disciple. God would send them to all the nations, but they were to leave a trail of equipped saints.

## 2 Timothy 2:2

2 Timothy 2:2 – “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

### Where’s the Disciple?

You may be saying to yourself, “Where is the word disciple here? Surely this doesn’t relate.” However, the pattern of disciple-making as presented in the gospels through Jesus’ life and example, Jesus’ admonition in Matthew, and repetition of the word throughout the book of Acts can be observed in action even if the label is missing.

### The Things That Paul Taught in the Presence of Many

We don’t have those teachings recorded for listening on the Internet, unfortunately, but it is likely that what Paul wrote about in his letters over and over reflected the important doctrines that the churches needed to know about. The doctrines that Paul likely intended for Timothy to pass on to godly leaders included (but were not limited to):

* The Gospel (Christology)
* Spiritual Growth (Sanctification)
* The Church & Body Life (Ecclesiology)
* Responsibilities for church leadership
* Identification truths
* Abiding/Beholding
* The Trinity & Their involvement in the lives of believers
* Glorification
* Love
* Marriage, the Family & Parenting
* Trials and Suffering
* Death to the Law
* Moral behavior in light of believing

We might even call these things part of The Faith. Paul wanted to make sure that these truths were preserved and understood through personal teaching by Timothy.

### Entrust These to Faithful Men Who Will Teach Others Also

The word entrust here is translated from a word that could in dining scenarios imply placing something before someone. But it also can mean to commit or entrust as it is translated here. In places where Paul uses it he uses it to commend or commit or entrust – it would be absurd to just suggest that the truth of God’s word be merely set before someone.

So Paul wants the teachings to be entrusted to faithful men. These believers were not to be merely interested in the newest teachings like some people Paul had interacted with [see Acts 17:16-34], but they were to be believers known for their belief. It’s worth noting here that various teachers have attempted to address the need for faithful men. They have gone about it by using tools such as

* Calvinism to say that only the faithful are saved
* Legalism to say that you *must* be faithful
* Charismatic teaching that works to keep you ‘feeling your faith’
* Liberalism to say that being saved means you had faith and therefore are faithful

Biblically we find Paul writes about principles of Spirit-led body-life so that we actually have the faithfulness of those who are mature impacting those who are weak to grow and become faithful [Galatians 5:16, 5:22—6:1; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 2:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:11].

And in this maturing together we find the need to *be making disciples*. Not just through words, but through walking together as the Jews would have expressed in the Old Testament [Exodus 18:20; Leviticus 18:3; Deuteronomy 5:33]. In fact Deuteronomy 11:19 implies that the whole nation of Israel should have been teaching their families about what God had commanded all the time. Starting at home, and then because it is normative at home, spreading to their tribes, nation, and then eventually reaching the godless nations that they came into contact with [Exodus 12:48]. We’re not looking to duplicate Old Testament Law in the church with this reference, we’re looking to see what the readers of Paul’s letters who had grown up in Judaism would have been taught. The principles of teaching and living and walking and interacting together would have carried weight.

Grace allows us to abandon the legalism of some teachers and look to the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the motivation of God’s gift, and the intimacy we can have one with another because we’re not walking in legalistic judgment.

## Making Disciples: It’s Not Just for Men

### Titus 2:1-8

1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, (sound) in love, (sound) in perseverance. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. 6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; 7 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, 8 sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Given the total amount of material here in this passage we’re going to skip doing a verse-by-verse exposition here. We should all take some time to study this passage and prayerfully consider what the Lord would have us do with it in our own lives. We should be looking as believers at our Christian relationships, whether we’re older or younger, and at the value of the times of fellowship we’re having. We should observe that the word ‘disciple’ is not used here, but the very same pattern of establishing ‘the faith’ from one generation to the next is described.

### Older Men & Older Women

We can observe that the doctrine is critical to the well-being of the young body in Crete where Paul is writing to Titus. We can observe that the family is critical to the well-being of the church and carrying on through generations what is to be understood. We get direction here through the creation of *biblical, Spirit-led, culture* that is setting the stage for how the older generation is thinking and living being passed down to how the younger generation is thinking and living. If you’ve raised a family, if you’ve served in a ministry, if you’ve studied God’s word, if you’ve loved your spouse through various mistakes the next generation needs to understand these truths practically, conversationally, and in their walking with you.

### Younger Men & Younger Women

In modern times we’re finding that younger generations of believers are being encouraged to seek out other believers that are the same age bracket, financial bracket, and life stage. We see a pattern where homogenous, fad-driven living is the outcome as a result. If Paul’s letter to Titus is to be understood younger believers need to insert themselves into the lives of older believers with the intent to learn, and grow, and be to lovingly intimate with one another across the generations. Our children (if we have them) need to see this to know that it is not only OK, but should be normative.

### An Observation on the Idealized Younger Family Presented Here

One observation here is that while the older men are to be teaching the younger men doctrinal truths that doctrinal truth should not stop at the younger men’s ears and mind. That truth should be shared within their own homes. Their wives should be hearing these doctrines, their children should be learning them, and it would likely impact their entire family’s walk.

The relational things that the older women are teaching the younger women will absolutely impact the husbands and children – including impacting their conversations and understandings and modeling of life for their children.

Both of these roles of husband and wife within the family will show reverence to God’s word and its impact on the man, the wife, the children, and their relationships together. There is a reason in Ephesians 5:22-33 why the husband and wife are used as an analogy to describe Christ and the Church, His bride.

# Conclusion

Because we’re learning the truth of what is in “the faith,” because we’re being taught not just the milk of God’s word, but the meat as well, there comes with it the general responsibility [and I don’t mean that legalistically] to make sure it doesn’t end with you.

The author of Hebrews gets close to closing the book in Hebrews 13:7 where he writes, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their [the] faith.” When we disciple we leave a legacy of God’s truth, the love of the body, and the character of Christ possibly for generations to come. When we are being discipled we learn to leave the very same legacy. We don’t know when Christ will return – though we hope it is today – but we know that while we wait for His return we are preparing those who might wait for His return after us, empowered by the Holy Spirit to learn, to lead, and to walk in His loving, sanctifying life.