

The Discipling Dilemma

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Second Edition
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ISBN 0-89225-311-8

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- **'Spiritual Pornography' Warning:** *If you are a member of the International Churches of Christ, it might be a good idea to consult with your discipler/'discipleship partner' (DP) to see if Kip allows 'true christians' to read this book.*

Contents

PART I

Church Growth Research Concerning the Discipling Movement Among Churches of Christ By Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr

1..The Discipling Movement: A Mixed Blessing... *{you are here}*

[2..A Psychological Study...23](#)

[3.Alternative Explanations Examined...39](#)

[4.A Discussion of Differences...48](#)

[5.Dealing with the Discipling Dilemma...69](#)

PART II

The. Impact of the Discipling Movement On Mission Work Done by the Churches of Christ.. By Howard W. Norton

[6.Mission Work: In Search of the Perfect Solution....89](#)

[7.Discipling Churches: An Imperfect Missions Solution...99](#)

PART III**Historical Roots of the Discipling Movement Among Churches of Christ***By Don Vinzant*[8..Roots of the Modern Discipling Movement...123](#)[9..What Other Groups Have Learned About the Discipling Movement...141](#)[10..A Select Annotated Bibliography of Materials Generally Unfavorable to Modern Authoritarian Discipling Tactics..158](#)**PART IV****A Reference Guide to the Discipling Movement Among Churches of Christ***By Gene Vinzant*[11..A Guide to the Discipling Movement.....171](#)[12..Pillar Churches and Future Church Plantings....177](#)[13..Boston Churches Country by Country....183](#)[14..Boston and Statistics.....189](#)[Appendix, by Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr.....192](#)[Editor's Update, Second Printing, August, 1988.....206](#)

PART I**CHURCH GROWTH RESEARCH
CONCERNING
THE DISCIPLING MOVEMENT AMONG
CHURCHES OF CHRIST***by Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr.***ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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p1

CHAPTER

1

THE DISCIPLING MOVEMENT: A MIXED BLESSING

The discipling movement has appeared in several religious groups under various labels. Several denominations have experienced growth as a result of the discipling movement in various places throughout the world. Those same denominations, however, have been troubled by the doctrines and practices associated with this movement.

The word "discipling" is used in this movement to mean much more than making converts. It is used primarily to describe a system of intense training and close personal supervision of the Christians being disciplined. Disciples are regarded as being superior to mere Christians. Disciples are said to be Christians who have received special training. This training includes much more than mere teaching. There is an intense one-on-one relationship between the discipler and the Christian being disciplined. The discipler gives detailed personal guidance to the Christian being disciplined. This guidance may include instructions concerning many personal matters of a totally secular nature. The person being disciplined is taught to submit to the discipler. Furthermore, the person being disciplined is taught to imitate the discipler. Christians being disciplined are required to confess their sins to their discipler. Such confession is followed by rebuke, correction, admoni-

p2

tion, and prayer. If the person being disciplined seems reluctant to confess sins, the discipler asks probing personal questions to elicit the confession.

Discipling is hierarchical. There is a clear distinction between the discipler and the person being disciplined. A Christian might have many peer relationships, but only one person is that Christian's discipler. That discipler is the person who must be imitated and obeyed. After a Christian has been disciplined for a while, that Christian is expected to start discipling others. **The result is a pyramid of relationships that resembles a multi-level marketing system.** In various denominations where the discipling movement has appeared, the typical pattern has been for the founding pastor of a church to be at the top of the pyramid. That founding pastor disciplines a small group of other pastors. Each of them, in turn, disciplines a small group of lay leaders. The lay leaders then disciple members one step lower in the pyramid. That hierarchical system continues through as many steps as may be needed as the discipling movement spreads. The growth of the discipling network typically goes beyond one local congregation to include many other congregations established by the parent group.

This description of discipling, of course, does not perfectly fit every group that has ever been a part of the discipling movement. This composite description, however, is very close to each of the groups that has been a part of this movement. The focus of this study is on one particular manifestation of this movement: the discipling movement among churches of Christ. There is general agreement among those inside and outside this movement that the Boston Church of Christ is the

p3

leader of this movement today. That congregation is the primary focus of this study.

SOME COMMENTS ABOUT LABELS

For the benefit of any readers who are not familiar with this group known as "churches of Christ," we need to begin with some comments about various terms. If conditions were ideal, it would not be necessary to use labels that set one group of Christians apart from other Christians. Conditions, however, are not ideal. Christians are not perfect. The church has experienced numerous divisions throughout its history. Discussion of these divisions is not possible without the use of some labels. Such labels could be used in a judgmental way. In this study these labels are used only to describe a social reality with all judgment being left up to God.

The term "churches of Christ" is used throughout Christendom with reference to the spiritual fellowship of all the saved. Pioneers of America's Restoration Movement--such men as Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and many others--used this term with reference to their congregations to emphasize their purpose of being Christians only.

Three heirs of the Restoration Movement are listed in *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980*.¹ The smallest of these groups has the most liberal theology. They are known as the "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)." They are listed as having 4,324 congregations with 817,650 members in the United States. A more conservative fellowship that is somewhat larger is listed as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" because some of their congregations use one designation and some the other. This group is listed as having 5,293 congregations with 929,650 members in

p4

the United States. The largest and most conservative of these three groups is known as "churches of Christ." They are listed as having 12,719 congregations with 1,239,612 members in the United States. This fellowship differs from the group known as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" in two significant ways. Churches of Christ believe that what is done in congregational worship must be specifically authorized in New Testament teaching. Because of this, they do not use instrumental music in worship. The group known as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" uses instrumental music in worship because they believe that Christians can do anything in worship that is not specifically forbidden in New Testament teaching.

Churches of Christ typically use the plural word "churches" rather than the singular form to emphasize their independence as local congregations with no central denominational organization or headquarters. They often use the lower case "c" in the word "churches" to emphasize their purpose of identifying with the fellowship of all the saved without forming any denominational organization. The Boston Church of Christ and other churches of Christ identified with the discipling movement grew out of this most conservative of the Restoration Movement fellowships.

Several different terms have been used to describe the discipling movement among churches of Christ. Some supporters have used the term "restoring churches."² Others call them "multiplying churches."³ These self-serving terms are judgmental toward other churches of Christ and thus have not been accepted by most critics of this movement. Some critics have called this the "total commitment movement." Supporters have not generally accepted this term because it focuses on just one part of what this movement is about. Most critics have been reluctant to use this term because it implies that the critics are opposed to total commitment.

p5

The most common terms which critics of this movement have employed use some form of the word

"Crossroads." They talk about the "Crossroads movement," "Crossroads churches," the "Crossroads philosophy," or "Crossroadsism." These terms have been used because of the key role the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida, played in the development of this movement. This discipling movement was first introduced into churches of Christ by Charles H. (Chuck) Lucas in this congregation.

Under the leadership of Chuck Lucas, the Crossroads Church of Christ achieved rapid growth through its campus ministry at the University of Florida. They began training people for similar ministries elsewhere. Soon other churches of Christ wanted campus ministers who had been trained at Crossroads. However, most of these churches that employed Crossroads-trained campus ministers eventually divided into discipling churches and churches that oppose this approach.

Terms that identify all discipling churches with the Crossroads congregation are not especially useful. Supporters have never accepted these terms. Furthermore, leadership of this movement has now shifted away from Crossroads. Lucas left the congregation in 1985 and is no longer the leader of this movement. The Boston Church of Christ is now the leading congregation among the discipling churches.

Terms such as "discipling churches" or the "discipling movement" seem to be the only terms acceptable both to the supporters and the critics of this movement. The

p6

discipling churches use the term "discipling" in reference to a particular form of evangelism and a particular way of teaching, guiding, and influencing people after they have become Christians. If other churches of Christ use the term "discipling" at all, they generally limit its application to evangelism. The idea of discipling someone who is already a disciple is foreign to their understanding about how this term should be used. Other churches of Christ practice evangelism, but not in the same way the discipling churches do. They also provide teaching, guidance, and influence for those who have already become Christians, but not in the way the discipling churches do. For this reason, they do not mind *not* being called "discipling churches."

The Boston Church of Christ

Supporters and critics generally agree that the Boston Church of Christ is now the leader of the discipling movement among churches of Christ. The rapid growth of this congregation has been amazing. Indeed, that growth is the most persuasive argument in favor of the discipling approach.

The Boston Church of Christ was originally known as the Lexington Church of Christ since it began in Lexington, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. The congregation had existed for several years without achieving much growth. Membership in the spring of 1979 was around 40. In June of that year, they employed a Crossroads-trained minister and things have never been the same since.

Kip McKean was converted at the Crossroads Church of Christ while he was a student at the University of Florida. He was trained by Chuck Lucas. After leaving Gainesville, McKean attempted to develop discipling ministries in several congregations. These efforts met strenuous opposition. In June of 1979, Kip and his wife, Elena, moved to Lexington, Massachusetts, to work

p7

with the small congregation in that Boston suburb. They brought with them about 10 young people who were being trained for service in discipling ministries. Half of the members who were in the Lexington Church of Christ when McKean moved there eventually left--most because of their opposition to the discipling approach. That left a very small work force, but that small group achieved a remarkable record of rapid growth.

There were 68 baptisms in the last six months of 1979. Then there were 170 baptisms in 1980, 250 baptisms in 1981, 365 baptisms in 1982, 402 baptisms in 1983, 594 baptisms in 1984, 703 baptisms in 1985, and 818 baptisms in 1986. In the first seven-and-one-half years of McKean's ministry with this congregation, they baptized 3,370 people. It now appears that they will baptize between 900 and 1,000 in 1987. That would mean a total of well over 4,000 baptisms in just eight-and-one-half years.

Growth was so rapid that the Lexington Church of Christ soon was too large for its building. They rented the building of the Arlington Baptist Church until they grew too large for that meeting place. They started meeting in the Boston Opera House. When they outgrew that facility, they started meeting in the Boston Gardens where the Boston Celtics play basketball and the Boston Bruins play ice hockey. Early in 1987, they were averaging around 2,500 in attendance on Sunday mornings. Virtually all the members were attending one of the 62 house church meetings conducted each Wednesday evening and at least one of the 260 Bible Talks conducted at various locations throughout the Boston area each week.

Early in his ministry with the Lexington/Boston Church of Christ, McKean decided that the discipling approach could not be developed properly in existing churches. There were divisions in almost all of the congregations where the Crossroads-trained ministers

p8

introduced this approach. Furthermore, these ministers found it difficult to keep new converts faithful in congregations where many of the members did not appear (to these ministers) to be totally committed, really spiritual, or seriously involved in evangelism. McKean decided that he would not train workers and send them into existing congregations the way Chuck Lucas had done at Crossroads. Instead, he decided to concentrate on planting new churches.

The story of the new churches planted by the Boston Church of Christ is even more dramatic than the story of rapid growth in Boston. In June of 1982, they planted a new congregation in Chicago. By the end of 1986, that congregation had baptized 567 people. In July of 1982, the Boston church started a new congregation in London. By the end of 1986, that church had baptized 627 people. In June of 1983, the Boston church sent a team to plant a new church in New York. By the end of 1986, that church had baptized 649 people. The Providence, Rhode Island, House Church of the Boston congregation became a separate congregation in June of 1985. By the end of 1986, they had baptized 83 people. In August of 1985, the congregation in Boston sent a team to begin a new church in Toronto, Canada. By the end of 1986, they had baptized 159 people. In 1986, the Boston church planted four new congregations. In June they sent a team to Johannesburg. By the end of that year they had baptized 33 people. In August they sent a team to Paris. By the end of the year they had baptized 10 people. In October they sent teams to Stockholm and Bombay. By the end of the year, the Stockholm church had baptized nine and the Bombay church had baptized two.

This is a total, counting the baptisms in the Boston church, of 5,509 baptisms in just seven-and-one-half years. The figures by the end of 1987 will be even more impressive. No other congregation among churches of

p9

Christ today has a record that comes close to this. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find a similar record of growth from such a small beginning in such a short time in any religious group anywhere in the world today. This amazing record of growth should not be minimized.

An even more amazing chapter is being added to this story. Several of the churches started by the Boston Church of Christ have already started new mission works on their own and many more are planned for the near future. Now other discipling churches that grew out of the work at Crossroads have started following the example of the Boston church. Instead of training workers and sending them into existing congregations, they are planting new churches. In the last section of this book, Gene Vinzant identifies all these discipling churches that have been started or that are now being planned.

CONCERNS OF OTHER CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Other churches of Christ view the amazing growth of the discipling churches with mixed emotions. They rejoice because of the number of people being baptized. They are pleased to see the emphasis on mission work. They are concerned, however, because of the previous divisions and the problems they have seen in the discipling movement. They fear that the rapid expansion of this movement will mean the spread of these problems throughout the world.

There are several reasons for the concern which other churches of Christ feel in regard to the rapid growth of the discipling movement. They fear that the people they are seeking to reach with the gospel may be confused by the presence of two different churches of Christ that are similar in some ways, yet quite different in other ways. They fear that the people they are seeking to reach may react negatively to the methods of the discipling

p10

churches and that this negative reaction may close the door to evangelism by all churches of Christ. They also fear that when discipling churches are started in areas where other churches of Christ already exist, the new discipling churches may recruit members from the existing congregations. Their main concern, however, comes from their belief that the discipling churches are teaching and practicing things that they should not be teaching and practicing. They fear that the doctrines and practices of the discipling churches are damaging people psychologically and spiritually.

THE HIERARCHY OF DISCIPLING CHURCHES

The gap that separates discipling churches from other churches of Christ has recently grown much wider. An ecclesiastical hierarchy is developing among the discipling churches. Other congregations that grew out of the work of the Crossroads church are being taken over by the Boston church. This takeover is not just an informal matter of influence, although that is the way Al Baird and Steve Johnson represented it at a forum at Freed-Hardeman College on October 10, 1987.⁴ They said that the argument was just about words. Other churches of Christ, however, do not just object to the words used to describe this takeover process. What they object to is what the discipling churches admit they are doing.

In this new system that is emerging, there is a new organizational structure in which one congregation officially assumes the oversight of another congregation. The evangelists and elders in one congregation control, direct, and exercise authority over other congregations. This hierarchy extends through

p11

several levels so that the Boston church has direct or indirect control over a large network of congregations throughout the world. The plan is for the Boston church to exercise direct control over several key congregations known as "pillar churches" with the pillar churches controlling "capitol city churches," the capitol city churches controlling "small city churches," and the small city churches controlling "countryside churches."⁵

The pillar churches in the United States have been identified and boundaries have been drawn for their "spheres of influence." Seven such pillar churches in the United States have been identified thus far. These are the discipling congregations in Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, New York, Providence, San Diego, and San Francisco. In addition, 17 pillar churches outside the United States have been assigned various foreign spheres of influence. The Boston Church of Christ is not listed as a pillar church. It is at the top of the pyramid, directing the 24 pillar churches.⁶

This new ecclesiastical hierarchy is a clear departure from the doctrine of congregational autonomy taught by churches of Christ since the early days of the Restoration Movement. That is not really being denied. What is being denied is the validity of the congregational autonomy doctrine as it has been taught and understood among churches of Christ.

The doctrine of congregational autonomy is based on the New Testament pattern. That pattern includes independent local congregations. It does not authorize any level of church organization above that of the local congregation. It does not authorize one congregation to exercise authority over another congregation. The departure from this pattern and the development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy was one of the major factors in the apostasy that turned the church of the first century into the Roman Catholic Church by the sixth century.

The doctrine of congregational autonomy has been

p12

very important in the history of the Restoration Movement. Churches of Christ and Christian Churches divided in the late 1800s. One of the issues involved in that division was a Missionary Society that functioned as a level of church organization above the level of the local congregations. In the early 1900s, there was a division between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a more conservative and independent Christian Church. There were many issues relating to theological liberalism that led to that division. The final break, in the 1950s, came over a "restructure" plan that shifted control from the local congregations to a central denominational organization.

Churches of Christ cooperate with one another, but the typical practice is to exercise great care to avoid any appearance of anything that would violate the autonomy of a local congregation. When a congregation sends out a missionary to start a new congregation, for example, the supporting congregation has oversight of his work, but they do not claim to have oversight of the congregation established by that missionary. They might offer advice to a new mission congregation if asked to do so, but they would never exercise authority over that congregation. They would never attempt to direct or control that church. They would regard any such action as a violation of congregational autonomy. The recent development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy among the discipling churches is a clear break with their roots in the heritage of the Restoration Movement. What they are doing now is a clear violation of congregational autonomy.

In November of 1986, the Boston Church of Christ had this statement in its bulletin: "We are excited to announce that the Elders of the Boston congregation have assumed oversight of the Kingston Church of Christ, a two-year-old mission effort originally planted by the Miami-Gables congregation."⁷ In a pattern that

p13

was soon to be repeated throughout the United States, the preacher for the Kingston congregation was taken to Boston for further training and the Boston church sent in its own preacher.

One week later the Boston Church of Christ announced another takeover. In 1985, the Crossroads church had targeted Vienna, Austria, for a new church planting. The sponsorship of this mission effort was shifted from Crossroads to Boston and the leader of that mission team was moved to Boston for further training.⁸

On April 29, 1987, the Gateway Church of Christ in St. Louis was taken under the Boston umbrella. The Shandon Church of Christ in Columbia, South Carolina, started that congregation almost one year earlier. After the takeover, one of the preachers went to Boston and the other to Chicago for further training. The Chicago Church of Christ, one of the pillar churches directed by the Boston church, assumed oversight of the St. Louis congregation. They sent in their own preachers to direct the work. They changed the name of the congregation to the "St. Louis Church of Christ." They described this as a "replanting" of the work in that city. Ever since then they have referred to the date of the replanting as the beginning of the work in St. Louis.⁹

In July of 1987, the Boston church announced a takeover attempt that was not completely successful. Kip McKean said,

At the invitation of Sam Laing and the other evangelists of the Atlanta Highlands congregation, the Elders, the Lindos and I sought to inspire an evangelistic revival in the congregation. However, due to opposition from within the congregation to such Biblical principles as the authority of the evangelist, one-on-one discipleship and the calling of every member to evangelism, the Elders and I were asked by these same evangelists to consider planting a new congregation.

p14

where the before-mentioned principles would be taught and practiced.¹⁰

What happened in Atlanta, according to personal correspondence and telephone conversations with those involved, is that some of the members of the Atlanta Highlands congregation refused to accept the claim that the Boston Church of Christ should have authority over the Atlanta Highlands congregation. This case followed the same pattern seen earlier. Sam Laing moved to Boston for further training. The Boston church sent in its own

team, including an evangelist and 15 full-time interns. The Boston church assumed the oversight of the "remnant" which formed this new congregation. Those who wanted to be a part of the new congregation were interviewed to see if they would be acceptable.

Kip McKean said concerning the new congregation, "My vision for the Atlanta congregation is to become the pillar church for the entire Southeastern United States."¹¹ He then went on to list nine cities where this pillar church would plant new congregations. The pillar church status of the new Atlanta congregation raises the question about the status of the older Crossroads-type congregations in the Southeast. McKean listed eight such churches and said that the Boston church planned to help these congregations while training the Atlanta church so that it would be "more than capable of meeting all their needs."¹²

The next month, the bulletin of the Boston church included a report of another takeover, this one in Berkeley, California. In June, the preacher who started that church--Tom Brown--went to Boston for further training and decided to stay in Boston until he could plant a new discipling church in Los Angeles. The Boston church sent a preacher to initiate what was called the "rebuilding" of the Berkeley congregation. In

p15

August, the Boston church officially began directing the church in Berkeley. On August 2, Tom Brown, Al Baird, and Kip McKean outlined for the congregation the plans for the "reconstruction." Notice that all three of these men were members of the Boston church--not the Berkeley church. There were three elements in the reconstruction plan the Boston church imposed on the Berkeley church.

First, they had to move from Berkeley to downtown San Francisco and become "The San Francisco Church of Christ." Second, all their evangelists and women's counselors had to resign and become interns. McKean explained that this was required so that "when they are appointed in the future, they will be recognized in Boston as well as in our church plantings, such as in Bombay or New York."¹³ He went on to say, "I foresee this to help form a uniform standard of recognition throughout the multiplying ministries."¹⁴ The third requirement in this reconstruction is that "every individual who desires to be a member of the new San Francisco congregation will need to count the cost of being a disciple."¹⁵ If this requirement means what it did in Atlanta, the members will have to be interviewed to see if they will be acceptable.

Another takeover was announced recently in the bulletin of the Mission Church of Christ in San Diego. They said that they had agreed to follow the Boston church "with a true disciple's heart." As insiders in the discipling movement know, that language means total submission without question. Once the Mission church submitted to Boston, they were recognized as a pillar church and given oversight over California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. One of the congregations that now reports to the Mission church is the East Valley congregation in Phoenix. I recently interviewed a preacher who had been invited to move to Phoenix as an "elder intern." He declined the offer when he

p16

learned that the East Valley congregation is directed by the Mission church in San Diego and that they are directed by the Boston church.

A similar situation now exists with the Denver Church of Christ--a discipling church started recently by the Crossroads congregation. The Denver church has now joined the Boston hierarchy as a pillar church. The Boulder church has been told that it must merge with the Denver church. Other discipling churches in that area are expected to work under the oversight of the Denver church.

There was a very revealing statement in the Boston bulletin in a note at the end of a two-page spread listing all the church plantings that have taken place and that are planned by the Boston church and by other discipling churches:

As discussed at the Leadership Meeting at the 1986 Boston World Missions Seminar, here are the mutually agreed upon guidelines for targeting a city:

- 1..Prayer and fasting.
- 2..A man (of intern status) who is qualified and commended by the brothers.
- 3..Contact churches in the targeted city.
- 4.If another congregation has a planting in that nation, no targeting of those cities. Exception: if the initially planted church agrees, then there may be another city targeted from another congregation.¹⁶

The third and fourth rules are incompatible unless one understands that two different kinds of churches are being discussed. The third rule means that the discipling churches have to let other churches of Christ know that they are going to plant a new church in their city. That is all. No cooperation is contemplated. They can move in next door to a congregation not identified with the discipling movement and all they have to do is to notify them of their plans. The fourth rule, however, is talking about discipling churches only. In that case,

p17

they cannot even send a mission team into the same nation where another discipling church has already been planted--at least not without their permission.

This statement clearly shows that in the thinking of those who lead the discipling movement, discipling churches now constitute a totally separate fellowship from the fellowship of other churches of Christ. This attitude is reflected even more clearly in their frequent use of the term "remnant" to describe themselves. They see themselves as a remnant sent by God to call the faithful out of the "mainline" churches. Still more recent developments suggest that the circle is being drawn even tighter. The older discipling churches started as a result of the work at Crossroads are being excluded if they refuse to join the ecclesiastical hierarchy headed by the Boston church.

Some of the leaders of the original discipling movement that came from the Crossroads congregation are now resisting the takeover attempts by the Boston church. John C. Whitehead of the Crossroads church recently wrote a booklet, "Stop, Look, Listen," in which he warns against the Boston takeover effort. The Miami-Gables congregation has been resisting the Boston takeover attempts. Now, the Boston church plans to start a new congregation in Miami.¹⁶ What is happening now however, is the only logical extension of what was taught at a different level earlier throughout the discipling movement. If every Christian must be disciplined in a hierarchical discipling system within a local congregation, why not insist that every congregation must be disciplined in a hierarchical discipling

p18

system that puts one congregation in a position of authority over another? There is as little Bible authority for one of these ideas as for the other.

Now, however, the Boston church has started teaching a doctrine of authority that goes far beyond what was taught earlier in the discipling movement. They are teaching that Hebrews 13:17 applies to matters of opinion. They are claiming that this verse gives authority in matters of opinion to evangelists and elders, zone leaders, house church leaders, Bible Talk leaders, and disciplers. Al Baird told members of the Atlanta Highlands congregation that it would be a sin to refuse to obey the instructions of a discipler--even in a matter of opinion with no biblical justification at all because of the claim that God has placed that discipler over that Christian. Some observers believe that this is what was being practiced all along in the discipling movement, but they did not admit it or try to defend it until recently. What is happening now, however, is that discipling with its requirement of imitation and unconditional submission is being extended to congregations. The Boston church is discipling its pillar churches. They are discipling other churches. Eventually this Boston-led hierarchy is supposed to extend throughout the world.

DILEMMAS

In writing this material, I have had to point out some very serious problems with the discipling approach. That may make some people think that I regard the discipling churches as being totally wrong and other churches of Christ as being perfect. This is not what I believe. I see much good in the discipling churches. I also see many failures among other churches of Christ. But when I discuss the good things I see in the discipling churches and

the failures among other churches of Christ, some may think that I totally

p19

endorse everything about the discipling movement. This is not at all what I intend to communicate.

These dilemmas, however, simply involve the discussion of the issue, not the issue itself. The discipling dilemma is far more serious. It involves the question of how we can help others become more and more like Jesus Christ without making them over in our own image and thus changing them in ways that have nothing at all to do with Christianity.

A central element in the debate over the discipling movement as it has appeared in various denominations throughout the world has been the charge that this movement involves a control that is foreign to the spirit of Christianity. Critics of this movement charge that its leaders are making members over after their own image. According to these critics, **members are controlled in such a way that their personalities are changed to conform to the group norm.** These critics argue that such personality changes are destructive psychologically and spiritually.

The discipling dilemma offers two equally unacceptable alternatives. One extreme is to insist on changing people at all costs--even at the cost of their person-hood, autonomy, and uniqueness. The opposite extreme is to avoid such unhealthy changes by not helping people change at all. The way to escape from this dilemma is to recognize that there is a third alternative. We can help people change in ways that are uniquely christian, but avoid making them over after our own equally unacceptable alternatives. One is to accept the discipling approach totally in spite of some very serious

p20

problems. The other is to reject everything about this approach in spite of its many strong points.

After years of careful observation, I have come to the conclusion that the discipling churches are right in many of the things they do. They emphasize evangelism and get virtually all of their members involved in evangelism at some level. They have a very effective small group approach to evangelism. They are careful to make sure that prospective converts are thoroughly taught before they baptize them. They place a great emphasis on mission work and send some of their best people to the mission fields. They are conservative in doctrine. They spend most of their money to support the preaching of the gospel and little on paying for a church building. They are active in confronting sin in the lives of their members. They get their members into personal relationships that could encourage spiritual growth if used properly. They are baptizing a large number of people. They have a low drop-out rate. These strong points are important and they must not be ignored. By way of contrast, years of careful observation have forced me to the conclusion that many other churches of Christ are failing in these very areas where the discipling churches are succeeding.

There is, however, a very serious problem in the discipling churches that is not generally found in other churches of Christ. The next chapter presents the results of some research conducted in the Boston Church of Christ. A psychological test was administered to over 900 members of that congregation. Results of that study provide convincing evidence of an unhealthy pressure toward conformity in the Boston Church of Christ. It is changing the personalities of its members in unhealthy ways. Later in this book, you will find several follow-up studies done after the original research in Boston. Results of these studies provide compelling proof that the personality changes are being

p21

produced by the discipling methods employed by that church. Various comparison group studies show that these personality changes are not generally found in other churches of Christ or in various mainline denominations--but the very same pattern of personality change is observed in studies of various sects that are highly manipulative.

Discipling churches have some very serious problems in spite of the fact that they are doing a lot that is right. Other churches of Christ do not typically have the same problems, but there are many ways in which they are

failing to do what they ought to do. Churches of Christ would face a terrible dilemma if these were the only two options. Fortunately, each congregation of the churches of Christ is independent. All members are expected to study the Bible for themselves and reach their own conclusions regarding matters of faith and doctrine. No individual member and no local congregation has to choose sides and accept one or the other of these two equally undesirable alternatives. There is a third alternative. Churches of Christ can correct all their many failings, do everything good that the discipling churches are doing, but avoid the errors that are producing the psychological manipulation.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

1. Bernard Quinn and others, editors, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1982).
2. Robert Nelson, *Understanding the Crossroads Controversy* (Gainesville, Florida: published by the author, 1981).

p22

3. Milton Jones, *Discipling: The Multiplying Ministry* (Fort Worth: Star Bible & Tract Corp., 1982). Note: while this book seems to be the origin of the term "multiplying churches," the author has an independent ministry not identified with Crossroads, Boston, or any other discipling congregation.
4. Al Baird, Winford Claiborne, Earl Edwards, and Steve Johnson, "Discipling, Church Growth, and Church Unity," The Third Annual Preachers and Church Workers Forum, Freed-Hardeman College, Henderson, Tennessee, October 10, 1987. Audio Tape.
5. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, January 4, 1987.
6. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, August 30, 1987.
7. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, November 23, 1986.
8. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, November 30, 1986.
9. Bulletin, Chicago Church of Christ, May 3 and July 19, 1987.
10. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, July 26, 1987.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, January 4, 1987
17. Bulletin, Boston Church of Christ, August 30, 1987.

END OF CHAPTER 1

Link to [Chapter 2](#)