



## Apostolic Discipleship

### *“Discipleship”*

In my article, [\*Christ-centered Discipleship & Equipping Ministries\*](#), I discuss at length the particular ministry relationships between a disciple and an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher. Here, I would like to identify that which each of these Christ-appointed ministries have in common: **“Apostolicity”**.

### *“Apostolic”*

“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ....”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV). Whereas the NASB reads "as apostles", etc. and the NKJV reads "to be apostles", etc., neither "as" nor "to be" are in the Greek text.)

This passage tells us that Jesus gave certain gifts to men and gave certain men as gifts to the Church (Ekklesia)<sup>2</sup>. Something which is important for us to understand is this: In building His Church,<sup>3</sup> **Jesus blesses men – not methods**. There may be some value in considering discipling methodologies; but in the end, **Jesus blesses disciples through men rather than through methods**.

Again, Jesus gave certain gifts to men, and gave certain men as gifts to the Church. The apostle Paul was able to say to the Thessalonians, “You know *what kind of men* we proved ourselves to be....”<sup>4</sup> That which qualifies these men to equip the Church is not their fulfilling the presupposed “job descriptions” of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, but rather **who they are as ambassadors of Christ**.<sup>5</sup> These are men who “**have been with Jesus**”,<sup>6</sup> and bring the presence of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Contrary to what is in vogue today for some, I make no distinction between the Greek word, ekklesia, and its English translation, “church”. I use the two words interchangeably. When I say “church”, I mean the full and accurate biblical meaning of “ekklesia”. Simply using the Greek word, ekklesia, in and of itself, helps no one understand the biblical meaning. The biblical meaning will always require explanation for the unlearned. Therefore, I think the English words, “church”, or “assembly”, or “community” are adequate translations. Not everyone identifying with the word “church” is part of the Ekklesia of God. There is only one true Church made up of those who have received the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9-10) - those who “possess the Son”. (1 John 5:11-12)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>4</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *The Amplified Bible*

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>6</sup> Acts 4:13

Now, in saying these things, I am *not* saying that every minister who *claims* to be an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher is inherently “apostolic”. I am far from even implying that. The point I endeavored to make in my article [\*The Vineyard of the Lord\*](#) is that most ministers attempting to “equip the saints” are, in fact, *not* “apostolic”. What I *am* saying is this: Every minister who has been truly given to the Church as a gift from the ascended Christ will prove to have this “apostolic” quality which I am discussing.<sup>7</sup>

Just as there is an essential difference between the ministry of teaching and the ministry of discipling (specifically, “teaching them to observe all Christ commanded”), there is also an essential difference between ministry and “apostolic” ministry. And likewise, there is a difference between “Discipleship”, as conventionally understood, and “Apostolic Discipleship”. Although

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<sup>7</sup> So that the reader doesn’t miss the point of what I desire to communicate here: The debate concerning whether the ministry of the apostle still exists for the Church today or “passed away” in the first century, in this case, is quite beside the point. *Apostolic* (adjective) teaching, based on the apostles’ (noun) teaching recorded in the Scriptures is an absolutely necessary and sorely lacking *genre and quality of teaching* having a particular approach and goal – viz. to lay the foundation of Christ and to build Christ experientially in the lives of individuals and churches. I am focusing here on the adjective, *apostolic*, rather than the noun, *apostle* – specifically, a genre and *quality* of faith and practice (Jude 3), rather than a *supposed* job description of an apostle. However, I do not hold to dispensationalism or cessationism – I do believe that all the equipping ministries in the New Testament are for today. I deal with this issue in the afore-mentioned article, [\*Christ-centered Discipleship & the Equipping Ministries\*](#).

there are various schools of thought on discipling, and different methodologies are promoted, I think it is true to say that discipleship is conventionally understood to be a ministry which focuses on the initial development of the basic components of the Christian life, such as Bible reading, prayer, local church attendance, obedience, stewardship, witnessing, etc. “Apostolic Discipleship” certainly addresses these things, but while it is understood to be “**foundational**”, it is not looked on as being something “initial”, in fact, it is perceived as something “*eternal*”.

### *Christ-centeredness*

Discipleship has to do with the Christian life. But, whereas conventional discipleship focuses on merely developing various practices of the Christian life, first and foremost, “Apostolic Discipleship” focuses on **knowing Christ, who *is* our life.**<sup>8</sup>

“Apostolic Discipleship” has a very definite Christ-centered approach, focusing on Christ as the Center of Christianity, Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life for the disciple, as well as Christ as the Foundation and Head of the Church.

“Apostolic Discipleship” is all about growing in Revelation of Christ, Relationship with Christ, and Reflection of Christ. This

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<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:4

essential characteristic – which I am referring to as “apostolic” - is either seen and grasped or it isn’t. It is either the core of the discipleship or it is essentially missing.

## *Apostolic Fellowship*

Acts 2:42 tells us that the disciples “were continually devoting themselves to **the apostles’ teaching and fellowship....**” In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also **fellowshipping with the apostles**. The syntax in the Greek text has both the teaching *and* the fellowship referring back to “the apostles”. In fact, The Amplified Bible translates it as: “**the instruction and fellowship of the apostles**”.

What is the significance of the fact that the disciples “were continually devoting themselves to **the apostles’ fellowship**”? What was the nature of this “fellowship”? What was taking place during this “fellowship”? **Discipling.**<sup>9</sup> A significant aspect of “Apostolic Discipleship” is that the relationship between the disciple and the one discipling is a **ministry relationship**. These may also be friendships, but they are ministry relationships by nature. Something in addition to human friendship is taking place in these relationships. *The life of Christ is being ministered*

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<sup>9</sup> Alternative terms may be: “Mentoring” and/or “Spiritual Parenting”.

*through the Spirit and the word of Christ.* In John's gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."<sup>10</sup> Human friendships are good, but an intentional ministry relationship is vital for discipleship. Since it takes the authority of Christ to make a disciple of Christ, **authentic ministry relationships share the life of Christ**, specifically, they are *Christ-centered relationships through which Christ is revealed and relationship with Christ is nurtured.*

## *Apostolic Teaching*

Acts 2:42 tells us that the disciples "were continually devoting themselves to *the apostles' teaching....*" "Apostolic Discipleship" has to do with "apostolic teaching". In my article, [\*The Apostles' Teaching\*](#), I discuss at length teaching which is "apostolic" in nature; but I will attempt to summarize here by saying: *Apostolic teaching is teaching with a particular approach, goal, genre, and quality:*

The New Testament Scriptures explicitly tell us that the **foundation of Christ is laid by *apostolic teaching***.<sup>11</sup> What does

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<sup>10</sup> John 6:63

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Ephesians 2:20, 3:1-7

this mean? How does *apostolic teaching* lay the foundation of Christ?

*The goal of apostolic teaching is the experience of Christ and the formation of Christ in the disciple.* Therefore, the subject matter of *apostolic teaching* is Christ – that is, teachings *about Christ* and the teachings *of Christ*. Teachings *about Christ* are found in typology throughout the Old Testament,<sup>12</sup> which are wonderfully encapsulated in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews.<sup>13</sup> And, of course, the teachings *of Christ* are found throughout the gospels, many of which are found in the "Sermon on the Mount" and the "Parables of the Kingdom".<sup>14</sup>

Again, *apostolic teaching* is teaching with a particular approach, goal, genre, and quality – its goal is the *experience of Christ* and the *formation of Christ* in the disciple. It is obvious that the Church has a plethora of teaching ministries. Personally, I think it is just as obvious that it has a dearth of *apostolic teaching* ministries. In order to obey the Lord's commission to "disciple all peoples", the

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<sup>12</sup> E.G. The Old Testament tabernacle, feasts, and priesthood. I am of the opinion that the interpretation of *all* Old Testament typology is for the *sole* purpose of revealing Christ. The *only* purpose of any of my teachings interpreting or incorporating Old Testament typology is to reveal Christ.

<sup>13</sup> See my articles: [Seeing Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews](#), and [Seeing Christ](#).

<sup>14</sup> See my articles: [The Character of the King & His Kingdom](#), [Abide in the Vine](#), [Who Is this King of Glory](#), [The Way of the Cross](#), and [Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross](#).

Church needs to “continue steadfastly” and “be devoted to” apostolic teaching.<sup>15</sup>

When the ascended Christ gives an equipping ministry gift, He also gives the necessary grace to fulfill that ministry. The *apostolic teaching* ministry is the special grace to teach *the Revelation of the Mystery of Christ* in such a way as to bring a people into fullness of *Relationship with Christ*, with a view to *Reflection of Christ* – by the working of the Spirit.

“And we all, with unveiled face, *continually* seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (in the face of Jesus Christ – Cf. 4:6), are *progressively* being transformed into His image from [one degree of] glory to [even more] glory, which comes from the Lord, [who is] the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 AMP

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"Apostolic Discipleship" is an excerpt from the eBook "[The Vineyard of the Lord](#)". See the corresponding [eBook](#) and [Audio Message](#) on our website.  
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<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:42

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*"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."*

1 Corinthians 2:13

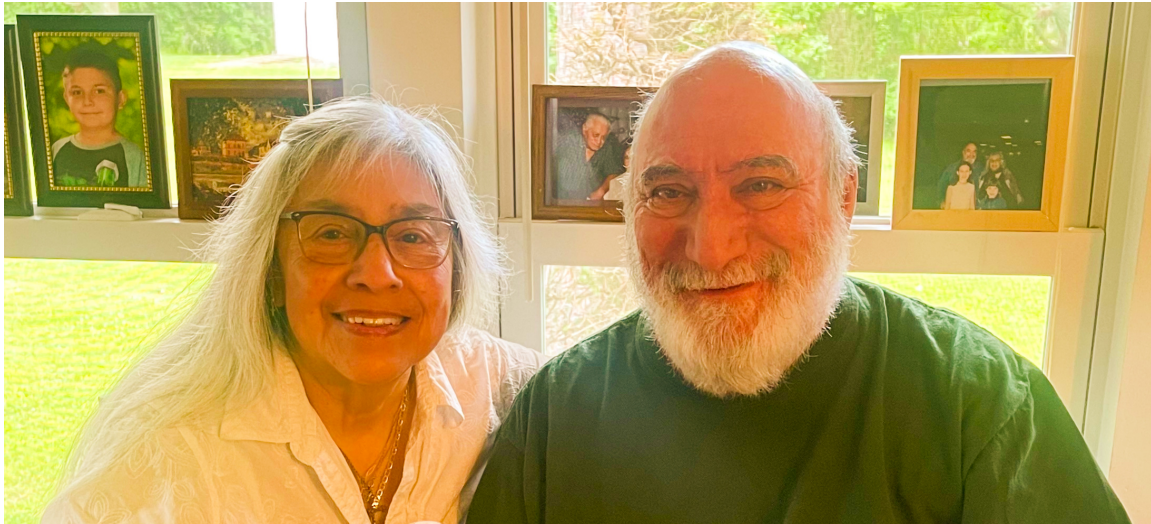
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Bill & Frances Furioso  
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... [www.AtChristsTable.org](http://www.AtChristsTable.org)

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