



The Church's Biggest Problem(s)

By

Mark McGee

What is the biggest problem the American church faces today?

That's the question a college student asked me after a meeting of Christians at his university. My mind raced through the many problems we face today trying to determine which of the many would be at the top of my list.

We ended up with two primary answers that come from the same spiritual root.

Problem #1

The first problem is **not knowing how to hear God's voice** with all the noise of false teaching and celebrity (personality) following in the American church.

Preaching and teaching in churches have changed dramatically in the last 50 years. The focus has changed from glorifying God to glorifying self. Instead of emphasizing God's Word, pastors and teachers often emphasize their own words. Celebrity is often more important than truth and goes to the heart of the spirit of 'consumerism' that exists in the United States and other countries around the world. We want what we want when we want it and are ready to pay whatever 'it' costs to get it.

Why doesn't that work well with Christianity? Because what 'I want' and 'we want' is often **not** what GOD wants. Consumers love celebrities and will give a lot of money, time and attention to them. That includes Christian 'celebrities,' whether they are preachers, teachers, conference speakers, authors or musicians (e.g. singers, bands, worship leaders, etc).

I shared a message at a church many years ago called *The Gospel of Me, We and Thee*. My point then and now is that the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ changed into the preaching and teaching of a gospel that fits the audience's wants and desires rather than what Jesus wants and desires. We are less concerned with what God says is true than what we want to **get from** God.

Christians have a difficult time hearing God's voice because there are so many voices in churches, denominations and conferences today with conflicting messages about what God says. Christian 'celebrities' have taken the plain message of God and perverted it into a gospel the apostles would not recognize. Because that's what Christian consumers are buying today, 'celebrity' messages and influence have become more important than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Warning

Jesus and His apostles warned this would happen, so we shouldn't be surprised –

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” Matthew 7:15

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Acts 20:28-30

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.” 1 Timothy 4:1-2

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Timothy 4:2-4

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” 2 Peter 2:1-3

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1

Okay, here's the problem in the form of a few questions —

- How do we know if what we're hearing is the voice of God or the voice of men?
- How do we know if what someone says or sings in church is true or false?
- How do we 'test the spirits, whether they are of God'?
- How do we know if the voices we are hearing in church or at conferences are really 'deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons'?

The answer is easy, but the solution is hard —

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15

Christians accomplish what Paul told Timothy to do through careful study of God's Word, which is truth. Once we are sure we've heard the voice of God clearly from our careful and thoughtful study, then we have to start the process of applying and comparing His Word. We want to apply the truth to our lives and compare the truth with what others are preaching and teaching as 'truth'.

However, that brings us back full circle to the problem. So many preachers and teachers have changed the Gospel into something that is no longer recognizable as the truth given to us by Christ and His apostles.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” Hebrews 1:1-2

The Apostle Paul told the leaders of the church at Ephesus that he had not “shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Unfortunately, many of the leading voices in the American church have shunned to declare the whole counsel of God to their audiences. I’m assuming they either don’t know it or purposely withhold declaring it. If they know the whole counsel of God and don’t declare it, what does that say about them and their purpose and motives?

How can we solve a problem this big when so many people who claim to be a voice for God are not?

Problem #2

The second problem, which I believe is the root of the first, is that the American church has to a large extent **abandoned making disciples**. Churches emphasize church attendance, children and youth program attendance, small group attendance, etc, but the one thing Jesus told His disciples to do is something the American church does not do very well – make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

- Go in the authority of Jesus Christ
- Make disciples of all the nations
- Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
- Teach them to observe all things that Jesus Christ commanded them

While emphasizing baptism and church attendance, American churches (for the most part) neglect making disciples and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus and His apostles commanded.

Is it any wonder that American Christians are not able to hear the clear sound of God's voice?

Making disciples is the KEY to accomplishing what Jesus told His followers to do. However, how can that happen when so many of the leaders of the American church don't do it themselves?

Here's what discipleship looks like –

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” 2 Timothy 2:1-7

How many preachers, teachers, conference speakers, authors and musicians do what Paul told Timothy to do? How many of them commit what they learned from their disciple-maker to faithful people who will be able to teach others also? How many endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ? How many refuse to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life? How many compete according to the rules (the whole counsel of God)? As Paul told Timothy, “may the Lord give you understanding in all things.”

Aren't all Christians 'disciples' of Christ whether they follow Him closely and obey His teachings or not? Good question. Simple answer is NO, they are not. Discipleship is not what we see in the American church. It doesn't look or sound anything like what we read in the New Testament or see in the early years of Christianity. [Pew Research](#) estimates that more than 160 million people in the United States are Christians. Using the definition of discipleship we find in the New Testament, do you think our country has 160 million 'disciplined followers' of Jesus Christ?

Our culture is built on 'self.' As we mentioned earlier – 'We want what we want when we want it and are ready to pay whatever 'it' costs to get it.' How does that work with what Jesus said about being one of His disciples?

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'" Matthew 16:24-25

The fact is it doesn't work. The two ideas – self-fulfillment and self-denial – are diametrically opposed to each other. You cannot 'fulfill' your selfish desires and 'deny' your selfish desires at the same time. We must choose between the two. Jesus was clear that whoever desires to 'save his life' will lose it, but whoever 'loses his life for My sake' will find it. What a contrast to the type of Christianity we see in our country today!

The Solution

The solution to these problems is simple but complex – easy but hard. We have to do what God says. If preachers, teachers and celebrity speakers, authors and musicians won't do it, then individual Christians must do it themselves.

Don't look to people to determine what God says. Look to God to see what God says. The American church has bought into a pile of lies and the only way out of that pile is to climb out on the ladder of absolute truth – the Word of God.

Solution #1 — Read the Bible every day

As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy –

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Christians must be in God's Word every day. Select a Book of the Bible and read through it a chapter at a time. Finish one Book and start reading another Book. Keep doing that and you will soon begin to recognize God's Voice. As Peter wrote in his second Letter –

“... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

The Holy Spirit inspired holy men of God to speak and write divine prophecy. As you read the Bible every day, you will learn how to hear God's Voice. You will also learn how to recognize the voices of false preachers, teachers and celebrity speakers, authors and musicians. You will 'hear' how the false voices don't agree with God's Voice. The difference becomes pretty clear over time.

Solution #2 — Ask God for someone to disciple you

We all need to be disciplined. Jesus didn't tell His disciples that some people needed to be disciplined and some didn't. Every Christian needs to be disciplined and they need to be disciplined by someone who is a disciplined follower of Jesus Christ. That's a rule Jesus Christ established from the beginning of His earthly ministry.

“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.” Matthew 4:18-20

The Process

Jesus' idea of 'fishing' for men was more involved than just 'catching' them. Our Lord demonstrated through His own process of making disciples that 'fishing' included guiding and mentoring. Jesus 'lived life' with His disciples and was with them through every aspect of life. That's what Jesus wants us to do as we 'fish' for men. He wants us to guide, mentor, and live life with them.

How will you know if someone is qualified to disciple you? If you have first learned how to hear God's Voice, you will know if someone is qualified. What you read in God's Word will tell you what a disciple-maker looks and sounds like. A qualified disciple-maker will not speak something different than what's clear in God's Word. That's why Solution #1 must proceed Solution #2.

Our prayers are with you as you take your steps into the tough but rewarding world of Christian discipleship! It can slowly solve the big problems facing the American church — one disciple at a time.

You can read more about **Making Disciples** in our free eBooks on the topic

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[A Disciple Is ...](#)

[I Will Follow Jesus](#)

[On Discipleship](#)

[Thinking About Discipleship](#)

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