



from Jesus to the Gospels

a bild encyclical by Jeff Reed



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Presented at 2007 BILD Summit

Ames, Iowa

November 8, 2007

**JESUS TO THE
GOSPELS:
A BILD
ENCYCLICAL**

This encyclical is of fundamental importance to all of our BILD partners worldwide. It is key to building a solid process of establishing strong churches and mature leaders. It is important for our North American Antioch School partners because if you do not understand these issues you are likely to mix in contemporary discipleship materials in a way that will weaken your program significantly. It is vital for our international partners as well because you will be tempted to mix in discipleship materials in a way that will likely cause your churches to not be properly founded, leading to high attrition now and nominalism down the road in a generation or two.

I have called this paper an *encyclical*. It comes from the word encyclopedia. It refers to an ecclesiastical letter, a circular, intended for extensive circulation.¹ It is the first of several encyclicals I intend to write on the theological encyclopedia issues of our church-based training process and curricular design.² These are critical issues as we seek to plant churches and train leaders in this time of unparalleled expansion of the gospel worldwide.

Western Discipleship Movement

I want to set forth a few presuppositions concerning the Western discipleship movement, at the beginning of this encyclical. These presuppositions will be explicitly dealt with throughout the argument of the paper. I am stating them right up front because I believe they are critical issues in today's global expansion of the Church and will quickly and aggressively engage us in the issues.

- The whole discipleship movement has to be rethought, since many of its core tenets are deeply flawed.

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition.

² I have one underway on the 4-fold 150-year-old Western curricular framework followed by Western Bible colleges and seminaries worldwide—why this fragments theological education and what to do about it. It will then be followed by an encyclical of the dominance of Western systematic theology and why it must be replaced by a biblical theology approach, if we expect to produce churches with leaders capable of impacting culture and civilization in the 21st century.

- The orality/literacy debate is distorted, if these matters are misunderstood. This shapes the whole curricular approach to oral converts in the massive Global South church-planting movements.
- The issues around the use of the Gospels in the establishing process have huge implications for setting out curricular processes in establishing churches and believers.
- The Western discipleship movement sets up a series of false dichotomies that permeate the training process, confuse new believers, and weaken new church plants.

I realize these are strong statements that many will find inflammatory. But the issues are large and the stakes high, and I believe this justifies the most direct approach appropriate to engaging church-planting movements worldwide.

The Western discipleship movement began to expand in North America in the 1950s and 60s and now is a worldwide phenomenon. The movement is now led by massive Western organizations. They are independent of movements and associations of churches. They are built on an individualistic American business model. They almost completely misunderstand the Church and, for that matter, the Gospels themselves (note: I did not say the gospel). And they have enormous financial resources behind their enterprises.

Central to the philosophy of this movement is “the discipling process.” I almost detest the term. I never use it. It is a concept that means something very different from what it would mean if the maturing process practiced by the Early Church was really understood. We use phrases like “getting established in the faith” to define this process. And we begin with the Pauline Epistles. As soon as we make that known, the following argument is consistently used against our ministry.

“You must begin with Jesus. The basics of discipleship are in the Gospels, not the Epistles. You are making Paul and the churches more central than Jesus. After you first learn to love Jesus, then introduce them to the Church.”

Once we began challenging the movement and their interpretation of the Gospels, calling into question this “discipling process” and setting forth an alternative, calling for young people to make churches their priority, we were accused of making churches more important than Christ. We have been accused of this for over thirty years in Ames and have been “labeled,” by a major discipleship organization, as a church to avoid both in Ames and Iowa City—our two main university towns. We have had a national leader of a large national discipleship organization, which trained over 10,000 youth pastors across the country, attend our seminars and oppose our ministry nationally. The organization is now no longer functioning nationally. We have had our ministry aggressively opposed by a large global discipleship organization as our resources and philosophy entered an 11-denomination network of churches spanning an entire country, only to later have the organization pack up and leave the country as BILD spread across the provinces. The debate is not personal nor is it a matter of

competition, but it is about very important biblical ideas, which will make a difference in churches and church-planting movements for decades to come.

In an attempt to defend their existence under constant questioning of churches, several false dichotomies have been set up, which adds to the confusion.

- Jesus vs. Paul/Apostles
- Following Jesus vs. attending a church
- Story/relationships vs. teaching/abstract doctrine
- Oral reasoning vs. literate reasoning
- Stories vs. teaching

These will be explained and discussed throughout the paper. Though it may seem dramatic calling this discourse an encyclical,³ our desire is for this paper to serve as an official BILD document and to be circulated and read widely by partner churches and church-planting movements worldwide. We believe the arguments in this paper are biblical and compelling, and if church leaders grasp them as they set up their training programs, the churches and their leaders will be much stronger and much more dynamic for generations to come.

A Few Fundamental Questions

As we begin to deal with the issue of how the gospels fit into the establishing process of new churches and new believers, let's focus on a few fundamental questions. The basic question of the paper is this:

Where do the Gospels fit in the establishing process?

Notice that I did not ask where the *gospel* fits in the establishing process, but where the *Gospels* fit. Many begin with the Gospels in a way that actually leads people to a kind of Christianity that decentralizes the Church and, practically, the churches themselves.⁴ In order to begin building our answer to the basic question of this paper, we must ask several additional questions. How did we get from Jesus to the four Gospels? It is a very different journey from what you might think. What are the gospels? When were they written? What was the purpose of writing them? How do they fit into the establishing process? And when . . . ?

To answer these questions, we must reach further back yet. Who exactly was Jesus? What did He come to do? What was His core mission? Who

³ An *encyclical* is an ecclesiastical document intended for extensive circulation. Its roots are actually in the encyclopedia. I intend to write a series of encyclicals all dealing with the issue of theological encyclopedia. It is our belief that the curricula of Western discipleship organizations and Western theological institutions both need to be radically ("back to roots") rethought as we enter the new millennium and as the gospel explodes into the Global South.

⁴ This encyclical is actually part of what is called the *From Jesus to the Gospels Project*. It includes a set of DVDs of six messages in a series by Jeff Reed entitled *From Jesus to the Gospels*, this encyclical, and the release of the four BILD Leadership Series courses on the New Testament, which are critical to the comprehensive development of church leaders in these concepts.

did the disciples think He was? . . . before and after His crucifixion? And finally, how did the Jerusalem churches understand Him? and His work—after His resurrection and ascension? What did they not yet understand? As we begin working our way through these questions, I want to express my indebtedness to two different and extensive bodies of work—conversations, if you will, that have been developed over the last thirty years—that of N. T. Wright and Richard Bauckham.⁵ N. T. Wright has entered the discussion of the quest for the historical Jesus, which has continued for over 100 years. Wright has been so influential as to shape the direction of this global, scholarly discussion by naming the current phase The Third Quest, of which he is by far the most influential. Richard Bauckham, taking the lead in another scholarly research conversation begun by Richard Burridge, has fleshed out the significance and implications of the Gospels being written in the form of Graeco-Romans biographies.

The Gospels in Context

We must begin by understanding a few basic things about the development of the Gospels before examining this development in some depth. There were three basic stages of the Gospels' formation:

1. The public ministry and activity of Jesus of Nazareth (the first third of the 1st century AD).
2. The (Apostolic) preaching about Jesus (the second third of the 1st century AD).
3. The written Gospels (the last third of the 1st century, approximately).⁶

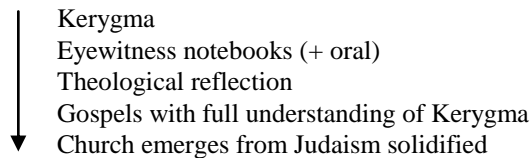
Most people do not know that the Gospels were written toward the end of the New Testament. Mark is placed by most scholars as the earliest of the Gospels and John the last, the total span being early 60s to early 90s AD.⁷ Bauckham does an amazing job of visualizing the actual process of the development of the Gospels.

⁵ N. T. Wright's magnum opus is his three-volume set entitled *Christian Origins and the Question of God—Volume 1: The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress, 1992); *Volume 2: Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress, 1996); and *Volume 3: The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress, 2003). The core ideas in this huge 2,000-page work have been published in a single volume entitled *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (IVP, 1999). Bauckham's two main works are *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Eerdmans, 1998) and *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Eerdmans, 2006). His works build on the work of Richard Burridge, whose main work is *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, (Eerdmans, 1992).

⁶ *An Introduction to the New Testament*, by Raymond E. Brown (Anchor Bible, 1997).

⁷ Arthur Patzia, in his book *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon* (IVP, 1999), has an excellent chart (Table 2.7 "From Jesus' Tradition to Written Gospels," p. 54) that pictures the entire development process, with well-researched dating estimates, with Mark written just before or after 65 AD, Matthew and Luke between 80 and 90 AD, and John in the early 90s.

Development of the Gospels

1st Century Reality

He first identifies the preaching (Kerygma) of Jesus Himself. Then he verifies the existence of eyewitness notebooks with collections of Jesus' miracles, parables, sayings, etc. Then, after the Church was established, Paul's letters written, and the Church emerging in full view, the Gospel writers began serious theological reflection, which emerged as a full understanding of the Kerygma, but not seeing clearly all that Jesus was ushering in. The Gospels are part of the process of the Church emerging from Judaism solidified.

Now we are ready to turn to our first order of questions: Who exactly was Jesus? What did He come to do? What was His core mission? Who did the disciples think He was—before and right after His crucifixion?

Jesus' Preaching—The Kerygma Unfolds

I am going to use Mark as my starting point. Mark is part of the Synoptics Tradition (*syn – optically*—to view side by side). The Gospels were written toward the last, not the first, of the New Testament. They were collections of stories, miracles, and teachings of Jesus that were drawn on by the Church, up until the time they were written. The Early Church referred to the essence of the story of Jesus as the *Kerygma*—the good news proclaimed. We begin with Mark because it was the first of the four Gospels, and Matthew and Luke appear to be based on Mark. Mark's structure is very basic. (As you will see as we go along, it follows the basic outline of what the Early Church called the Kerygma.)

The Kerygmatic Structure of Mark

John the Baptist
 Ministry of Jesus (brief, quick action: city to city, event to event)
 Proclaimed the good news and kingdom everywhere
 Confronted Jewish leaders
 Death and resurrection

5

As the book picks up, moving quickly toward the climax, three times Jesus foretells His death and resurrection (8:31, 9:30–31, 10:32–34). Other things stand out as the book unfolds.

What exactly was Jesus' message according to Mark? The message was simple, stripped down, and in an action context. He delivered it at one place, stirred everything up, and then moved quickly to another. Everywhere He went He "proclaimed the message" (1:38, 2:14). The message was summarized by Mark and put right up front in the book.

...Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." Mark 1:14–15 (NRSV)⁸

The message is called a proclamation of the good news. The term *proclamation* is the Greek word "Kerygma." This is the term that stuck with the Christians and is why they referred to the proclamation of the good news of the Jesus story as the Kerygma. The elements of the message are 3-fold in this initial proclamation. First the "time is fulfilled." This refers to the prophecies of the Old Testament looking toward the restoration of Israel. The restoration of Israel has begun. Second, the kingdom of God is near. Third, the news of victory is being proclaimed. (*Good news* was a term used for the news of victory as it trickled in from the battlefield (TDNT⁹). So right away, it is assumed that the Messiah is coming and He will liberate the nation of Israel from Roman rule and set up the kingdom. So the question right away becomes "Who is Jesus—is He the Messiah?"

As Mark's gospel unfolds, several clear distinctives begin to emerge. First are the strange kingdom parables, which suggest the kingdom growing slowly and many not becoming part of the kingdom. Second, are the identity dialogues. "Who is He?" is asked by everyone—the crowds, the disciples, the Pharisees, and Jesus Himself comments on who He is. The main terms are "Son of man" and "Son of God." Everyone would have translated the use of these terms as referring to the promised Messiah. A third distinctive are the two brothers and sisters dialogues, in which Jesus states that those who are following Him are His real brothers and sisters. Fourth was the way He spoke with authority, combined with His rejection of the Jewish leaders, and His prediction of the coming destruction of the temple. Add to this the clear predictions of His rejection and death at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes (8:31), and the picture becomes clear. Those who follow Him will receive a hundredfold in this age and eternal life in the age to come.

6

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. Mark 10:28–30

⁸ Throughout this encyclical, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible will be used unless otherwise noted. (NRSV, 1989)

⁹ TDNT

He then follows this with the third prediction of His death at the hands of the Jewish leadership and then enters Jerusalem and predicts the destruction of the temple. Remember, also, the kingdom of God parables: not all will enter, it will grow like a mustard seed, etc. In addition, this New Covenant community He is setting up will focus around Him, not the Jewish temple (Passover/Lord's Supper—14:12–25). So what is the picture then? Who was Jesus, and what was happening? If He was the Messiah, why was He not saving Israel? restoring Israel? He was, but in a totally unexpected way.

The essence of Mark's Kerygma story is this:

- Jesus preached the “news of victory” of God: the time is fulfilled (for Israel's restoration) and the kingdom of God is near.
- Repent and believe in this, and follow Jesus.
- Jesus is the promised Messiah, promised in the Old Testament, who would restore Israel and set up the kingdom.
- All who follow Him will be spared the coming judgment on Israel and be part of the New Covenant community He is setting up with His followers.

So let's return to our first order of questions. Who exactly was Jesus? What did He come to do? What was His core mission? Who did the disciples think He was—before and right after His crucifixion?

He was the Messiah, the coming Jewish deliverer, who was prophesied in the OT, who would deliver Israel and bring in the kingdom of God.

1. He saved those who repented from the coming judgment on the Jewish leaders, the Temple and Jewish system, and the faithless generation.
2. He was creating a new community built around Him rather than Judaism—that is Christianity (the Church).

All this sheds a whole new light on familiar ideas and passages. For example, seeking forgiveness of sins meant to show receptiveness and readiness to follow Jesus into the New Community. Repent and believe and you will be saved was understood primarily as being saved from the judgment coming to this generation. The gospel (“news of victory”) meant the time has arrived for God to fulfill Old Testament promises to Israel, for the Messiah to arrive, and for God to set up His kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount was primarily a preparation for choosing to follow Jesus into the New Community, cracking open their “Judaism worldview.” And the rich young ruler challenge was what was necessary for him to let go and follow Jesus into the New Community.

Now we need to turn to our second level questions. How did the Jerusalem churches understand Him? . . . and His work? (after his resurrection and ascension?) What did they not yet understand?

Apostolic Preaching—Rooting the Kerygma in the Old Testament

The first question the disciples had for Jesus was concerning the setting up of the kingdom.

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Acts 1:6–8

The Kerygma story would continue to unfold and eventually lead to a big picture quite different from what they had thought. They expected the kingdom to be restored to Israel very soon. They still were not expecting a worldwide expansion of the gospel (Kingdom is like a mustard seed). The church was not revealed yet. Let’s look at the Jerusalem churches and what they believed, through the five sermons of Peter found in the first ten chapters of Acts.

Acts 2:14–42 Peter

Acts 3:11–26 Peter

Acts 4:5–13 Peter

Acts 5:27–32 Peter and the Apostles

Acts 10:1–48 Peter

A careful study of the five sermons shows that they all followed the same pattern. Each of them had the same core.

Jesus Christ—the prophesied Messiah.
His ministry began with the baptism of John.
Went about doing good and healing.
Was killed but resurrected in 3 days.
Appeared to over 500.
Will return to judge the living and dead.
Everyone who believes receives forgiveness.

Peter simply told the story over and over—to the multitudes in Jerusalem at Pentecost, to the Jewish leaders, to the Gentiles at Cornelius’s house. He rooted it in their eyewitness accounts. He carefully related the events of Christ’s story to Old Testament prophesy.

This New Community, not knowing a lot about its identity yet, devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to breaking of bread, and to prayer. What exactly was the Apostles’ teaching at this stage? Basically, it was the Kerygma story integrated with the Old Testament Scriptures: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. That is what they knew at that time. Remember the event on the road to Emmaus, recorded by Luke?

Luke 24:7 “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”
 ...³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Luke 24:7, 32

They were working back through the Old Testament—every part of it, all three sections—and discovering its true meaning as related to Christ. Passages that had been veiled by Judaism were making sense. How did the Jerusalem churches understand Him and His work? . . . after His resurrection and ascension? What did they not yet understand?

What did they understand?

1. They understood that Jesus was resurrected, was sitting at the right hand of God, and would come back and judge the living and the dead.
2. They understood that they were part of a New Community formed by Jesus and that the Spirit of God would instruct and lead them.
3. They understood that everyone who believed in Jesus would receive forgiveness of sins and be accepted into this community (baptism).

What did they not understand? At least two things:

1. They did not understand the Church yet. They thought that this New Community of Jesus was to be contained inside Judaism, like sort of the heart of God fulfilling all of His kingdom promises to Israel.
2. They did not understand yet that Jesus would not come back for a long time.

The Kerygma, then, is the gospel proclamation. It is their explanation of who Jesus was, what He came to do, and the testimony of His resurrection. It was a challenge to those hearing the proclamation—to repent and believe for forgiveness of sins and for entrance into the New Community.

The Mystery of the Kerygma—The Church

It is very important to understand what happens now in our unfolding story. A mystery is being revealed. Read carefully the following account.

2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,
²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

¹ This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, ³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote

above in a few words, ⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Eph 2:19–3:10

Several things are very important to understand at this time. The Jews and Gentiles are made into one new household of God—the Church. Christ is the cornerstone. The Apostles and Prophets have laid the foundation. The whole new structure (the Church) is being built on that foundation. It is a holy temple in the Lord—a dwelling place for God. But this Church is a mystery—something that has in the past been hidden but now is known only because it has been revealed. This mystery was made known to Paul. As a result, now Paul has a two-fold job description: first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and second, to bring to light the administration of this mystery—that is Christ's administration (plan) for His Church. This Church will be so magnificent; this New Community that Christ first led his 70 followers into before He left them will amaze even the rulers and authorities in heavenly places even before He is done building it.

The Didache—The Teaching of Christ (Apostolic Letters)

Now it is time to add an additional concept used by the Early Church—the *Didache*. *Didache* is the Greek work for teaching and the body of teaching by Christ about His Church and Himself as the cornerstone. It was used by the Apostles and the Early Church for Christ's teaching delivered to them through the Spirit after He left. In Paul's letters several terms are used for this teaching, this *Didache*.

Early—"traditions," "instructions," "commandments," and "teaching"

Middle—"rule," "the faith," "rule of faith," "pattern," and "elementary principles"

Later—"deposit of sound doctrine" and "sound principles"

In the General Epistles (by Peter, John, and others), the teaching is referred to as "the faith." We will refer to this body of teaching as "the *Didache*." The Early Church used the term *Didache* for this teaching as evidenced by

The Didache, a catechetical document written approximately 100–120 AD.¹⁰

Let's begin in our understanding of the Didache (the teaching of Christ) by looking at its origins. Some state that because it is found in the writings of the Apostles rather than the Gospels that it is secondary to Christ's very words recorded in the Gospels. As you will see in a moment, that is absurd, and reflects a very shallow understanding of the New Testament, as well as creating a false dichotomy that does not exist. We can trace the foundations of the Didache to Luke's introduction to Acts.

¹ In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.
Acts 1:1–2 NIV

The term *began* literally means “to begin, to make one's beginning; to rule, govern, or command.” In the Gospel of Luke, Luke records what Jesus began to do and teach. In Acts, Luke records what Jesus continued to do and teach—through His Apostles, just as He said He would do. F. F. Bruce translates this phrase as follows.

As the gospel records what Jesus began to do and teach...so Acts records what he continued to do and teach, by his Spirit in the Apostles, after he was “taken up.”¹¹

John Stott's paraphrase of this important phrase is also of great value.

“The most accurate (though cumbersome) title, then, would be something like “The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through His Apostles.”¹²

What Jesus began to do and teach while on earth, He continued to do and teach after He left. It is all Jesus. In fact, if you remember from His discourse with the Apostles in the upper room before His death, He told them about how He would continue His teaching in the future.

²⁵ “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.
John 14:25–26

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever

¹⁰ *The Didache*, in the *Hemeneia Series* edited by Kurt Niederwimmer, is an indispensable wealth of commentary and insight around the complete text of this Didache manuscript, giving us much insight into the life of the early churches. (Fortress, 1998)

¹¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, by F. F. Bruce

¹² *The Spirit, the Church and the World: The Message of Acts*, by John Stott (InterVarsity Press, 1990).

he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:12–15

He said the Spirit would teach (didache) them everything and remind them of everything He had said to them so far. He was very specific—“He will take what is Jesus,” and declare it to them. The Apostles’ teaching, then, is Christ’s teaching. Jesus said the Spirit will take what is His and declare it. Where is this teaching found now? In the writings of the Apostles (and their co-workers). So let’s turn first to Paul, whose writings are recorded first, to see if we can find this future teaching.

Paul’s own testimony, on many occasions, was that he received the teaching that he was presenting to the churches directly from Christ. The Didache is not revealed as a set of abstract principles, but it is in real live communities of faith, facing all the same problems churches do in every culture and in every generation. It is clear that integrating the Kerygma and Didache into our lives is far more than learning abstract theology. It is life-changing doctrine—sound doctrine—therefore it must be learned in real life contexts with real life problems.

Is it possible to discover the essence of this Didache, just as we have the Kerygma? C. H. Dodd argues convincingly that a pattern of teaching consistently weaves in and out of the Apostles’ letters and argues for the existence of catechetical training in the early churches.

Our knowledge of any further contents must be derived from the study of passages in the epistles, which seem to recall, sometimes directly and sometimes allusively, the well-established pattern of catechetical training through which their readers had been put when they first became Christians.¹³

Dodd continues with a description of that pattern.

“It seems to have run somewhat as follows: The convert is first enjoined to lay aside certain discreditable kinds of conduct, especially some which were common and easily condoned in pagan society. Sometimes lists of vices are inserted.... Next, some of the typical virtues of the new way of life are set forth.... Then various social relationships are reviewed, in particular those which constitute the family as the primary form of community; the relations of husband and wife, parents and children, master and servants.... Then the wider “family” of the Christian community itself comes into view. ...He is given some counsel about behavior to his pagan neighbors.... He owes obedience to the constituted

¹³ C. H. Dodd, “Preaching and Teaching in the Early Church,” pg. 16 in *Gospel and Law*, Bampton Lectures in America, Number 3, delivered at Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 1950.

authorities.... Finally he is reminded of the extremely critical time in which he lives, which calls for constant watchfulness....”¹⁴

The essence of the Didache can be summarized as follows.

- Reform conduct—“put off/put on”
- Virtues—“fruit of the Spirit”
- Family relationships—“households”
- True community—“love”
- Conduct toward outsiders
- Submit to governing authorities
- Responsible living—“sober, watchful”

The primary essence of the Didache is found in Paul’s letters, the first writings of the New Testament. His letters assume the Kerygma, as can be seen in his summary of the Kerygma in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6 as a basis for his extensive treatise of the resurrection. Paul expands aspects of the Kerygma by using it as a metaphor for “resurrection living” in this age as we wait for our resurrection bodies in the age to come. The Didache is filled out more in the General Epistles, but it is important to note that the primary emphasis of 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude, and even John, to an extent, is to encourage the believers, especially the Jewish believers, to keep the faith and not return to Judaism as the Church emerges primarily as a Gentile Church.

The Early Church continued to build on the idea of the Didache (the teaching of Christ) in the first few centuries, with documents like *The Didache*, *The Apostolic Traditions*, and *The Apostolic Constitutions*. As I mentioned above, a manuscript entitled *The Didache* was discovered in the late 19th century, dating back to the 2nd century. It appears to be an attempt to put the teaching of Christ (what the Early Church called *The Didache*) into a catechetical manual. It is an amazing document! I have read and re-read it for years, but now it is beginning to come to full light in my thinking.

The Kerygma and the Didache are helpful early church distinctions that are not only accurate but built off of key Greek words that anchor the concepts to important biblical texts. Obviously the Kerygma comes first, for you cannot get established in the gospel without first embracing it. The Kerygma is foundational in one sense within the Didache. It is a very useful distinction in the establishing process. It is not clean, or perfect, yet it represents a very clear way of grasping the unfolding plan of God, and the New Testament itself, and lays the foundation for the catechetical process of new believers.

From Kerygma to Didache
And back again to the Gospels—Didache to Kerygma
Thus, FROM JESUS TO THE GOSPELS

¹⁴ Ibid. Dodd, pg. 20, 21

One final note before turning our attention to the Gospels themselves: It has to do with the narrative dynamics of Paul¹⁵ and what I call the orality-literacy straw man. It is false to call Paul's writings abstract theological literature and the Gospels narrative. Both have narrative; both have stories; both are set in real situations. It is true that Paul's writings are letters and the Gospels are Graeco-Roman biography, but the literatures were far more complex and written in a way that oral and literate believers could fully grasp their teachings. Some argue that Paul is not for today because the younger generation is story oriented (postmodern) not logic-scientific oriented (modern). Ridiculous! Paul both; Jesus both; and both Jesus. Practically, Paul uses the Socratic method in real situations, which is actually the best method for educating oral learners (see Paulo Freire's work).¹⁶

The Gospels—Solidifying the Kerygma and the Didache (the last piece)

Now we can finally turn our attention to the Gospels themselves. They are essentially biographies of Jesus, written in the form of Graeco-Roman biographies. They each are a Kerygmatic proclamation. They each follow the Kerygma storyline/formula. Yet, while they all share aspects of a general Kerygmatic intent (canonical), they each have unique elements in their intent. Again let's look at Mark as an example.¹⁷

IX: Content Analysis of Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>% of Work</i>
I.1–3	Introduction	0.9
II.4–17	Early years	4.0
I.18–VI.43	Travels and dialogues	68.8
VII.1–VIII.7	Imprisonment and trial	21.0
VIII.8–31	Later events, death, appearances, honours	5.3

¹⁵ *The Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, Bruce W. Longenecker, ed., Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

¹⁶ Paulo Freire established the thesis that those who are not literate could become educated to a very high level, what he called Critical Consciousness—reasoning across cultures—by simply posing problems appropriate to their current educational level. Paul's letters are problem-posing situational documents that, with a skilled leader, can be grasped in dialogue by oral learners. Freire's two seminal works are *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Educating for Critical Consciousness*.

¹⁷ These examples are taken from *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, by Richard Burridge (Eerdmans, 1992, 2004), pp. 163, 192.

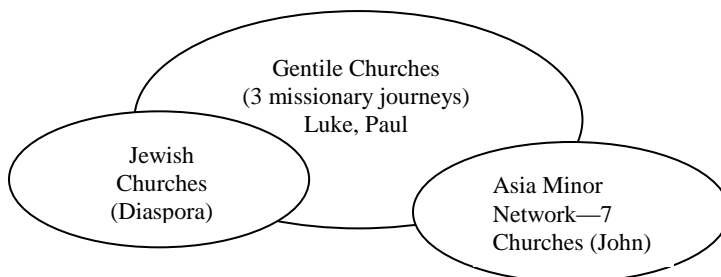
XI: Content Analysis of Mark’s gospel.

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>% of Work</i>
1:1–13	Preparation and beginnings	2.0
1:14–3:6	Ministry in Galilee	9.9
3:7–6:6	Call of disciples and ministry	17.9
6:7–8:26	Mission and blindness of disciples	17.0
8:27–10:52	Journey to Jerusalem	17.0
11–13	Ministry in Jerusalem	17.1
14–16:8	Last Supper, Passion, and Resurrection	19.1

You can see by the comparison that it fits the form of Graeco-Roman bios (lives; biography), and it clearly follows the Kerygma storyline, as do the rest of the Gospels. Yet beyond that, each one is different. Let’s look at how each was unique and how that helps explain the purpose of the gospels, both to their local and canonical intent.

We can gain insight when we look into the unique intent of each gospel and the collective intent of the collection as we examine the networks that the gospels were addressing.

Regional Networks in the Last Third of the 1st Century



We can learn a lot from these situations. As to Mark’s network, Mark worked with Peter, which we know from church history. Peter wrote his letters for the Jewish Diaspora. Mark’s gospel shares this context. These churches were mostly Jewish. Peter’s letters were arguing for his churches to stay with the faith (as do Hebrews and Jude). Mark’s gospel makes sense because it is a simple Kerygma that reinforces that the Church was Jesus’ plan all along, not for the New Community to be merely a remnant in Israel. Jesus is seen in Mark as leading a small community out of Israel (breaking up families), into a family that would spread all over the earth (mustard seed parable). Israel is seen as rejecting Jesus and headed for destruction.

Matthew’s network is not clear. His gospel is written from the same area as Mark. He appears to have drawn heavily on Mark’s work. It is a thorough treatment of the Kerygma, demonstrating tremendous command of the Old Testament, looking at Jesus’ teachings as preparation for entering this New Community. These churches were mostly Jewish. Both Jews and Gentiles

are in view in his gospel. It is sort of a Kerygmatic bridge to the complete story (Luke-Acts), with masterful command of the Old Testament, with the most comprehensive sermons of Jesus. This gives real insight into how to interpret Matthew's five discourses.

1. Sermon on the Mount—Entrance into this New Community (5–7)
2. Mission of Disciples—Announce New Community (10–11.1)
3. Parables of the Kingdom—The strange emergence of this New Community (13.1–52)
4. New Community Rules—The announcement of the New Community as the Church (18)
5. The End Times—The New Community in eschatological context (24–25)

The things Jesus was talking about in those five discourses can only be fully understood after the Church has been revealed. They understood some at the time of Christ, but very dimly. Matthew could now see everything clearly. Jesus was pointing to the New Community—The Church—all along. He was providing instruction on how to follow Him out of the old and into the new. And in a sense, it was actually the path that the Old Testament was pointing to all along.

Luke's situation was different. He was at the heart of Paul's network. This was the new world of the Church. The heart of the Church would be Gentiles. They needed to know the whole story. Luke writes two volumes to Theophilus, a Greek, with his emphasis to Gentiles, but he intended to tell the complete history of this great shift from the Jews to the Gentiles. The Great Commission unfolds into a spontaneous expansion of the gospel (Kerygma) through the empire-wide multiplication of churches, all part of this New Community: the Church. This was Christ's plan all along; now it is fully in view. He tells Theophilus that he is writing him so he will have the accurate context of all that has happened. This 2-volume work cannot be accurately understood without understanding the Didache (the teaching of Christ) and without understanding the mystery of the Kerygma—the Church.

John's network focused on the seven churches of Asia Minor, as described in Revelation 1 and 2. These churches are a mixture of Jews and Gentiles—a transitional bridge if you will. Both Jews and Gentiles are in view, but mostly Gentiles. The gospel is soon going to go mainstream throughout the empire and will come face to face with Greek philosophy, which is the base of Western thought. He wants to equip the churches to experience real life in this Graeco-Roman world (resurrection, spiritual life), and be equipped to share their faith in the battle of Greek "Gnostic" ideas.

So what then are the Gospels? They are a re-interpretation or full theological reflection on the Kerygma (prophetic), based on eyewitness testimony, which sets the whole story in context, which is now understood, with the full revelation of the Church as a new people, apart from Israel, now emerging into a world movement (religion) of its own—Christianity. They make it perfectly clear what Jesus was up to in His time here on earth.

He knew exactly what He was doing. What has now transpired in the Church was His plan all along. It is perfectly consistent with God's plan all along.

The Apostles or their companions could now see the whole picture. It is now becoming clear what God was up to. As Bauckham states so clearly at the end of his powerful book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, "It is in the Jesus of testimony that history and theology meet."¹⁸ And the result of that combustion, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the Gospels are produced. The Church is emerging from Judaism. This New Community is not a new Jewish remnant, but something totally new, of a grand scale, but deeply rooted in what God was unfolding all along, even as He birthed Israel hundreds of years earlier.

Mark—the basic Kerygma, with clear emphasis on Jesus creating a new household that would start small and then multiply beyond belief.

Matthew—the Kerygma is truly what the Old Testament pointed to all along. He provides a deep, convincing theological treatise of the Kerygma, also showing how and why Jesus was leading His followers out into a New Community—the Church.

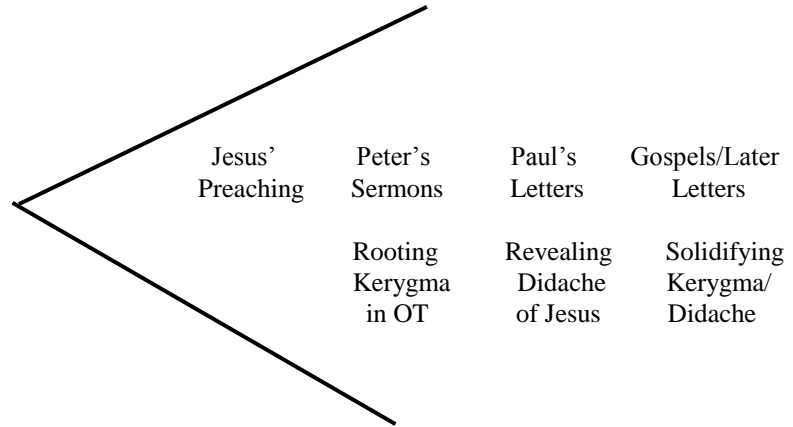
Luke-Acts—In Luke's work we see the sweep of the whole picture, the unfolding of the whole plan. His work put Jesus' final commission of His disciples into perspective. The fulfilling of that Great Commission is the worldwide multiplication of churches.

John—He presents Jesus as the Logos (the true Word from eternity past), offering true life, in the context of the battle of the Greek philosophical "Gnostic" ideas, which dominated their Graeco-Roman culture.

The picture is now complete. What began with Jesus moving quickly from place to place, announcing the kingdom as having arrived and Himself as the promised Messiah, and gathering a small band of 70 to make up the base of his New Covenant community, now had mushroomed into the foundations of the Global Church—based squarely in Gentile territory. Christianity had been born. The picture, then, looks like this.

¹⁸ Bauckham, p. 508.

From Jesus to Christianity



So when all is said and done, what does it mean to follow Jesus? If we are to make disciples of Jesus, how do we do it? What are the implications of our study so far?

Following Jesus Means:

1. *Following Jesus means following him into his Church.*

It means:

- embracing the gospel (Kerygma)
- being baptized
- following Christ into His Church
- becoming established in the teaching (Didache)
- fully living in community

There is no such thing as following Christ individually, outside His community; it is out of step. To conduct life outside the Church (following Jesus not joining the Church) is not possible, if following Jesus means anything real.

Today, many are talking about following Jesus, sort of a personal spiritual journey—almost like having your own personal guru. This phenomenon is recorded well in a recent book entitled *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generation*, by Dan Kimball.¹⁹ Young post moderns create their own small community but essentially ignore the church, not carefully founding believers in the Didache. This is not following Jesus. In my generation it was discipleship organizations. Now, it is the young post moderns. Another invitation down the wrong path of following Jesus is issued by George Barna's mini-manifesto entitled *Revolution: Worn Out on the Church? Finding Vibrant Faith Outside the Sanctuary*.²⁰ In it Barna states: "Millions of believers have moved beyond

¹⁹ *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, by Dan Kimball., copyright 2007, Zondervan.

²⁰ *Revolution*, by George Barna, copyright 2006, Tyndale House Publishers.

the established church.” I appreciate Barna’s research through the years on the sad state of the church in North America, but in this book he did not demonstrate theological acumen at all, let alone respect for Christ’s plan for the Church. Saturation church-planting movements in North America, now being propagated around the world, are calling 2 or 3 gathered (a father and son fishing together n Sunday morning) a local church. They base it on Matthew 18:2, again proving that you can do anything you want in the Gospels not rooted in the Didache.

2. *You cannot separate Jesus and the Apostles and be following Jesus.*

Following Jesus means following what He continued to do and teach through His Apostles. Remember the introductions to Luke and Acts. Acts is what Jesus continued to do and teach. And do not forget the Upper Room Discourse in the Gospel of John, where Jesus said that the Spirit will take what is mine, my teaching, and disclose it to you in the future. To set forth the dichotomy of Jesus and the Apostles is a convenient way of dismissing virtually all of Christ’s teaching on the Church, enabling you to follow your own plan rather than His. You may think you are following Jesus by just following him in the Gospels, but you are not.

3. *The Apostle’s teaching is the foundation of the Church and the starting point for establishing believers in the faith.*

Christ reveals the Church through the Apostles. Christ is the cornerstone. The Apostles and Prophets are the foundation. On this foundation He will build the entire edifice. He has a plan. It is a worldwide multiplication of churches. He has a plan for these churches. He has a plan for establishing believers in the faith. It is not our option to change the plan to get the job done through massive discipleship organizations operating on Western business plans, but networks of churches spontaneously expanding.

4. *You cannot accurately and fully understand the Gospels without understanding the Didache, thus you cannot clearly and solidly follow Jesus without understanding the Teaching.*

The Gospels were written after the Church, as Christ’s plan for the age was revealed. They assume it. They were written by the Apostles or their close associates, explaining to the Church the entire picture of what Christ was doing then, in light of all that had happened. Let me give you an illustration: Matthew 16 and 18. How could you understand what Jesus meant by this little glimpse into the Church without Ephesians 3? Or how could you understand what Jesus meant by his “you are my family” mini-discourse in Mark without His full teaching? With either of those two illustrations, just from the Gospels alone, you could go create your own little communities around you and your needs and purposes. I could give you dozens of examples of how people use the Gospels to create their own plans, rather than following Christ’s plan of the Church, and churches.

5. *Becoming established in the faith, beginning with the first principles.*

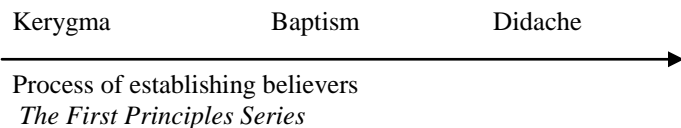
Paul expected the believers to begin with the first principles of the faith, to become rooted and grounded in the teaching that they received from him (and the other Apostles). What he taught them was “the faith,” “the deposit,” “the sound doctrine,” “the traditions” that they were to pass on (Colossians 2). The Hebrews writer expected them to understand the faith they had received, and if not, to go back and relearn the first principles (Hebrews 5). Peter warned his readers that Paul laid careful foundations that the unestablished and untaught would distort, so watch out (2 Peter 3).

The “discipleship process” of the Western discipleship movement confuses this entire process of properly establishing believers in the faith. Baptism is ignored because they are not incorporating them into churches. The first principles are ignored because again they start with the Gospels. The Christian life is reduced to a few basics from the Gospels that actually form a sort of pattern for life, but with church involvement as token. And, by the way, serious theology is also off the radar.

I have no beef with the discipleship organizations beginning the Kerygma (Jesus film, 4-laws, etc.). Nor do I with the orality/literacy approach to communicating the gospel—the essential Kerygma—through stories. But then creating a “discipling process” independent from the church, based in the Gospels, is to lay the wrong foundation. Some say it is all changing, they now are in the church-planting business. But that is my point! The old philosophy has still not changed, and the churches are still not central, but merely a means to an end.

So what should the establishing, catechizing process (ok, “discipling process” look like?

Catechetical Process Visualized



This is actually what Jesus said to His disciples in the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19–20. They were to go (preach the Kerygma), baptize (incorporate them into the New Community, and teach (Didache) them all that I commanded. Commanded is in the *aorist tense*, a point in time event without respect to past, present, or future. Here Jesus is referring to all of His teaching delivered to them, including what would be delivered. After the first principles are carefully laid, then move them on to maturity. Just remember, you must begin with the first principles in the Apostles’ teaching—the letters, first, for the Gospels assume an understanding of the Didache.

How long do the first two steps take? Often it does not take very long. Remember Peter's message in Cornelius's home? After a short 8-verse presentation of the Kerygma, they believed on the spot and were baptized immediately and incorporated into the first Gentile church at Antioch.

Now let's turn just briefly to the issue of orality and literacy. Remember the false dichotomies I commented on in the beginning of the paper: Jesus vs. Paul, following Jesus vs. joining a church, stories vs. teaching, oral reasoning vs. literate reasoning? Let's revisit these dichotomies with some facts.

- a. About 90% of the Graeco-Roman world of Paul's day was nonliterate.
- b. Paul expected them to follow the letters he wrote to the churches.
- c. Paul's letters were not abstract theology, but integrated communication filled with real life situations of churches and Kerygma references to OT stories pointing to Christ.
- d. Good research says that isocratic dialogue in "family counsel" style community life is the key!

The assumption by groups such as the Orality/Literacy Network is that oral learners learn best by stories and narrative, not teaching (theology). They assume that oral learners will naturally incorporate the stories but cannot reason the same as literate.²¹ This calls for a descriptive dialogue process, not a teaching (Socratic) dialogue. Both assumptions are wrong. Both narrative and theological reflection (Socratic discussion—Paul's Letters) go hand in hand with good oral learning. They must occur together, or the knowledge of the stories alone will not produce mature believers, let alone strong leaders. Remember, Paul's letters were to mostly nonliterate audiences. Ironically, much of the original orality/literacy research centered on the debate of the oral Socrates and the literate Plato.²²

6. *Following Jesus means His community is a higher order than family, ethnic, or national identities and relational networks.*

The church family is a real family. We are to see our families in a "family of families." We are not just to attend a church, but to become part of it its

²¹ One of the main documents of the new orality/literacy movement is *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, published as a Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP #54, copyright 2005, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and International Orality Network, SUDHINDRA Offset Process, Bangalore, India). While in one sense they are making strides in the communicating of the Kerygma, it is steeped in the Western discipleship paradigm I have been addressing in this encyclical. In their small 91-page book, I disagree with 75 assumptions that I believe do not square with either the Scriptures or good research from the orality literacy debate.

²² At the heart of this debate are Eric Havelock and the Yale School. *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to Present* is a great primer on these issues.

very life—the life of Christ: the Lord’s Supper; the care of widows; adorning the gospel in our communities through the quality of our community life; seeking the welfare of the city; maturing collectively into the image of Christ locally, for all to see.

Let me conclude with just a final word to our international partners. Many of you have shared with us that being in our church is as great an experience as the training you get while you are here. You talk about seeing the entire body of Christ working out these principles. You are impacted by hearing everyone sharing back these ideas, regardless of how basic their service in the church. Why is this so impacting? Because the people you encounter cleaning the building, serving the meals, producing the resources, etc., as well as leaders at all levels in the church are established in the faith in real community. They are not wandering around aimlessly as unestablished “disciples.”