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Review: Christ's Call to Discipleship

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communication skills, low self esteem, and inadequate or improper sources of significance and security, are not even mentioned.

This book is an excellent introductory book on a biblical understanding of marriage in our contemporary society, despite the weaknesses mentioned above. It would also be a good resource for a small discipleship group study, providing the pastor or teacher can supplement the discussion in the areas of sexuality and marriage problems. I also see this as a possible supplemental text book for an undergraduate course in marriage and family. It is well deserving of being in the pastor or student's library.

CHARLES L. VANCE
Plano, TX

Christ's Call to Discipleship, by James M. Boice. Chicago: Moody, 1986. Pp. 170. \$9.95.

Almost anyone familiar with contemporary American evangelicalism has heard of James Montgomery Boice. During eighteen years as pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and speaker on "The Bible Study Hour," Boice has published thirty books. He has also provided leadership for the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology and the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, and has been a Consulting Editor for the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* series.

Yet, for all his credentials and the respect he commands, Boice begins his latest volume in this way, ". . . I have not had apprehensions about how a book would be received until this one. I know that many will misunderstand it." (p. 9)

Why does Boice voice such strong misgivings? It certainly is not the general subject matter of the book. Works on discipleship written in popular language have had a ready market for several decades. Nor is it the form, for Boice is a skilled preacher and writer, and the present studies obviously began as sermons.

Even the sequence of development is fairly standard. Initially, "The Meaning of Discipleship" is treated in three short chapters (pp. 13-44). Next is the longest section of the book: "The Path of Discipleship," five chapters covering pages 49-102. Following is "The Cost of Discipleship" (3 chapters, pp. 105-34). The final segment is "The Rewards of Discipleship" (again 3 chapters, pp. 137-69). So, where is the basis for Boice's stated concern?

In the opinion of this reviewer, Boice is well aware that the biblical and theological case he presents and the great force and urgency of his message will receive a cautious and mixed response. He is almost certainly correct, but for two different reasons.

Christ's Call to Discipleship is strong medicine, if nothing else. Boice minces no words in calling the slumbering church to total commitment to Christ and corresponding obedience in every aspect of life. This clarion call is being given to a professing American church that one writer evaluating a

Gallup survey several years described as “a mile wide and an inch deep,” because of its biblical illiteracy and comfortable lifestyle. Thus, the author should be commended for the obvious courage that undergirds his urgent, but largely unpopular, message.

Unfortunately, despite strong admiration for Boice and the motivation that compelled him to publish *Christ's Call to Discipleship*, serious difficulties with his biblical and theological argumentation and basic methodology must be noted. It is hoped that these criticisms can be constructive in nature, and in no way undermine the “loud and clear” call for commitment to Christ this book embodies.

Throughout this volume Boice assumes that to be a Christian is to be a disciple. Such a conclusion can be easily drawn from the broad usage of the term in Acts (see, e.g., 8:1, 9:1, 11:26, 14:22,23), where it is basically interchangeable with “Christians,” “church,” “believers,” and “saints.” But, such a broader definition is not what the author means. He believes there is a “defective theology that has crept over us like a deadening fog” (p. 14). This “false theology” (p. 15) “teaches that Jesus can be received as one’s Savior without being received as one’s Lord” (p. 14). In opposition to this perceived biblical/theological and practical heresy, Boice’s book sets forth “essentially one thesis, namely, that discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first becomes a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian” (p. 16).

Now it becomes obvious why Boice believes “many will misunderstand” his book (p. 9). He is correct in concluding: “They will suppose I am teaching that good works enter into a believer’s justification—a false gospel” (p. 9). He is correct, because his discussion so tends to confuse sanctification with justification at many points, that, all his disclaimers notwithstanding, the water is terribly muddled.

The basic problem here is not equating being a Christian with being a disciple, or in calling for a total and constant commitment to Christ. It is in misunderstanding the comprehensive NT teaching on the meaning of “disciple,” and in demanding such a total “front-load” commitment as part of the gospel of grace.

Out of over 250 uses of “disciple” and related terms in the NT, Boice has selectively chosen the relatively few that present the demands of ideal discipleship to the Lord Jesus. Undoubtedly, that is the way every believer *should* relate to Christ. However, undeniably *uncommitted* disciples, such as those seen in John 6:66 and 19:38, also dot the landscape of the NT. The biblical reality is that there are some who are called “disciples” who have not submitted to His full lordship, or who have been “secret” disciples (John 19:38) for some time.

It must be granted that one could not cover every pertinent passage in such short compass, especially in sermonic form. However, the lack of balance, as far as the wider meaning of “disciple” is concerned, represents a significant flaw in methodology. Such over-selectivity also lends itself to

being controlled by an unseen theological commitment: here, Boice's strong Calvinism.

Another methodological shortcoming should be observed in passing. Out of the virtual mountain of material written on discipleship since 1970, Boice has barely acknowledged the presence of such studies (p. 35). He quotes none of these, choosing either older works, or newer ones not directly related to the subject at hand. It is, of course, the author's privilege to disagree with what has been written recently on discipleship (the present reviewer disagrees strongly with a great deal of it). However, it is more serious either to ignore or, worse, not even betray an awareness of a number of major contributions in this field. It is to imply that the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination has been "on hold" concerning discipleship until the writing of this volume.

In summary, even with such strong concerns expressed, the reviewer would be careful not to condemn the book. It can be recommended as worthy of the reader's interaction, as long as caution is observed in the areas stated above. Hopefully, its piercing call for commitment will be received unreservedly in hearts and lives, even though its biblical and theological basis must be weighed carefully with our minds.

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Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships, by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986. Pp. 125. \$5.95 paper.

The field administration assigned the new missionary to a rural setting in a West African country. One of his first duties was to attend an ordination service in a national church. He drove over the difficult terrain. The following day the service started at eleven a.m., when the program said nine. The new missionary feared the afternoon rains and told the leaders he was leaving at one. By two he simply left the service and began the tedious drive home completely frustrated and leaving behind a crowd of offended people. Was the new missionary impatient or simply uniformed about the people to whom he was ministering? The Africans were event oriented (foreigners, after all, brought watches to their culture). The missionary was time oriented. The Africans valued the experience; the missionary valued his schedule. Understanding such cultural differences and adjusting attitudes to serve incarnationally in another culture is a key to missionary success. Lingenfelter provides a very helpful guide for identifying such cultural nuances in both the missionary's value system and the host culture's value system. Being a professional anthropologist (Ph.D., Pittsburgh) with firm missionary concerns, Lingenfelter expertly unravels an age old problem facing cross-cultural workers; learning to get along with those served.