

Jesus Focused on Discipling Adults

By David DeWitt

In order to make the claim that the apostles were children, you must ignore the plain meaning of the text, in its context. You must assume the Holy Spirit left out some crucial information, that He did not lead the apostles into *all the truth*, so the Bible by itself is insufficient. You must have this Gnostic-like special knowledge to understand it.

The significant thing is, this takes your Bible away from you. You would never know the disciples were teenagers without these rabbinic teachers adding this information to the text. But, in Revelation, we read *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book* (Revelation 22:18, emphasis mine).

One result of this is to focus ministry on young people (or to justify focusing on young people). The idea is, if you focus on the youth, they will be the next generation of leadership. So to focus on the youth is to build the future. And if Jesus focused on teenagers, that's what we should do, too. There are two significant problems with that:

One problem is pragmatic. It doesn't work. The Communists did that for 70 years. The whole point of Communism was to ignore the old people, let them die off, and focus on the young people, who would make the Soviet world into socialist Communism. What happened was, as people became adults, they stopped believing in Communism. For the last 20 (or so) years, Christian churches have focused on young people. Is the church more mature today? Not according to any of the surveys. We are still focusing on young people, and the church is becoming increasingly more ignorant of the Word of God and, for that matter, ignorant of basic morality.

When you focus on young people, especially "seekers," you never get around to teaching the mature concepts of the Scripture. You keep "putting the cookies on the bottom shelf where anybody can reach them," but you never get around to teaching about the issues that adults need and maturity requires.

When a person gets into their forties, they begin asking more significant questions. A good number of Christians get into things like sexual affairs, tax evasion, alcohol, drugs, excessive debt, and other life crippling problems. They also are faced with children to raise, getting along with a spouse, financial burdens, health problems, business issues, job loss, and other life situations that come as we get older. **That's why Jesus disciplined adults.**

The second major problem is biblical. There is nothing in the New Testament that tells us to focus on children or teenagers. Actually, Paul says: *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things* (1 Corinthians 13:11). Not that there is something wrong with youth work, and there were converts and disciples of all ages. But there is no focus on the youth.

When Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus and Titus to Crete, it was to find elders, not young people. Peter's focus is on the elders, and James said to call for the elders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5; James 5). For example, Paul told Titus: *For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you* (Titus 1:5, emphasis mine).

Of course, the apostles were concerned about people of all ages. But they did not take on the role of a rabbi teaching children, nor did they suggest such a role. **They reached all ages of people, but their focus was on the maturity of adult believers.** Actually, the Judaizers tend to ignore the epistles. They impose rabbinic Judaism on the Gospels, but do not focus on the epistles, where the apostles applied what Christ modeled, taught, and commanded.

To sum up, as we've seen, **the Bible nowhere states that Jesus' disciples were teenagers.** Furthermore, the extra-biblical rabbinic literature suggests that the disciples did not have to be teenagers. Both rabbis Aquiba and Eliezer are examples of becoming disciples as adults, not as children or teenagers.