



The ICC Bible Studies: Discipleship Or Domination?

A brief look at the
ICC "First Principles" Bible "Studies"

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The International Churches of Christ (also known as the Boston Movement) utilize a series of "Bible Studies" called the "First Principles" (FP), written by ICC leader Kip McKean. Designed as a series of introductory lessons to the teachings and practices of this fast growing, college-campus oriented group, they are used around the world by ICC "disciplers". However, there is an underlying agenda of manipulation aimed at deceptive recruitment that prospects never see. We will examine each of the First Principle studies to demonstrate this.

The Word of God Study

In addition to establishing the authority of the Bible, the Word Study also serves to subtly encourage the student's absorption of ICC teachings. For example, one of the conclusions taken from 2 Peter 1: 19-21 ("*... no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.*") is that "There is no private interpretation of the Bible." (F P). If the student cannot have a "private interpretation" of a scripture, then evidently the student will have to accept the literal meaning of each passage as it is presented. The student's belief system can be thereby manipulated by controlling the choice and sequence of scriptures presented. Although the student may feel they are being asked to merely "follow the Bible", in reality they are being asked to adopt the entire ICC belief system, one step at a time. "The standard" is not just the Bible, but a specific *interpretation* of the Bible.

The Discipleship Study

The Discipleship Study may be perceived by the student as a well-meaning attempt to encourage them toward a deeper commitment to Christ. However, the study will also attempt to establish that the student has never been a disciple, is not a Christian, and is not "saved." One could ask: If discipleship and Christianity are truly *synonymous*, then what purpose

does it serve to shift the student's focus from one term (Christian) to the other (disciple)? By redefining Christian = disciple, this study is effective in getting recruits to *reevaluate* their religious status. At the end of the study, the student may surprise themselves by concluding that they're not a Christian, after all.

In the late 1980's the ICC leadership extracted a new teaching from the Great Commission: *one must be a disciple before they can be baptized, or their conversion is not valid.* This teaching is extracted from the word order of Matthew 28: 19 "... *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...*" But just because the verb "make" appears before the verb "baptizing", does not necessarily indicate that *first* you make disciples, and *then* you baptize them. Word order does not mandate an order of procedure. It appears the ICC has built a core doctrine on a grammatical misunderstanding. This doctrine of "disciples baptism" produces striking contradictions when compared with other ICC teachings:

Statement 1. "Baptism is when we become a Christian." (FP, p. 26).

Statement 2. "Christian = disciple." (FP, p. 6)

Statement 3. "You cannot be baptized until you become a disciple." (ICC Evangelist Nick Young, 1992).

Now note the consequence of putting these three statements together. Making substitutions from the equation *disciple = Christian = saved* we can derive the following statement: **"You cannot be baptized until you become a Christian."** This obviously contradicts Statement 1. One could even make further substitutions to produce the following, nonsensical statements: **"You cannot be baptized until you get baptized"**, and **"You cannot become a Christian until you become a Christian."** The ICC's doctrine about how one becomes a Christian/disciple is internally inconsistent and, therefore, unsound.

The Kingdom Study

The purpose of the kingdom study is to show that the scriptural "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God," is synonymous with "the church", and that *the ICC is the Kingdom of God.* But the view that the church is synonymous with the Kingdom of God produces some theological inconsistencies. Although the New Testament authors occasionally refer to the kingdom in the present tense (Col 1:13, I Corinthians 4:20), many other passages talk about the kingdom as something to be *inherited*, presumably after this life (I Corinth. 6:9, 15:50, Gal. 5:21, James 2:5). Acts 14:22 even depicts Paul and Barnabas instructing "disciples" that they must "*go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" If the church and the "kingdom" were the same thing, it would have been incongruous for New Testament writers to imply that *members* of the kingdom had not yet *entered* the kingdom.

Sin and Repentance

Generally, the scripture used to justify confession is James 5: 16: "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*" However, considering the surrounding verses this passage appears to have been taken out of context. Verses 14 & 15 would seem to indicate that *physical*

healing was the issue: "Is anyone sick .. the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well." This passage alone would not seem to command a confession to others of all sins, especially considering that there is *no other verse* in the New Testament which specifically mentions confession of sins to others. If successful, this study will produce a student who attains a group-determined standard of "Godly sorrow" about their life. The system of confession introduced in this study will become an effective tool in maintaining control over members.

Light and Darkness

The Light and Darkness study, similar to the Baptism Study, clearly outlines the ICC's view that baptism is the moment of salvation. There is not enough space here to disprove this particular doctrine. But since the ICC's doctrines about baptism are central to their claims of exclusivity, it is useful to examine certain areas where ICC baptismal teachings are divergent from biblical precedents:

1. *The ICC evangelism handbook Shining Like Stars* (Jacoby, 1990) gives many reasons to avoid the "premature study" of baptism including: avoiding turning off recruits, increasing longevity of converts, that "New Testament teaching on baptism is not logically intuitive (p. 155), and that "if the person does not become a Christian, he/she goes away with potentially harmful information about your church and its beliefs." (p. 190). By comparison, in Acts chapter 2, three thousand people were baptized after a single sermon! Most New Testament conversion stories take place in a single day (Acts 2, Acts 8: 26-38, Acts 10: 24-48, Acts 16: 25-34).
2. *Baptism can be withheld from someone who's not ready.* (Ibid.). The intention is to produce a lasting conversion. But in practice, baptism is withheld until individuals have fully agreed to important points of ICC doctrine/practice. This creates ethically questionable scenarios in which study leaders can withhold "salvation" from recruits who have not fully conformed to the program. There is no Biblical precedent for church authority being used to withhold baptism. In fact, the apostle Peter on one occasion says "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" (Acts 10:47). One could argue that if an apostle cannot claim this authority, who can?
3. *Rebaptism is common in the ICC.* It is important to note that the only New Testament example of rebaptism is Acts 19:1-5, where "disciples" are rebaptized because they had been unfamiliar with the significance, and perhaps even the existence, of Christ. By contrast, Apollos knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24-26), but no re-conversion or rebaptism is mentioned in his case.

The Cross Study

The stated aim of The Cross Study is as follows: "To inform the studier of God's solutions to our sin and to motivate the reader to love God." (FP, n.d.). While this goal sounds noble enough, an examination of the Cross Study shows that there are problems in the emphasis and methodology of this study. The unstated goal of this study seems to create a state of strong emotional remorse in the student, setting the stage for their conversion. The goal is to create a

recruit who is "broken" or "cut to the heart." One edition of *First Principles* indicates the Cross Study is proceeding as desired only if the student feels this way: "If cut, then fine, if not there is something wrong." If the student is not emotionally affected by the Cross Study, the study is not producing its intended results. In the attempt to "cut" the student, gruesome medical articles on the crucifixion and sad analogies may be used. It's interesting that one of the scriptures often quoted in the ICC implies that the Word of God is *sufficient* to convict one's soul: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4: 12). If the Word (Bible) is truly sufficient, one could question why the ICC needs medical articles and anecdotes to "convict" their students. The Cross Study's preoccupation with systematically producing a "broken" student would seem to run contrary to the aims of a healthy religious group.

Denominationalism and False Doctrines

The main thrust of this study is to show that all (other) Christian denominations are invalid, and guilty of teaching false doctrines. The ICC defines a denomination as "a group of a name", and says that denominations are "unscriptural." (FP, p. 27). Ironically, one can make a very strong case that the ICC itself is a denomination. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1981) defines a denomination as "a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations." The ICC qualifies in all aspects.

By systematically reviewing and discrediting the teachings of other religious groups, this study is effective in encouraging the student to regard the group as the sole source of truth, and minimizing any future impact from spiritual support systems outside the ICC (clergy, religious family member or friends, etc.). Once the student's pre-existing belief system has been refuted and dismantled, it can be replaced by that of the group. After a gradual and systematic narrowing of the student's options, the only acceptable choice is for them to become a member of the International Churches of Christ.

Excerpts from *The ICC Bible Studies: A Critical Analysis*. A complete copy can be obtained on the World Wide Web at:

www.reveal.org/library/theology/dandersn.htm

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