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Teach and Obey

Great Commission - Part 5



2019: Resurrection Commission



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Bible Advocate Press

Jason Overman: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Sylvia Corral: Translation

Hope Dais-Clark, Martha Muffley: Proofing, clerical

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The Great Omission

Have you taken an Artios class yet? I have, and each time I do, I benefit from the experience. Artios, Publications, and Missions are a few ways that the Church of God seeks to be faithful to the goal of the Great Commission: discipleship. Jesus doesn't leave us to guess what this means. Going and baptizing lead to "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20a, NIV).

The mission is not just reaching and teaching people *about* Jesus, but reaching and teaching people to *obey* Jesus. Often this is set aside for an easier goal; worse, it is unknown altogether. A startling 2018 Barna survey reports that 51 percent of churchgoers have never heard of the Great Commission; 25 percent say it sounds familiar, but they don't know what it is. A meager 17 percent of churchgoers can identify the term. Surely this sample is not representative of us. *Is it?*

Stats like these reveal the anemic condition of many churchgoers and their teachers. Evangelism is often limited to baptism following a confession of Jesus as our personal Savior. As important as that step is, it's not the commission Jesus left us, and the real goal of obeying Jesus as our personal Lord is unreached.

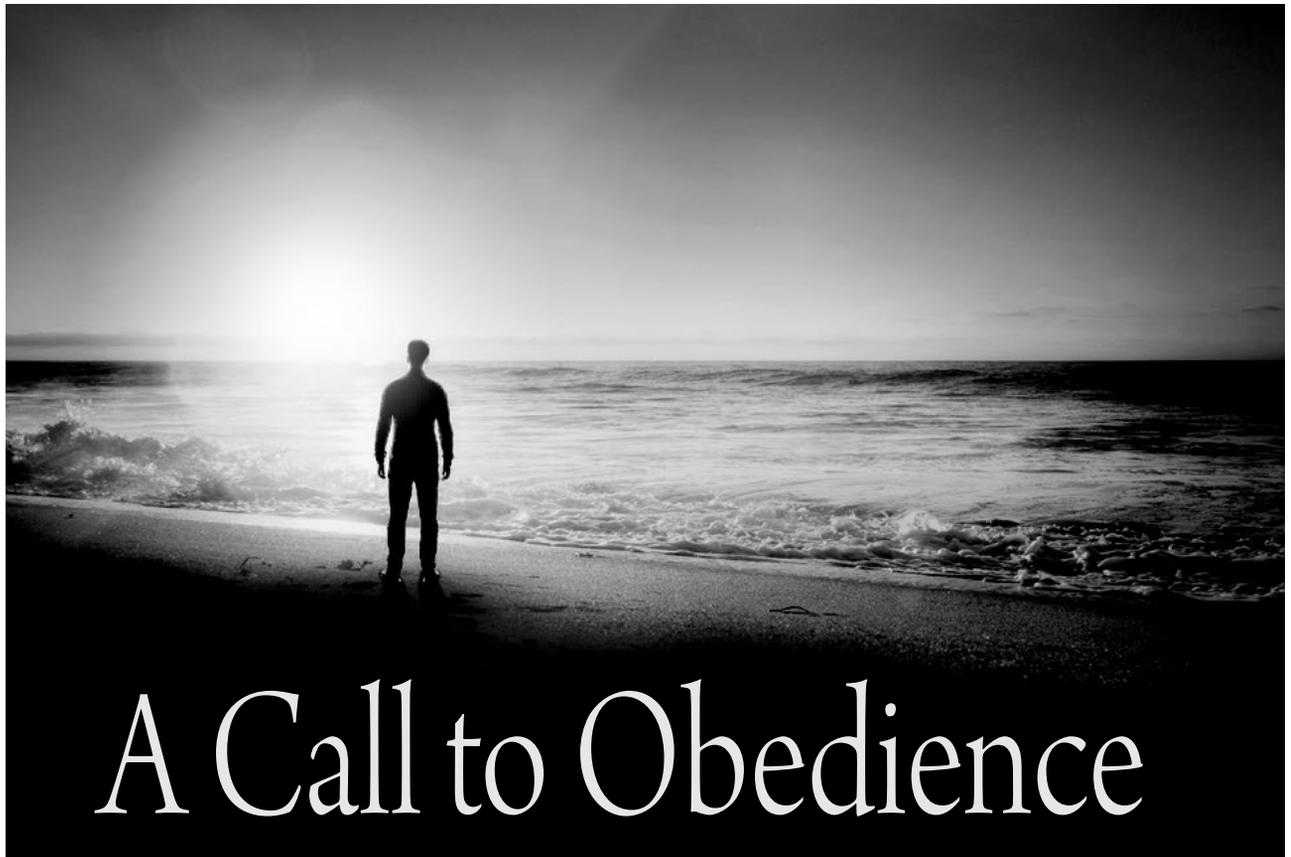
This failure has been recognized. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard charges that Christianity drifted from Jesus' actual plan and substituted it with "Make converts . . . and baptize them into church membership." Willard says that this resulted in "two great omissions" in our churches: "enrolling people as Christ's students" and "training . . . them . . . to do what Jesus directed." The omission of genuine discipleship produces feeble faith and Christians unaware of both commission and commands.

This has me wondering if I am guilty of a great omission. Does my congregation know what the Great Commission is? And am I guilty of gutting Jesus' plan, more concerned with filling pews than in *enrolling* and *training* students for Christ, who will learn His commandments and obey them?

Do you see a great omission where the Great Commission should be? Drop me an email and share your thoughts. And if you haven't already, enroll in an Artios class. You'll be glad you did.

— Jason Overman





The heart of discipleship and
the Great Commission.

by John Klassek

Is it possible to experience a church environment with singing, reading Scripture, preaching, and celebrating every Sabbath, without fully experiencing the lordship of Jesus Christ?

“Really?” you say. “How could you *not* know the Lord Jesus?”

Jesus on the sidelines isn’t so far-fetched! Did you know that happened in the first century? The church community in Laodicea (what is Turkey today), recorded in Revelation 3, excluded Jesus from church life. He wasn’t among them; He was outside, calling and knocking on the door of the church,

appealing to those inside (vv. 14-22). Oblivious to Jesus, the Laodicean church continued to exult their religious rites. “We’re rich; we have need of nothing,” they chorused.

Jesus thought otherwise. His chastening words to the Laodicean believers serve as a powerful reminder for all who are listening. They are also a caution for those of us in this era. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (v. 22).

Today, Laodicea has become somewhat of a byword for a church culture without the lordship of Christ. The risk of complacent and misaligned religiosity is as real today as it was then if we’re not listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

My story

A personal testimony may help illustrate this. For the better part of thirty years, I too warmed a church pew every Sabbath. Although purporting a reasonable familiarity with the Scriptures, I never really ventured any closer to personally knowing Jesus, the Lord of Scripture, with a deep, abiding relationship. I never comprehended His pre-eminence.

Of course, I had read about Jesus explaining that those very Scriptures were about Him (John 5:39, 40; Luke 24:27), but I didn’t relate to His call to fellowship, obedience, and discipleship – that is, until adversity struck.

As I lay in a hospital bed with C4 osteomyelitis (a bone infection in the neck vertebrae), decades of disempowerment in

my faith added to deep bewilderment. In the months of recovery that followed, questions I had asked as a nine-year-old boy resurfaced and became clearer.

“How come,” I ventured so many years earlier, “the apostle Paul seemed to preach only about Christ, when the church doesn’t?” It was a telling question, and one that should weigh on our hearts today as it did mine while I attended another church.

For the answer, let’s go back in history and explore where a similar situation existed at the center of Paul’s story.

Paul’s story

The apostle Paul grew up in the midst of religious life in Jerusalem. He was trained by Gamaliel, one of the brightest and most reasonable minds in Judaism. As a young man, however, Paul took his fervent understanding of Scripture and obedience to Judaism to new heights. He despised the new Christian movement, and, in loathing Jesus, Paul murderously pursued Christ’s followers wherever he could.

But a singular event changed Paul’s direction. After seeing Jesus in dazzling light while on the road to Damascus, Paul became a follower of Jesus within a matter of days. He embraced discipleship with the same fervor and obedience that had characterized his previous contempt for Christ.

In wrestling with the call of Jesus and in finally meeting Him, Paul experienced a reckoning he had never encountered. As Paul sat in the shadows of Damascus in Syria, the city he had earlier

determined to wreak havoc in, his deep perplexity led him ultimately to faith in the Messiah. He was not unlike me, dying to myself in that hospital bed.

The only illumination of the Scriptures that Paul knew so well, that made any sense, was this Jesus. The Jesus of Scripture was simply undeniable, the call of Jesus to obedience unmistakable, the burden of Jesus’ discipleship so clear. Paul saw what he had never imagined: All those scriptures he could recite suddenly took on an elevated meaning, centering on Christ.

original enthusiasm for Judaism? The apostle finally renounced it, and his love for and obedience to Christ Jesus grew. His energies and endearment for Judaism were now directed at serving his Lord. After dedicating his life in Jesus’ service, Paul eventually carried his obedience even to the point of martyrdom, in the name of his Savior.

Like Paul, we must learn that discipleship is forsaking all, renouncing our past, and following Jesus. It’s listening to His Word and living in obedience — keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus

“ Like Paul, we must learn that discipleship is forsaking all, renouncing our past, and following Jesus. ”

Our story

Today we have the legacy of Paul’s various letters to the churches so we can understand their struggles and learn from them. We also have Luke’s historical account in the book of Acts giving further insight into this new Jesus movement. We learn that the church in Laodicea, like Paul earlier, practiced a shortsighted religiosity conspicuous only by Jesus’ absence. This is what I came out of and what we must avoid, by God’s grace.

What happened to Paul’s

(Revelation 12:17). It’s beholding the Lord Jesus in the entirety of Scripture. It’s surrendering all and following His call. Discipleship is imitating His righteousness in our lives within the context of His faith community, the church. It’s entering into fellowship with Christ, eating the bread offered at His table. It’s drinking at the wellspring of life, the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is stepping out in faith and in prayer, in Jesus’ name, to accomplish those great things that only Jesus can do.

Still knocking

Mediocrity and disempowerment are not the way of Jesus' kingdom. They don't exist! But the call to service, obedience, and sacrifice do.

Jesus calls. He knocks. And if we're slow to understand, He can also break our hardened hearts by inviting us into deep and enduring fellowship with Him. But we must willingly respond in faith and submission. A broken man or woman who admits their mortality and willful blindness can be rebuilt by Jesus

“Are we seeking religion or a personal relationship? We need look no further than Jesus.”

into His own image, strength, and glory. Accepting the Lord of Scripture, Jesus Christ, and centering our lives around His call constitute a commitment to obedience. Jesus' will and purpose now become preeminent in our lives, shaping us in complete conformity to His stature.

Like Paul, our allegiance must find its true home in Christ. The former Paul followed his former way of life so much that he blindly “persecuted” Jesus. The new Paul, deeply converted and committed to Christ, was credited worthy to “stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

For all his religion and passion, the Lord probably would have rebuked Paul with nothing less than “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23). Instead, the Lord Jesus sought Paul out, an act of grace that defies our human sense of justice. Did Paul deserve this divine attention? Do we deserve this grace?

Grace is who the Good Shepherd is. It's what He does! Jesus extends this grace to you and me today. Without Him, we're completely lost. Similar

to the former Paul and those at Laodicea, a false sense of assurance and conformity to ritual is nothing more than the devil's masquerade of conformity and religiosity.

The call

There's work to be done in the name of Jesus. The gifts He has given us are for His service, to the Father's glory. Those who are blind need the healing to behold what they've never seen. The thirsty need the drink they've never tasted. The hungry don't realize they crave the Bread of Life — all in Jesus alone.

Paul came to understand the compelling call of Jesus to attend to these needs. Thus, he spent the rest of his life dedicated to the Lord who saved him, preaching Christ and sharing the Bread of Life. Paul knew just how much he had been given and what was required of him, and lived accordingly. He fed the Word of the Lord, in Scripture and personified in Jesus, to all who would listen.

In the face of seemingly impossible odds, Jesus' other disciples learned the same lesson. “You give them something to eat,” said Jesus to Phillip and Andrew. “Feed my sheep,” said Jesus to Peter, just beginning to understand discipleship and commission. That's the baton of discipleship Paul also grasped.

This timeless call to servitude is also for you and me today. We must encounter and surrender to the Jesus of Scripture, who then invites us into His service for a life of discipleship that is further characterized by obedience. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” said Jesus (John 14:15).

Paul became Christ centered in word and deed, and he sought out others to do likewise. He brought every thought in obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Those “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” folk (Jesus' words in Revelation 3:17) in Laodicea who ignored Jesus' calling and knocking were also featured in Paul's letter to those in Colossae. Apparently these believers also suffered the same spiritual blindness.

Paul expressed his struggle in appealing to those in both

continued on page 23



On Mission . . .

*Daniel Flores (left)
and Walter Apen*

In Central America

Join us in this space each issue of 2019 for CoG7 evangelism stories direct from the field all around the globe.

In this issue we feature an interview conducted by NAMC President Daniel Flores with Walter Apen, IMC representative for Central America (Zone 2). They were recently in Belize for the Zone 2 Leadership Conference.

The following is an edited transcript of the video interview, which can be viewed in its entirety at <https://imc.cog7.org:4443/media/zone2.html>.

Daniel Flores (DF): Brother Walter, it's a pleasure meeting you here in Belize. What can you tell me about the churches in Zone 2? What can a person expect to find there?

Walter Apen (WA): Well, first, I believe that any person can come to the Church the same way I did. I was born and raised in a family that professed to be Catholic. But when I was a teenager, I started listening to the Word of God, and I found this church. I liked it because the people gathering for services were very humble. There was a person who always invited me every Sabbath. I was a child, and he took me to the church.

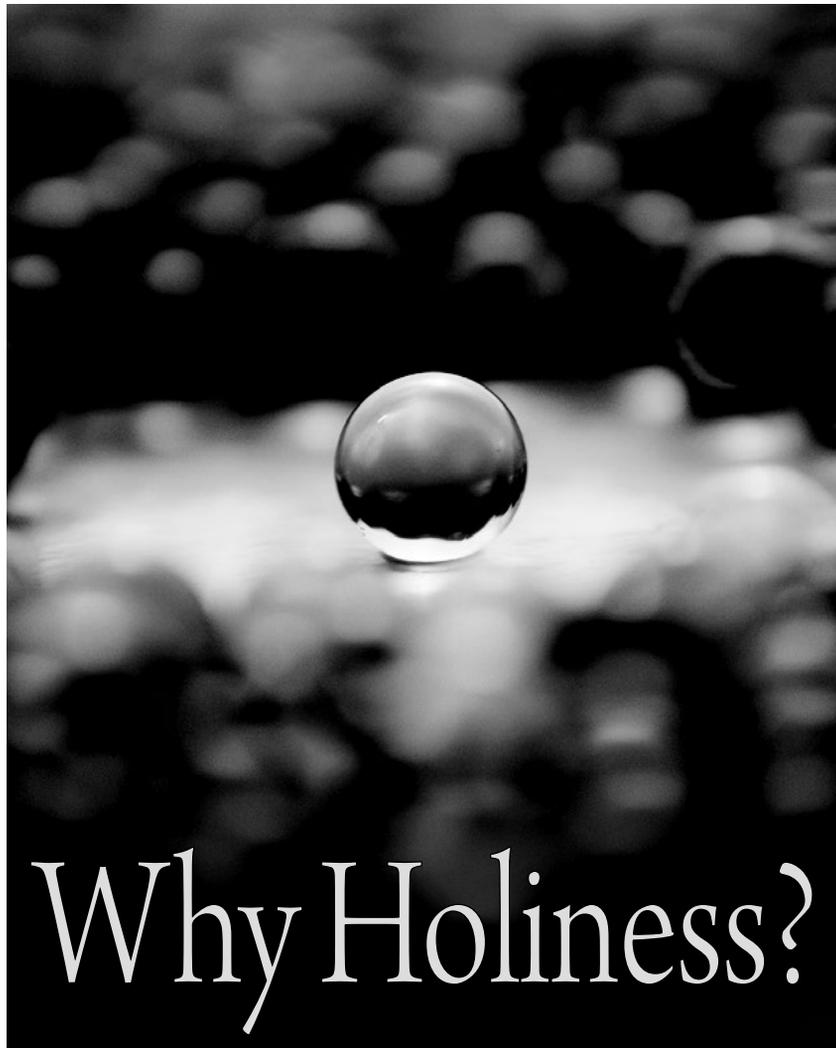
DF: How old were you?

WA: I was about eleven. In that church they gave out snacks to the children, and I liked going because of it. At the same time, the gospel message was getting deep within me. Later on, I went astray because of my parents, but as Ecclesiastes says, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it later." A few years later, I went back to my faith with my wife.

DF: Were you already married?

WA: Yes, we married at a very young age — seventeen. One thing that was strange to me was that when I went back

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Why Holiness?

A calling and command for
God's children.

by **Marcellus George**

We are besieged in our culture with messages about situational ethics and moral relativism. "If it feels good, do it," we have been told for decades. And where did that get us?

What if God has a different message for His children? Peter emphasizes that God's plan for us is holiness. Quoting Leviticus, Peter reminds his readers, "But as

He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15, 16). It is the same word he uses in 3:15: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

But what does it mean to be holy, or sanctified? Some see this as a "better than thou" attitude, but holiness is not about a list of things not to do. It is about striving to do the right thing regardless of the circumstances. Some of us identify holiness with stained glass windows, but it is

not the "walk on the water" perfection we think of. Rather, holiness is desiring God and growing in our relationship with Him.

In his Christian Bible Studies article "What Does It Mean When God Asks Us to Be Holy as He is Holy?" author Joel Scandrett says, "Holiness is not primarily about moral purity. It's primarily about union with God in Christ and sharing in Christ's holiness." And in his book *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges notes, "But God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like Himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God."

There are three reasons we must be holy, according to Scripture. Let's look at them.

Our calling

God's nature is holy, and it could not be otherwise. He is incapable of being tempted by sin (James 1:13). The nature of God is so holy that twice in Scripture we are privileged to witness the scene in heaven where the angels who surround God shout, "Holy, holy, holy . . ." (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). As the old hymn by Reginald Heber states,

Holy, holy, holy! All the
saints adore Thee,/Casting
down their golden crowns
around the glassy sea;/
Cherubim and seraphim fall-
ing down before Thee,/Which
wert, and art, and evermore
shall be.

God calls us to be holy like Him, but He does not leave us on our own to desire to do what is holy. Rather, He is at work in us to make us want to do what pleases Him (Philippians 2:13). God transforms our desire to

become holy like Him as we grow in our relationship with Him. While the war with sin continues in our bodies, there comes an ever-increasing desire for holiness (Romans 7:22). The result is that our growth in Christlikeness is a combination of divine sovereignty and human responsibility to make us holy. The evidence of God at work in our lives is a growing desire to be holy.

Command

The original command to be holy was given to Israel as they came out of Egypt, and it was to mark their special relationship with God. They were taught how to be different than the Egyptians and the surrounding nations, because they were to worship the one and only true God. This command was not given to limit Israel's freedom but to enhance it.

God looked upon Israel as His sons and desired that they experience the best He had to offer. Peter captures this idea in his quotation of Leviticus 19:2. We now, as God's sons and daughters, have been called out of a world full of sin and sadness. We can rejoice in our salvation. Because He has chosen us to be His children, we delight in finding out and doing what is holy. This idea is at the core of Peter's list of virtues in 2 Peter 1:5-7: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." God's desire is to give us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

Defense

God wants us to be fruitful (John 15:5), and this fruit includes sharing the gospel with others. First Peter 3:15, 16 points out that as we seek to live holy (sanctified) lives, God will enable us to make a defense to those who ask us about our faith. After listing those qualities we are to grow in, Peter repeats the idea of fruitfulness in 2 Peter 1:8: "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowl-

“We can share God's grace and holiness with others in order to show them that our God is real and our faith changes our lives.”

edge of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, God's desire is for our holiness to make others want to know Him.

Holiness is not judging others based on my own convictions. When another person and I stand in the light of God's holiness, we both fall short. Instead, it is letting God's character shine on those around me so that they are attracted to Him. Sin will always oppose holiness in this life, and our culture is becoming more populated with people who hate God and deny His existence. But we can share His grace and holiness with others in order to show them that our God

is real and our faith changes our lives.

Facing the challenge

Becoming increasingly holy mirrors God and His character. We are commanded to be holy people because we are set apart unto God. We must intentionally develop habits of holiness (such as Bible reading and prayer) in our lives in order to overcome sin. Obedience chooses to do what is right even when it is difficult.

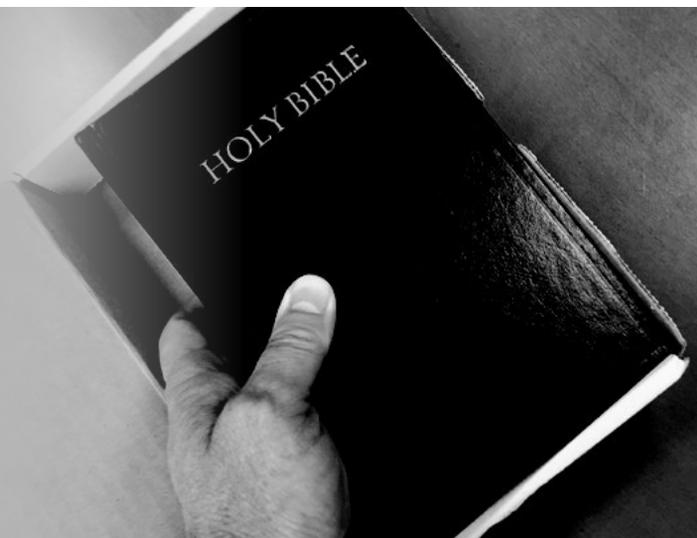
Holiness does not mean that I work to earn my righteousness but that I have been set aside by God to do what is good and right.

Increasing in holiness is what is meant by becoming progressively sanctified. As I walk with God, I am to become conformed to His nature (Romans 12:2). Let's encourage one another in this! **BA**

Marcellus George
writes from Fort
Wayne, IN.



Taking Jesus to Jail



by Elaine Schulte

I've often thought I should visit women in jail and tell them about Jesus, but it never worked out. My excuses seemed legitimate. I had a young family to care for, we often moved for my husband's career, and I was barely meeting deadlines on the four books the Lord led me to write.

One sunny afternoon the mailman left an interesting envelope in our mailbox. Its return address was a Florida jail.

A jail?

I tore open the envelope. The writer, Brenda, had found one of my Christian novels on the jail's book cart, and after reading it, she prayed to accept Jesus as her Savior. Her life had changed as she read and reread the pages about my heroine's decision for the Lord.

"Thank you for writing the book," Brenda wrote. "I feel my life changing for better every day."

It ended with, "I wish I had a Bible."

The day was so bright with sunshine, the letter lifted my spirits even higher. I owned a collection of Bibles and decided to send Brenda what I thought was the easiest one to understand. First, though, I reread the notes I'd written on the pages while I attended Bible studies. It was a joy to read them again.

Finally, I wrapped up the Bible, prayed for Brenda, and sent it. I knew that in most jails, the inmates are allowed to receive Bibles.

A month later, another letter from Brenda.

She wrote, "Thank you for the Bible. I feel like you're teaching me through your notes. I can't believe how easy it is to understand the Bible since I gave my life to the Lord. I didn't understand about Jesus when my parents took me to church."

I was delighted, and told Brenda so in my next letter. Months later, she responded, "The pastor who comes here is taking me around to other jails so I can tell the women prisoners how the Lord changed my life. I tell about the joy and peace He gives me. I feel like my life is finally worthwhile."

That was the last letter from Brenda. We were in the midst of moving and somehow lost each other's addresses. I pray she holds on to Jesus.

I'm grateful to whoever placed my novel on that jail's book cart. Through Brenda, God fulfilled my wish to visit prisoners and tell them about Jesus. (Christian novels are often best so the reader can identify with the characters.)

With so many Christian books available nowadays, I hope other Christian readers will donate appropriate books to jails and prisons. It's an easy way to make a stand for the Lord. **BA**

Elaine Schulte writes from Scottsdale, AZ.



Questions & Answers



How do we know what is abolished from the old covenant? Is Leviticus 19:19 still binding?

These are two big questions for this short space. Let's see how far we get.

We should recognize a basic tension in the New Testament. On one side, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). And Jesus says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Verses like these provide a high view of the authority of Scripture, Torah included.

On the other side, the New Testament is clear that the old covenant has been replaced by a new one in Jesus' blood (Luke 22:20). Hebrews puts it plainly, commenting on the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-33: "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete" (8:13). This requires a "change of the law" (7:12). We see from Jeremiah that "My law" is part of both covenants, but the change impacts how we read and appropriate them as new covenant Christians. We're no longer under a yoke to do the whole law of Moses (Acts 15:5, 10; Galatians 5:1-3).

One change is in the prophecy itself: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). The external code on "tablets of stone" becomes an internal, new nature by the Spirit (Exodus 24:12; 2 Corinthians 3:3). Jesus and Paul call this fulfilling the law (Matthew 5:17; Romans 13:8), and the love commandment summarizes it all (Leviticus 19:18; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Verses like these teach us that moral laws, like the Ten Commandments, are "righteous requirements of the law" still bind-

ing on Christians, but from the inside out (Romans 2:26; 8:1-4; 13:8-10).

The New Testament gives tools and examples to help us rightly divide the Word by the Spirit. We can see what the Word reaffirms and what it doesn't, and why. For instance, purity and blood laws of the temple priesthood are changed and fulfilled in Christ and are no longer necessary to perform literally. This accounts for the vast majority of the 613 laws of the Torah. Still, the language of priesthood and temple is retained and spiritually applied to the work of Christ and the church in many New Testament passages (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:21; 5:1; Philippians 2:17).

Other examples show Paul appropriating obscure laws in such a way that gives the old a fresh meaning in the Spirit. For instance, drawing on an agricultural law ("You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together"), he instructs Christians not to be "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14; Deuteronomy 22:10). In another place, Paul writes that those who minister the gospel are worthy of their pay. He supports this by another agricultural law: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain" (1 Corinthians 9:9; Deuteronomy 25:4). In these places, Paul argues from a lesser to a higher principle of the law.

With these examples in mind, let's turn to Leviticus 19:19. If "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" in verse 18 is for Christians, why not 19? That verse begins "You shall keep My statutes" and follows with instruction on three areas of life: not "mixing" different kinds of fabric in clothes, different kinds of seeds in crops, and different kinds of livestock in breeding.

We've come to the end of our space here, but you can read the full answer in the Q&A section at the all-new baonline.org.

— Jason Overman



Empowered Witnesses

Living the call,
divinely enabled.
by JP Robinson

Jerusalem, AD 33.
The fledgling church had been given a mission, a call that would challenge social norms, upend religious traditions, and identify her members as a group of radicals.

It was a call they ran from.

Yes, the disciples had seen Jesus resurrected. They had heard Him speak and watched Him ascend. But that wasn't enough to keep them from seeking shelter behind closed doors

(John 20:19) and praying that the Holy City would not become their tomb.

Then Pentecost came — and nothing would be the same again.

What enabled terrified men and women to become a living echo of the Lion of Judah's roar? What gave them the boldness, the passion, and the fervent desire to see Christ glorified, even at the cost of their own lives?

It was neither confidence in their theological brilliance nor trust in their philosophical eloquence. Frankly, the Scripture records that many of the disciples were "unlearned and ignorant" (Acts 4:13, KJV). Yet

their conduct, miracles, and unprecedented fraternal love forced even their adversaries to admit that they had been with Jesus.

The difference was the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Peter and the 120 other believers were living proof that Joel's prophecy of a spiritual outpouring was accurate (Joel 2:28). Here we see one of the most compelling aspects of God's divine plan: preparation. God doesn't just call us to service; He equips us. Christ hadn't abandoned His fledgling church. He was operating with those believers, and in them, just as He promised. Against all odds, they — the empowered witnesses — changed the world.

Divine methods

God's pattern of preparing His children before service has not changed (Acts 2:39), but His methods of equipping us are often unexpected and, sometimes, unseen.

In 2010, I found myself unanimously elected as the pastor of a small rural congregation. Like the believers of old, I felt daunted by the work God had called me to do. I was only 25 and, although I had been in ministry for about eight years, many of my congregational members were older than I and came from various ethnic backgrounds. The church had little money and no building of its own, and it had recently undergone a series of devastating losses.

While I felt unprepared, I realized later that unbeknownst to me, God had been molding my life for this moment. The strength and leadership I needed were already there, but it took this seemingly overwhelming situation for

God to demonstrate what He can do if we are willing to step out in obedience to His call.

Lesson

Fast-forward ten years. That same church is flourishing with a strong focus on both local outreach and global missions. We nurture Christian marriages across the nation. We've fed the hungry, reached out to those in prison, and offered hope to the abused and fatherless. To me, it is nothing short of a miracle, but it is a miracle with a lesson behind it.

So often we limit God by focusing on our weaknesses instead of on His strength. Like Moses, we list our inabilities without realizing that, through Him, our ability to carry out His commission is unlimited. We are His witnesses, empowered by His Spirit and molded by experience.

Let us recall the words spoken to Joshua when he received his commission: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, ESV). In a time where fear and social unrest claim the hearts of many, the need for empowered witnesses has never been greater.

Like the believers of old, let us step forward boldly, recognizing that we have God. And that means we can change the world.

BA

JP Robinson writes from Willow Street, PA.



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WHY WE KEEP SINGING TOGETHER: EXAMINING OUR APPROACH

Reading Time: 4 minutes Growing up in the current American Christian landscape, there are so many things that become staples of church and...

MEDIA4U

NOAH | APRIL 28, 2018

Reading Time: 1 minute One of the Bible's best-known stories comes to life on movie screens for a special nationwide event April 8...

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An Online Facelift

For years you have enjoyed the convenience of the BA Online – accessing the archive, reading “extras,” and exploring other content. Now the all-new BA Online features not just the current and past issues but new sections as well: **Lead Up** (articles from Artios), **Now What?** (stories on life’s problems), and **Media4U** (the latest in Christian media and events). With one click of a button, the whole website can convert to Spanish.

We’re still working on the site, but feel free to visit. You’ll like what you see!

baonline.org

Don’t miss these online-only articles for the September-October BA:
 “Protecting the Commandments”
 “Learning to Love the Church”

Understanding divine
indicatives and imperatives.
by Caitlin Meadows

“I’d like to be baptized some-
day, but I don’t think I’m
ready yet. I need more time.”

I’ve heard statements along
these lines several times. Those
who speak them wrongly be-
lieve that they must first be good
enough before receiving the
salvation that Christ offers them.
Some have parents imposing this
false belief on them.

Others grew up in congrega-
tions that focused more on
how the Bible commands Jesus-
followers to live, and less (or not
at all) on what Jesus Christ has
already accomplished on their
behalf. In effect, these individuals
believe they have to fulfill gospel
imperatives without first embrac-
ing gospel indicatives.

Definitions

If you’re unfamiliar with
these terms, let me simplify
them, based on the writing of
Gary DeLashmutt and Dennis
McCallum (Xenos Christian
Fellowship):

Gospel indicatives: What God
has already done on your behalf
in Christ.

Gospel imperatives: What you
are to do as a result of being in
Christ.

The whole Bible points to
Jesus Christ stepping in to re-
ceive the full penalty of *our* sins
in *our* place so that through Him,
we can be restored to God in
righteousness and purity. This
is an indicative truth — a state-
ment of what is, of what God

The Gospel’s Proper Order

has already done for us through
Christ. By placing our faith in
Jesus Christ and receiving the res-
toration He freely offers, we also
receive His grace that frees us to
live obediently as righteous and
pure disciples. Our obedience is
the imperative. As DeLashmutt
and McCallum say, it is what we
are to do as a result of being in
Christ.

Is there an order?

Indicatives precede impera-
tives. Who we are and what we
do always come after who God
is and what He has done. God,
through Christ, initiates relation-
ship with us. We, through Christ,
respond to God’s initiation. We
can accept it and then, restored
in Christ, live transformed in His
likeness. Or we can reject His
initiation and continue to live for
our own glory. But we cannot
live obediently enough to save
ourselves. We can never earn
God’s favor, let alone eternal
salvation (Romans 3:23, 24). We

desperately, unequivocally *need*
Jesus Christ for relationship with
the Father, for salvation, and for
obedience (John 14:6).

This divine order is critical. As
Israel Steinmetz has explained
to me, “It is a reminder that God
is always the source, always the
one who initiates. Every time
we’re commanded to love, we
should remember that God loved
us first, an act that gave us the
ability and urgency to love one
another. God initiates; we are
changed and respond. This is the
significance of the indicative-im-
perative relationship. Regardless
of which one is stated first [in
a text, like Ephesians 5:1, 2] or
even if we state them independ-
ently, they are intimately related
to one another and the indicative
always precedes the imperative
in reality, even if not in our writ-
ing/speech.”

Is there a balance?

Is the indicative more impor-
tant than the imperative? This is,



perhaps, an even more controversial question among believers than the question of order.

Are gospel indicatives and imperatives equally balanced? No.

Because the indicatives always precede the imperatives, they are of greater value. God initiates (indicatives). This initiation, complete with His grace, enables His followers to respond through obedience to the imperatives.

In other words, without His indicatives, the imperatives are impossible and pointless (Galatians 2:16, 21). Instead of questioning their balance, let's turn our attention to their inseparable relationship.

Inseparable elements

In his book *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, theologian Victor Paul Furnish explains this inseparable relationship between gospel indicatives and imperatives:

Paul understands these two dimensions of the gospel

[indicative and imperative] in such a way that, though they are not absolutely identified, they are closely and necessarily associated. God's claim is regarded by the apostle as a constitutive part of God's gift. The Pauline concept of grace is inclusive of the Pauline concept of obedience. . . .

In Christ he has been engaged, renewed, and restored by the creative and redemptive power of God's love. Moreover, in Christ he knows that redemption is not just deliverance from the hostile powers to which he was formerly enslaved, but freedom for obedience to God. For Paul, obedience is neither preliminary to the new life (as its condition) nor secondary to it (as its result and eventual fulfillment). Obedience is constitutive of the new life.

Our response

As a result of this relationship between gospel indicatives and imperatives, we know our proper place before the Lord. We are not to live in an attempt to earn His favor. Doing this either leads to prideful self-righteousness or fearful distance between ourselves and our heavenly Father. Rather, we are to live in response to God's initiation through Christ, which means heeding gospel imperatives as a loving response to gospel indicatives. We obey God out of love because He loved us first. Even more, His grace operating in and through us enables our obedience.

When a person says that someday they'll give their life to the Lord or be good enough to proclaim publicly that they have done so, this is the truth they need to know: Someday will never arrive. Today is the day because Jesus has already accomplished their salvation. He has finished the work. All they must do is respond to His initiation in faith. They can embrace gospel indicatives and proceed through His grace and in love to live out gospel imperatives. Christ is re-creating them, causing the old to fall away and the new to come.

BA

Caitlin Meadows

and her husband, Adam, live in Hudsonville, MI. Reprinted, with revisions, from *Artios Magazine*: <https://artiosmagazine.org/god-thoughts/gospel-indicatives-imperatives/>.





A Friend to Jesus

by Jody McCoy

In Luke 7:36-50, two people befriend Jesus. The first is Simon the Pharisee. Though the other Pharisees want to kill Jesus, Simon realizes He could be the real thing; He can heal and even raise the dead. So Simon invites Jesus home for a meal, and He accepts.

Soon after they sit down to eat, the second friend enters the scene: a woman with a bad reputation — perhaps a prostitute. From the story, it's clear that Jesus had transformed her in a previous encounter. Now she longs for a tangible way to express her gratitude.

When she hears Jesus is at Simon's house, the woman can't stop herself; she has to see Him. She brings an alabaster jar of fragrant oil and weeps as she anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair.

Simon is repulsed by who the woman is, and thinks Jesus should be repulsed. Since He isn't, in Simon's reasoning, Jesus must not know what kind of woman she is, and thus, He can't be a true prophet. His Pharisee friends are right: Jesus is a phony.

Having allowed Simon time to misjudge Him, Jesus sees this as the moment to draw His friend into a closer relationship. To do so, He must also risk pushing Simon away. Jesus gently opens the door: "Simon, I have something to say to you." Then He tells Simon a story of two people who were forgiven debts. The creditor forgave one a debt ten times larger than the other. Then Jesus asks Simon, "Which of them will love him more?" Simon responds, "The one he forgave more."

Now comes the moment of truth. For Simon to love Jesus as his Savior, not just as his friend, he must first see himself as a sinner. He cannot

hide behind his reputation as a Pharisee and the woman's reputation as a prostitute. He must accept that this woman's actions have been that of a loving friend — more loving than his own. Jesus says to him (paraphrasing), "You gave me no water for My feet, no kiss, and no oil. This woman did all those things for me. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Now Jesus turns to the woman and speaks the words that both she and Simon need to hear: "Your sins are forgiven." To the woman, it's the joy of forgiveness. To Simon, it's Jesus revealing His divinity, because only God can forgive sins.

How does Simon respond? We don't know. It's as if the author is saying that Simon's response isn't the point. The point is, how do I respond to Jesus' love as His friend? Do I love Jesus a little or much? In John 15:12, 14, Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you" (ESV).

Jesus wants to rescue a lost world through me. To be His friend, I must be faithful in the responsibility He's entrusted to me: His Great Commission. If my love for Jesus isn't where it needs to be, I need to reflect on how much I've been forgiven. **BA**

Jody McCoy is executive director of the General Conference and lives in Austin, TX.



One Candle

One
candle
to burn
in
the
desperate
darkness.
One candle
to cast
circles of
Christ's
love.
One candle
to guide
travelers
lost in
the night.
One candle
to reflect
the everlasting flame
of One
Life.



Elaine Wilburt

Moving Beyond

by Amber Mann Riggs

Chalkboards, classrooms, and open books dominate web search results for teaching-related imagery. When we include the word *Christian*, then pulpits, pews, and Bibles join the mix.

Because we are heirs of the Enlightenment and citizens of the Information Age, our concept of discipleship and teaching is often conflated with the notion of sharing information. We think, *They don't do, because they do not understand. We must tell them. Surely, once they have the correct information, they'll apply it.* This is how we so often approach discipleship. We pack our sermons and Sabbath school classes with so much information that no one can remember it all, much less practice it.

When Jesus told His disciples to make more disciples by "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you," sharing information would have been only a small part of the picture they had in mind (Matthew 28:20b). What did they picture? Probably hillsides and healings, parables and parties, wells and wheat fields, and walking miles down dusty roads. His disciples understood that He spent every minute of every day and night

teaching them. Class was never dismissed because as long as Jesus was with them, school was in session. He transformed their lives, not by giving them a lot of new information but by inviting them into a new chapter of what God was doing on earth. It reshaped their understanding of God and showed them how to walk in the ways of God's kingdom.

While the twenty-first century world is vastly different from first century Judea, Information Age research has revealed a number of effective, timeless teaching techniques. Whether you teach adults from behind a pulpit, or your own kids from the front seat of your car, these tools will add more dimension to your disciple-making.

Root your teaching in a contextual story. The narrative arc of the Bible is the story of the kingdom of God. Jesus' students were already rooted in this story. Your students, however, may not be as familiar with how God established His realm and rule in Eden and determined to bless the entire earth by expanding this kingdom. However, everything else you teach them will find its context if they see where they fit within this storyline.

For more practical leadership articles from Artios Christian College, visit the new Lead Up section at baonline.org.

Information

Narrow down what you need to teach, and focus on these things. What aspects of God's kingdom (as embodied by Jesus) are not yet a reality for your students? Write them down. In our teaching, we can easily get sidetracked by tangents and can "major on the minors." When Jesus taught, He focused on equipping His disciples for what they would need to do when He left. He didn't let Himself become distracted from that task.

Don't limit teaching to the classroom or the pulpit. Effective teachers see the world as their classroom. Aware that students are always watching, they apply what they teach in the potluck line, on the phone, at the grocery store, and in their homes. When appropriate, they use words.

Associate lessons with physical objects. A sparrow is so synonymous with Jesus' teaching that I can't even hear the word *sparrow* without thinking about God's care for us. As a result of a sermon I heard about time, I wore my watch upside-down for two years to remind myself that God's view of time is different than ours. What everyday objects could be used to remind your students about kingdom principles?

Use easy-to-remember sayings. I doubt that a scribe was present to record Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. So why were His students able to remember it? In addition to powerful imagery, Jesus used linguistic techniques like poetry and hyperbole. Their structure made it easy for listeners to remember what He had said. While we do not live in an oral culture, when we hear the same sayings and phrases often enough, we remember them!

Tell stories. It is said that a picture paints a thousand words. The same can be said for Jesus' parables. These stories communicated complex truths and caused emotions to engage with these truths. Despite our proclivity to elevate objectivity, emotional engagement is a key to inciting action. When we tell stories, we invite students to find themselves in these narratives. The stories become part of them, making it more likely that they act them out in their lives.

Teach the same thing in multiple contexts. Not only are Jesus' teachings timeless but they are applicable at home, work, church, school, and around the community. However, students often need help associating teaching with multiple contexts. The more locations they connect

to a teaching, the more pervasive that teaching becomes.

Get your (and their) hands dirty. Remember the demons the disciples couldn't cast out? Jesus let His disciples get their hands dirty and fail. He showed them how to do it, then He let them try. However, when the disciples still needed more help, He gave it to them. Every ministry in your church is an opportunity for ministry leaders to provide this type of coaching and teaching.

If discipleship is about knowledge, we're all destined for failure. We will never know as much as the Word, through whom and by whom the world was made. Jesus' goal was to invite disciples into His life to walk in His ways. When we do this and teach others to do likewise, we too take part in this grand tradition of discipleship. **BA**

Amber Riggs is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.



Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



A Beautiful Witness

Five keys to meaningful faith conversations with unbelievers.

by Israel Steinmetz

Cosmos and *cosmetic* — two words that don't seem to have much in common but share a common Greek root. The Greek word has two primary meanings: order and beauty. While these ideas might seem disparate to us, in Greek they were closely related. Things in proper order, like the cosmos, were beautiful. Beautiful things were well ordered. Like a symmetrical face or a snail's shell displaying the Golden Spiral, nature's order was beautiful, and beauty was orderly. In many New Testament versions, the

Greek word *kosmeo* is translated "adorn." Sometimes it refers to organizing and cleaning a room. Other times, it speaks of a bride made beautiful. Order and beauty.

The instance that strikes me is in Titus 2:10. Here, Paul identifies the purpose for his instructions on Christian living to the young and old, women and men, servants and masters, wives and husbands. With echoes of Jesus' "Let your light shine" (Matthew 5:16), Paul encourages believers to live holy lives, "so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." That is, Paul instructs us to live lives that display the orderliness and beauty of the gospel. This is a reminder that living holy lives is not simply for us, but in fact is aimed at others and accomplishes God's mission to redeem all

of creation. It is also a challenge to live and speak in ways that make the gospel as appealing as possible. How do we face this challenge in an increasingly post-Christian culture?

Recently I read a survey from Barna Research Group that discovered "Nearly all non-Christians . . . and lapsed Christians . . . have a friend or family member who practices and prioritizes Christianity — but these believers may not be their ideal conversation partners when it comes to faith." Reading the research was fascinating as it became clear that many non-Christians and lapsed Christians do not perceive the gospel to be orderly or beautiful in their interactions with Christians.

What if we could change that? What if we took the time to hear what our neighbors are

saying, and demonstrate love by responding to them?

In order to do this, let's look at the characteristics that non-Christians and lapsed Christians identified as most important. These characteristics represent ways we can make the gospel orderly and beautiful to those who need to hear.

Judgment

Six in ten of those surveyed wanted a conversation partner who listened without judgment, but only three in ten felt their Christian friends demonstrated this characteristic. Sadly, many Christians believe we should judge non-believers, despite Scripture to the contrary. Those who do not accept the gospel are already judged. Jesus has come to offer salvation to all those who will believe (John 3:16, 17). This is our role as His ambassadors — not to judge unbelievers (1 Corinthians 5:9-13) but to share the message and ministry of reconciliation with them so they will be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

Judging a non-believer for their individual sins is like criticizing a person suffering from cancer for a minor symptom! It is not our responsibility to condemn their sins but to offer them salvation. Those who respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit will receive the gospel as the gift it is. Those who do not will only be further repelled by our condemnation.

Conclusions

The next characteristic deals with conclusions. Half of the survey respondents said they wanted to dialogue with people

who don't force their own conclusions, and nearly that many said they appreciated those who allowed others to draw their own conclusions. Here we should remember that faith in God is a deeply personal response of belief and trust. It is not something to be argued or coerced into. As the old saying goes, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." As we share our deeply held convictions with others, we must leave room for them to reach their own conclusions and come to genuine faith through their own wrestling with difficult questions and choices.

Along these lines, two other results from the survey were significant. Twenty percent expressed an appreciation for those

looking for an abstract debate about the existence of God or the problem of evil. They're not won over by those who "have all the answers" or know how to win an argument. Rather, they're responsive to those who are confident in their own views, but aware of the paradoxes inherent in any faith claim. That is, they want people who sincerely believe what they believe, but who also acknowledge the mysteries of faith and the limits of reason and logic when it comes to supernatural matters. Faith is based on evidence, not proof. Our belief ultimately rests in a gracious God we cannot fully comprehend or explain, not airtight arguments that can counter any objection.

“Most people are responsive to those who are confident in their own views, but aware of the paradoxes inherent in any faith claim.”

who were aware of the inconsistencies in their own perspective, and only 15 percent appreciated someone who was "good at debating topics."

Some who advocate for evangelism via apologetics claim we must have answers for every question and be skilled debaters to convince others of the gospel. But the data paints a different picture. Most people today aren't

Mutuality

The third characteristic has to do with how we relate. One-third of those surveyed agreed on the importance of their conversation partner being both "confident in sharing their own perspective" and demonstrating "interest in other people's story or life." This reminds us of the importance of mutuality and authenticity

in our interactions with non-Christians or lapsed Christians. In contrast with the “drive-by” or “sales pitch” approaches to evangelism that were popular in past decades, we are called to a far more relational and personal approach.

Paul models this in his commitment to become all things to all people, if by any means to win some (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). On one hand, he was committed to sharing the gospel, confident in his belief in his Savior. On the other hand, he was committed to building bridges to people, understanding their per-

the message in ways they can understand and receive.

In this venture, we should be encouraged to build new relationships. More of those surveyed valued conversations with people who showed interest in their story than in those who already knew their story. We should be open to learning more, both about those we already know and those God brings into our path.

Questions

A similar number of those surveyed were particularly interested in the topic of questions. They

some usefulness, their effectiveness is limited as we engage real people in complex states of understanding and belief. It is far better to approach each person as a unique individual and seek first to understand who they are, what they believe, and what questions concern them.

Evangelism is much like other forms of communication: Listening is more important than speaking. No wonder God gave us two ears but only one mouth! Sadly, only a quarter of Christians surveyed considered themselves good at asking questions, and fewer than half felt they were good at demonstrating interest in someone else’s life. These are skills that can be practiced. As we ask questions, we draw out the thoughts and feelings of those we are witnessing to. As we listen carefully to these questions and tailor our responses to pinpoint their specific concerns, we demonstrate love (Colossians 4:5, 6; 1 Peter 3:13-17).

Listening carefully includes responding to the questions that are asked, rather than reading into them assumptions and attitudes from other experiences and conversations. Only one in ten expected a dialogue partner to focus on the emotions behind a question. In other words, they’re looking for a good listener, not a mind reader.

Practice what you preach?

The most surprising response in the survey to me was that fewer than two in ten (15 percent) of the respondents said they valued a conversation partner who “exhibited a vibrant faith of their own.” This is especially striking, since 57 percent of Christians

“Evangelism is much like other forms of communication: Listening is more important than speaking.”

spective, and entering into their contexts and lives for the sake of the gospel.

These are the two inseparable components of biblical evangelism. Unfortunately, they are too often separated. It is not enough to simply hold our convictions with confidence or become like our audience. We must find ways to do both without sacrificing one for the other. Like the Son becoming incarnate, we enter the world of those we hope to reach, while living and speaking

desired dialogue with people who were good at asking questions and who focused on the details of questions they asked. Both characteristics are vital for understanding and responding to the unique needs of the person we’re speaking to.

This cautions us against the use of formulaic or generic approaches to sharing the gospel, popularized in past methods like the bridge illustration or Romans Road. While these canned versions of the gospel may still have

believed this was an important characteristic in sharing one's faith. Nearly identical numbers demonstrated a similar gap between the value that Christians placed on helping others have a spiritual experience of God for themselves (53 percent) and the value that non-Christians and lapsed Christians placed on this ability (13 percent). So how important is it for Christians to practice what they preach and be able to help others have spiritual experiences?

Here, we're directed by Scripture regarding what others expect of us. We remember the words of Jesus and the apostles that tie our lifestyle to the effectiveness of our witness. We don't want to be hypocrites, preaching one thing and practicing another. Whether non-Christians and lapsed Christians value our living out our beliefs for the sake of conversation, we realize the importance of it for those conversations to bear fruit and bring glory to God.

Let's live lives that demonstrate the reality of our words. This draws people to Christ. This brings glory to God. This combines the message and ministry of reconciliation. This makes the gospel orderly and beautiful to those who hear it. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College and pastors New Hope United. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their eight children. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



A Call to Obedience

continued from page 6

Colossae and Laodicea, that they too might "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" (Colossians 2:2).

This Jesus

Today the idea of obedience takes on a new vibrancy, found only in Jesus. Paul exulted in the fact that "those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The questions that remain for us are these: How do we read Scripture? Where does our allegiance lie? Who is our Lord? Who do we live for, and serve? Are we seeking religion or a personal relationship? We need look no further than Jesus.

With our Lord and Savior at the helm and as head of the church, and with His promise of "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them" (Matthew 18:20), our lives now find their true place of rest, service, and obedience. **BA**

John Klassek and his wife, Rebecca, have six children and five grandchildren. Living in rural Western Australia, he works bi-vocationally in IT support and ministry and pastors a CoG7 congregation near the capital city of Perth. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



Appreciating Pastors

Dear Pastor,

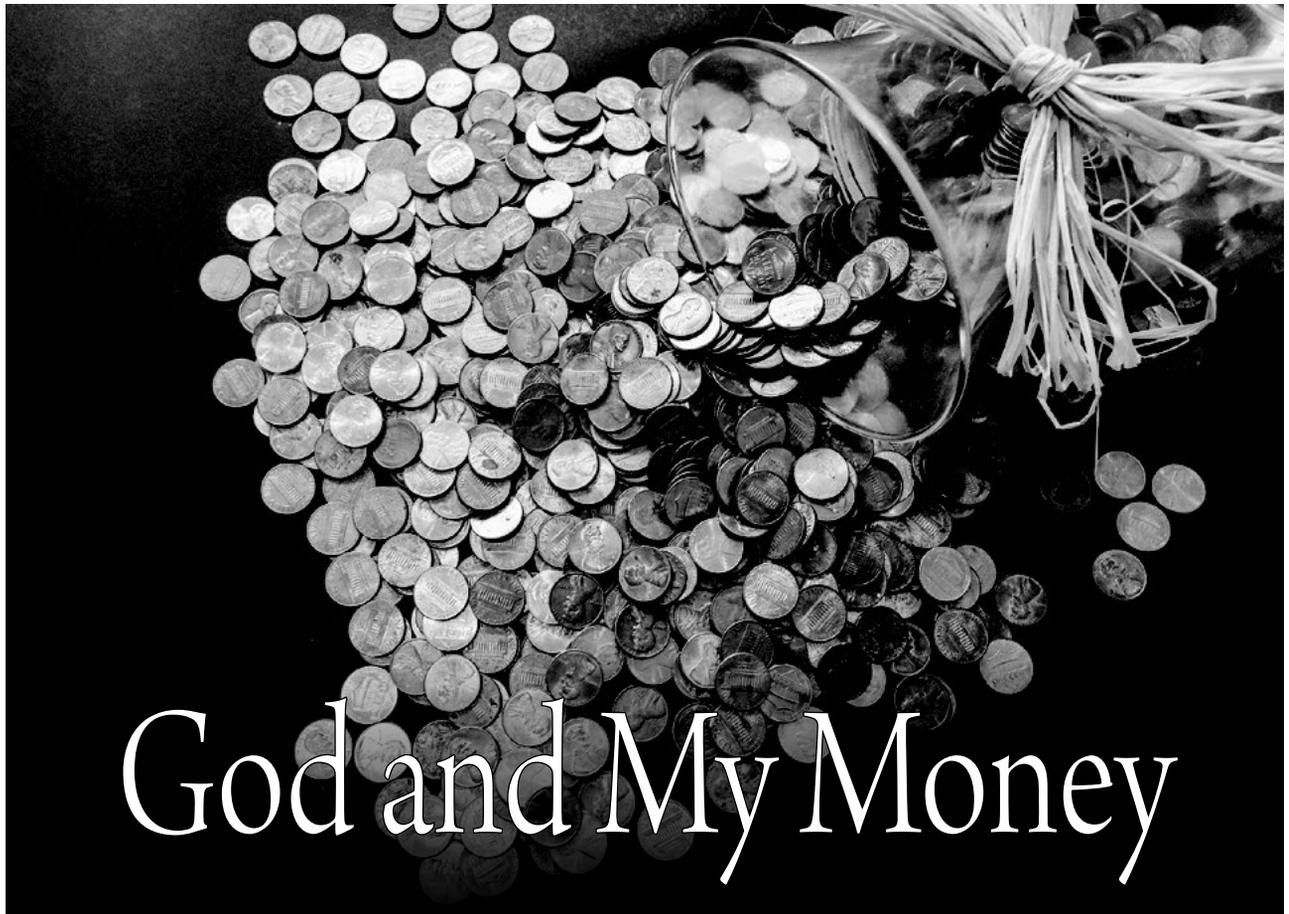
Thank you for your work for the kingdom of God. It is a privilege to serve Almighty God. No doubt you have experienced different situations: family trials, decreased health, unstable finances, moments of discouragement, and complicated challenges in the church. The apostle Peter experienced several difficult trials during his life, but he could say, "May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10). God never abandons the work that has begun.

Dear Church,

October is Pastor Appreciation Month. Our pastors do much for us throughout the year, and we are grateful for their service. We urge all our members to express their gratitude to their pastors and families in a special way, remembering what Scripture says: "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).

We are the body of Christ, and together we work in the kingdom of God.

— Daniel Flores
NAMC President



God and My Money

Learning to trust and obey
Jesus with family finances.

by Betts Baker

“How irresponsible you are!” My mother-in-law’s face flushed red below her graying curls. “You’re expecting the rest of the family, or me, to pick up your bills! I can’t believe it!”

Her words put a nasty spin on our most recent decision. A few years earlier, my husband resigned his long-held overseas job, and we moved our family to the US. After a few months of fruitless job searching, he started a small business.

We planned to live on his severance pay until the business could support us. Month after month, however, our expenses far exceeded our income. The benefits of the overseas job had masked the true cost of living. In

addition, we had moved to an expensive area.

Searching for solutions

With my stomach knotted in worry, I cast around for solutions. Credit card debt seemed a hole we shouldn’t start digging. If we couldn’t afford something right now, how could we be sure we could pay for it later?

All around us, wives worked to help meet expenses, but that option didn’t seem realistic for us. My husband and I both felt that our four children — especially the older two, already in their teens — needed me at home to help them navigate the new culture.

In desperation, I voiced my fears to God. “Lord, You know our circumstances. You love and

care for us. What can we do?" I read the Bible, clutching at the promises I found there. Hebrews 13:5, 6 says, "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. . . .'"

Discontentment

I wanted that fearless confidence. Instead, my growing anxieties revealed my uncertainty about God's willingness to meet our needs. Why was I anxious? I'd experienced God's loving answers to prayer in the past. But in those days, we'd always had a salary and money in the bank. Had I been depending on them instead of on God?

The verse in Hebrews commanded me to be content with what we had. We spent more than came in every month. Was that a form of discontent? What if our income never went up?

Perhaps instead of looking for ways to increase our income, I should reduce expenses. I couldn't imagine what we could cut, but God could show me. I just had to look for His way, not mine.

Another verse sprang to mind: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

What an amazing promise. But perhaps depending on His promise meant relinquishing anything He didn't consider necessary. Was I willing? I asked God for courage to examine our expenses in His light.

Studying expenditures

My husband and I agreed on the first step: no more eating out or buying little treats like French fries, ice cream cones, and hot coffee. Clearly, none of these were necessities.

Then I studied our other expenditures. Some monthly expenses were obviously necessities: rent, utilities, gasoline, and food. Some expenses, like taxes, had to be saved for. And I didn't consider tithing optional, for long ago I'd learned that God gave us enough money for other expenses if we tithed.

about tomorrow . . ." (Matthew 6:33, 34).

God's comfort enveloped me every time I read these words. They reassured me that He knew my struggle and had answers. I just had to believe Him and act accordingly.

Tomorrow's worries

Simple. But not easy.

I took a deep breath. For now, car repairs and clothing needs were tomorrow's worries.

One large expense was the family health insurance. We had been paying the monthly pre-

“We'd always had a salary and money in the bank. Had I been depending on them instead of on God?”

I couldn't discern any nonessentials. We had to set aside money for future needs, didn't we? What if our car stopped running, or someone had to have new shoes or a jacket? What if one of us got sick?

Jesus' words about anxiety in the sixth chapter of Matthew seemed written just for me: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious

mium from our rapidly dwindling savings. To live on our income, we had to choose between paying for daily necessities or health insurance. Together, my husband and I concluded that at that moment, even medical expenses were tomorrow's worries.

Not long afterward, my mother-in-law asked some probing questions about our medical care. Our answers infuriated her. By her standards — and the world's — such thinking was

simple-minded. But the Bible's promise was clear: "My God will supply every need of yours . . ." (Philippians 4:19). Now each time my husband brought home money, I focused on putting something aside for taxes and tithes, paying the rent, and buying groceries and gas. Once that was done, I asked God to help me not fret.

And truly, car repairs, clothes, and medical expenses weren't that day's needs, for the car was running, and all of us were healthy and clothed.

“Month after month, I was surprised how our needs were met, one day at a time.”

Adjustments

Time passed. I learned to accept piles of hand-me-down jeans and T-shirts cheerfully. We bought winter clothing from thrift stores on "dollar days." We inherited beds, sheets, blankets, and towels from relatives moving to smaller homes.

For only a few dollars, garage and estate sales furnished us with whatever else we needed. A large box of blank paper for \$2. An office chair for \$5. A couch for \$2.50. Two pairs of just-the-right-size new leather shoes for \$10 each. Month after month,

I was surprised how our needs were met, one day at a time.

One week after making a grocery list, I checked how much I had to spend. Seventeen dollars? I leaned back in the kitchen chair and laughed out loud. How could I buy a week's groceries for a family of six with only seventeen dollars?

I dropped my face into my hands. "God, You know what we need and how much money we have. Help me see how to manage."

As I slid open the kitchen all-purpose drawer, scavenging for

the few coins in the corners, a small voice inside asked, "Do you really need all those groceries?"

I studied the list. We still had milk in the fridge, so I didn't have to buy a second carton now. We still had some sugar and flour. We needed meat, some vegetables, and fruit, but not foil or paper towels. Not yet. I rethought each item, crossing out whatever could wait.

Divine help

With the much shorter list in hand, I went to the store,

collected the true necessities, and rolled the cart up to the cashier. The total came to seventeen dollars and some cents. The coins I'd dug out of the corners of the drawer just covered the extra.

A flood of joy and awe washed over me. God really did care about meeting our needs! I drove home from the store rejoicing.

Beautiful adventure

Step by step, God turned my struggle into a beautiful adventure. Each time I turned to Him, He demonstrated His love. Instead of being a shameful burden, our dependence on God for financial solutions led to joy. Now I knew how Paul could say in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

The children graduated from high school and then from college. God met every need along the way — even medical expenses, despite my mother-in-law's forecasts. In recent years, we've joined a health-sharing program.

God is the source of my security now, not medical coverage or money in the bank. And if sometime again we don't have what the world might call enough, I know I do not need to be afraid. God really is faithful and good. **BA**

Betts Baker writes from Longmont, CO. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.





Wesley Walker

1927 - 2019
James Wesley Walker (92) was born April 27, 1927 in Stanberry,

Missouri. He passed away May 26, 2019.

All his life, Wesley took his spiritual life seriously. He went to church, hardly ever missing a Sabbath. He met Darlene Poff at the Stanberry church, and they were married December 26, 1951.

The couple returned to Concord to live and start their family: daughters Orene and Chrisann, and son Gilbert. Chrisann lived only two days.

At the 1951 General Conference Convention at Red Rocks in Colorado, months before he married, Wesley was asked to give a talk to the young people attending. At that event he couldn't seem to shake the feeling that God was calling him into ministry.

Wanting his family to be closer to the church, Wesley quit his job and moved them to Sacramento,

California. He soon became active in the church as one of the local elders. Elder Israel Haeger worked with Wesley, using him to fill the pulpit when he was gone. As district overseer, Elder Haeger sent Wesley to various churches in the area to speak when there was a need. With his wife's approval to enter full-time ministry, he applied for and received his ministerial license. Over the years the Walkers pastored churches in Lodi and Stockton, California; Tacoma, Washington; Eureka, South Dakota; and Fort Smith, Arkansas.

In 1969 Wesley was elected to the General Conference board of directors and served on it for eighteen years. Since "retiring" from eighteen years of pastoring at Fort Smith, he helped out at various churches in Wister, Shawnee, and Claremore, Oklahoma. In 1999, at age 72, Wesley began pastoring at the McAlester, Oklahoma church, driving 95 miles one way. He retired in December 2018, and in January 2019, began preaching at the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Kibler, Arkansas.

Wesley is preceded in death by his parents, one daughter, four brothers, one sister, and one grandson. He is survived by his wife, daughter, son, and other family members.

Introducing the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership

What could your congregation do if you realized its potential for influence?

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To find out more or to schedule a Vibrant Church Conference in your area, visit <http://center.artioscollege.org>.





Central America



CoG7 in Zone 2

Countries - Local Congregations - Membership

México	899	35,471
Guatemala	180	9,886
El Salvador	107	3,106
Honduras	74	3,167
Nicaragua	35	1,275
Belize	18	480
Costa Rica	15	299
Panamá	2	35

Central America

continued from page 7

to the church, nobody showed interest in me except a kind brother who visited us. I had previously talked to Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and all that, but I was always chasing them away with all kinds of questions. But I couldn’t with that brother. He never invited me to go to his church. He told me that his job was to teach me. He came to my house, and I would say to him, “Don’t come anymore! I have no time for you, and I can’t change. I can’t make a commitment.” Then he said, “No, I will continue coming because I see that you are sick.” When I told him I wasn’t sick, he showed me Mark 2:17: “Those who are healthy

don’t need a doctor, but the sick.” He said since I was spiritually sick, he would keep coming.

DF: When did you receive Jesus as Lord?

WA: That brother taught me the doctrine during those visits. “Do you believe in Jesus?” he asked me. “I believe in Jesus,” I said. But I had so many questions.

DF: How has your growth in God been since then?

WA: The church took about four years to teach me the doctrine. I wanted to get baptized, but I had to take doctrine classes, so I was baptized later. My wife and I were baptized the same day. We began to see spiritual growth in our lives, but we noticed that the atmosphere at the church was not a happy one. In spite of this, I felt we should stay there. I flourished at that

church. A year after I was baptized, they appointed me as a pastor because of the needs we had. Beginning that year (1983) and for the next twenty years, I pastored the church where I was born again.

DF: Now you are the Zone 2 representative. What else can you tell me about the countries that make up this zone?

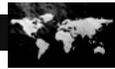
WA: In Central America we live in an atmosphere that is very dedicated to our doctrine. The Church doctrine came from Mexico, and then it expanded to all Central and South America. But people from Central America have had incidents. It’s not that we disagree with changes, because the doctrine is never going to change — just the systems to communicate them. For instance, the theme of evangelism is one of the strongest we have, so we built a ministry of evangelism that we are very dedicated to.

DF: What method works best for you when you evangelize?

WA: We have several ways. One of them is visiting different places, like hospitals, jails. We also practice door-to-door evangelism, outdoor evangelistic campaigns, and sometimes medical mission trips. That way we can invite people, including those who already have received the gospel but belong to other denominations. When they hear our doctrine, they come.

DF: What do you think is the biggest challenge when sharing the gospel?

WA: Having an open mind to understand other people. Sometimes I think I’m right, and because of that, I have all kinds of disagreements with other



people. But we are starting to understand that the Lord has called us to be a church in the middle of a swamp. We have to be very careful so we can help others out of it.

DF: What is the greatest need the Church has to successfully do the work of evangelism?

WA: I believe a call to awareness, as leaders, to not exclude people. We need to be more open, to have a conversation with other people.

DF: What strengths do the churches of Zone 2 have that can benefit others?

WA: One is our knowledge of Church doctrine. I recently went to a remote community where a pastor, who is a simple person, was participating in a forum in which he had a dialogue with a Catholic priest. The pastor, with the help of the Holy Spirit, was able to answer all the questions he was asked.

DF: We have been talking about the ten-point vision in this event here in Belize. Have you shared these ten points with some other countries in Zone 2?

WA: Very little. I started this position in June 2018, so we have been discussing administrative issues, and we haven't paid much attention to these subjects. In fact, I would dare to say something about the last message we heard from Brother Jason Overman, about a Christ-centered church. When people in our region hear about subjects like that, it's like a bomb. They will ask, "What is that?" But when you listen to it with an open mind and in a different way, you feel better.

DF: Which one of the ten

points do you think would be the easiest to share?

WA: Evangelism. We have been addressing the issue "The church that we should be." If Christ is in me, I can understand others. We need to accept each other. And maybe this is going to be part of the challenge we'll face. I do not know when, but we are going to have to accept people who were baptized in other places, to receive them and embrace them among us and say, "Well, they believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized in the name of Jesus.

DF: Do you see the Church of God (Seventh Day) as having potential in this part of Central America?

WA: Yes, we have been feeling it, seeing it, and living it. I was recently in Nicaragua, and the brethren there, despite the crisis they have been going through, have grown compared to past years. If you go to El Salvador, it's the same thing. We know that the Enemy does not rest, and we need to be aware that one of the things hurting the church and our church family is the ambition for power.

DF: But our greatest power is our God. May God help us to continue walking this journey. Brother Walter, it has been a blessing spending time with you. Would you like to say something else?

WA: Thank you, Brother Daniel. I also want to tell the staff of the IMC that I thank God and those who thought of me to give me the opportunity to serve. Also, I believe that all the personal challenges we face are very difficult. Sometimes we suffer when we are going through those times, when unexpected pain comes our way. It makes me think of what the Lord said through Peter: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour." Tell our brethren that in Central America, Mexico, and Panama they have a family. The promise Abraham received, that through him God would make a great nation, has reached us too. I believe we are seeing it now. Blessed be God for it!





Obeying Jesus

We want to share with you this good news. In Texas (Southwest District) we have started a revival program to reclaim the important task of evangelizing. At the time of this writing, three events have already taken place.

The program consists of regional meetings attended by pastors, local evangelism directors, and all who wish to serve the Lord in this area of the Church's mission. The general theme is "Obeying Jesus." We have three days of training (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday), with an average attendance of 400.

Topics include

- Salvation: A Myth or Man's Greatest Need?

Using our personal testimonies to reach people for Christ.

- Why Don't We Evangelize?
- The Ministry of All Believers. Evangelizing one-on-one and answering the call to serve.

We also hold a revival service on Saturday afternoon.

This program is interesting for several reasons. First, evangelizing is a fundamental task that the church must fulfill. All other responsibilities, such as edification, adoration, communion, and service, in some way depend on it. If we don't evangelize, then we don't have new believers, and the church decreases.

Evangelizing was the first thing Christ commanded His disciples to do when He left them. Jesus said, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46, 47).

Second, statistics show that we are not growing significantly. Although it is true that we have

grown spiritually, due to good biblical understanding, it is also true that in reaching new believers, we fall short. That is why, in every local church, members should be aware that evangelizing is not the responsibility of just a few, but a privilege of all. The Bible says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30).

Third, evangelizing is not only a gift but also a commandment. It has been said that evangelizing is not the great suggestion but the Great Commission. Those who have this gift can bear much fruit, but if we all obey this as a commandment, we will have a lot more fruit to glorify God.

Christ said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8). Among other things, bearing fruit, without a doubt, refers to winning souls.

Lastly, we must recognize that the greatest need the world has today is the gospel of Christ. Only the good news can transform a human being and their environment. Without trying to demonize or despise anything, we understand that the great change humanity needs will not come from science and technology, nor from new politics or government, nor from armies watching after the interests of countries, nor human philosophies. The greatest change will happen through men and women whose hearts are on fire to share the Word of God. They do so with the same style as that of the greatest evangelist who ever existed, Apostle Paul: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

— Ramón Ruiz





Knowing or Doing?

American evangelist D. L. Moody was once accosted by a woman who told him that she didn't like the way he shared the gospel. D. L. Moody is said to have responded, "I agree with you. I'm not satisfied with the way I share the gospel either. How do you do it?" The critical woman replied, "I don't share the gospel." Moody responded, "I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."

The issue of knowledge without appropriate action deserves our attention. The woman who criticized Moody did not criticize him for sharing the gospel but for the way he shared it. Apparently, she had some degree of knowledge concerning the gospel and evangelism and considered them important. Otherwise, why would she have given any thought to Moody's methods, and why would she initiate this conversation with him? Apparently, the woman had given evangelism enough thought to conclude that Moody wasn't doing it properly, though she herself wasn't sharing the gospel at all! Knowledge without appropriate action.

In a brief teaching video I recently viewed, Christian psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud addressed a phenomenon of the human mind. He pointed out that it is common for people to confuse thoughts and intentions with actual actions and achievements. People regularly set goals, such as losing weight or getting out of debt or overcoming a bad habit, but they fail to accomplish their goals. Why? Often because the act of thinking and planning their goals provides enough immediate satisfaction that they no longer feel compelled to actually do the things necessary to achieve their goals.

Think with me now about the Great Commission that Jesus Christ has given to His followers. Matthew 28:18-20a expresses it this way: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'" (NIV).

Look again at the last phrase. It does not say, "teaching them everything I have commanded you." It says, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." I don't think that's accidental. Knowledge of Christ's commands is important! But knowledge is not obedience. It must compel us to appropriate action. The Great Commission is not to know the Great Commission; it is to make disciples of Jesus Christ!

Throughout 2019, the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the United States and Canada is focused on the Great Commission. We will continue to gradually expand this focus to include the apostle Paul's wonderful expression of our role and responsibility, recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2. We are ambassadors for Christ! We are ministers of reconciliation! We are God's co-workers! As we continue to learn and plan, however, may God help us also to act. Let's not fall into the trap of thinking that knowing the Great Commission is actually fulfilling it. Knowing is not doing. A goal is not an achievement. Let's make disciples!

— Loren Stacy



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