

How Much do You Really Believe the Gospel?

Many Christians say that as individuals, our chief purpose is to glorify God. If this is true for individuals, then certainly we can say that the chief purpose for the Church is to glorify God. In order for a Church to purposely glorify God, it must be obedient to Him. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus issued the Church its marching orders. We call it the Great Commission. THE Great Mission of the Church is to make disciples, baptize them and teach them to observe all things that Jesus commanded. Since a church cannot purposely glorify God if it is disobedient to Him, then a church MUST obey THE Great Mission that He assigned to it. Since the fulfillment of THE Great Mission is paramount in the Church's purpose, it is essential to keep it at the center of our thinking as we try to answer the question, "*What is the local church and how is it supposed to function?*" Only as we see THE Great Mission as paramount to the fulfillment of God's purposes can we properly comprehend the Bible passages that describe the church and how it is supposed to function. If we fail to hold THE Great Mission as paramount, our understanding of the Bible passages that speak about the Church will be flawed. It would be no different than attempting to interpret a verse without taking into account its context.

If a person comprehends the absolute importance of THE Great Mission assigned by Christ, he knows that the making of disciples cannot be considered less important than the ministry of believers to one another. He realizes that the task of making disciples has been assigned to all believers, not merely to professional evangelists or missionaries. He understands that as ambassadors of Christ, all believers will have an impact on the unbelievers living around them IF they live godly in Christ. He understands that godly living always includes proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us. (See I Peter 2:9, note 1 below.) If a person has a solid conviction about these things, he will see that the purpose of the ministry of saints to one another is so the saints will become equipped to do the work of the ministry IN ORDER THAT THE GREAT MISSION GETS CARRIED OUT. This is the lens he looks through to understand passages like the following one.

"He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Paul also said, "*We are to, grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). As a result of our ministry to one another, we will each have greater capacity to be used by God in the fulfillment of THE Great Mission and its fulfillment begins with the making of disciples.*

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 29:19-20).

While on earth, Jesus made disciples and taught His disciples the things they needed to know. When he was about to ascend into heaven, He told His disciples to do as He did- to make disciples, baptize (see note 2 below) and teach them everything He commanded them. This is THE Great Mission He assigned to the Church. Therefore, if no disciples are being made, baptized and subsequently taught by a local church, the chief assignment Christ gave to it is not being carried out. It should not be considered a "healthy church."

At this point it should be noted that Jesus wants us to make "true" disciples who prove that they indeed possess life from above through works wrought of God (see note 3 below). People who respond to invitations or pray a sinner's prayer are not disciples unless they possess life from above that shows up in the form of radically changed lives that produce the fruit of the Kingdom (see note 4 below). Also, the fulfillment of the mission must be evidenced locally, not merely by extension through missionaries far away. The Church at Thessalonica was commended by the Apostle Paul for its role in fulfilling THE Great Mission.

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything” (I Thessalonians 1:2-8).

Now this was a healthy church! According to Paul, the fact that the gospel sounded forth from the Thessalonians was evidence that they believed the gospel with “full conviction.” In other words, they really believed it “from the heart.” The Apostle Paul said, “*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!*” (II Corinthians 13:5). Jesus said that when the gospel is sown in “good soil,” it produces fruit. “*The one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty*” (Matthew 13:23). This fruit shows up in every area of our life. I maintain that one fruit of this new life from above is a spontaneous desire for the gospel to be proclaimed to all people. I maintain that if a person does not have this desire, he should not be confident that he has been born from above. Secondly, I maintain that if this desire is genuine, it will manifest itself through works that are aimed at seeing this desire fulfilled. For example, if a person has this desire, he will pray that the gospel will be proclaimed more. He will pray that God causes Jesus to be exalted highly in the preaching of the gospel to all people. He will give of his resources so that the gospel is proclaimed more and more. And if this desire is genuine, he will actively participate in the proclamation of the gospel in whatever capacity God enables him. If he is deaf and dumb, he will still seek to communicate the gospel by giving out tracts that communicate it. If a person relegates this privilege to others and excuses himself from it, he shows that he does not really believe the gospel very much if at all.

I maintain that the degree to which this desire exists and is manifested in a Christian is directly proportional to the degree he actually believes the gospel.

We can conclude that some people believe the gospel more than others because we see some being more active than others in praying and doing things that will cause the gospel to be proclaimed.

To take our spiritual temperature, all we have to do is compare ourselves with the Thessalonians. Is the Word of the Lord sounding forth from us? Is it sounding forth beyond the walls of our homes and churches? Is it sounding forth “in every place?” Or, do we keep this good news to ourselves? The extent it is sounding forth is a direct indication of how much we actually believe it. The gospel comes to us through the shed blood of Jesus, God’s dear Son. It is the most valuable treasure that He has placed into the care of His Church. At the judgment, each individual that has heard it will be held accountable for what he has done with it. The unbeliever who heard and refused to embrace it will be subject to more severe punishment. (See Hebrews 10:29.) The one who professes to believe but has been negligent in his stewardship of it will be cast into outer darkness. Based upon the degree to which the gospel is spread by the typical professing Christian living in the USA, we each need to consider whether we are in danger of hearing these words on judgment day, “You wicked, lazy slave!”

“For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. “To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. “In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. “But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled* accounts with them. “The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to*

me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ “Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ “And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. ‘And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. ‘Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. ‘Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. “Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 23:14-30).

It is not my intention to motivate people by making them feel guilty. We cannot live in the newness of the Spirit if we are motivated by guilt! I wrote all this because it seems that the Church needs a wakeup call. It is my hope that God will use my words to awaken His people from their slumber so that they begin to cry out to Him for revival. Deep down inside, all true believers want to be used by God as His witnesses.

Knowing that THE Great Mission is job ONE, we understand that the goal of the ministry of those in leadership is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. It is the leader’s job to train them for ministry in order that THE Great Mission GETS DONE. Leading must be by example. (See I Peter 5:3). In the Bible narrative, leaders showed by example and first hand experience the things that must be done to fulfill THE Great Mission. They spent their time teaching their pupils all things that Jesus commanded. They also set examples as men who proclaimed the gospel outside the confines of church meetings.

Like the Apostles, today’s leader must be out in front proclaiming the gospel to the unbelievers outside the Church. Like the Apostles, today’s leader must be willing to suffer persecution and rejection for the sake of Christ as he faithfully proclaims the gospel. He must be able to say, “Follow my lead. I will show you what we must do in order to fulfill THE Great Mission that Jesus assigned to us.”

This is true for anyone in leadership because to lead, a person must lead by example or it is mere lip service. As the members watch and learn what to do, they are admonished to do what they observe the leaders doing. If they observe the leaders leading as the Apostles led, the members will not only minister to each other but also to those outside the Church. As a result, disciples will be made. All of this is necessary for the Church to fulfill THE Great Mission.

1 “You are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

2 Though he may not have actually baptized with His own hands, John credits Jesus as having baptized many people through His disciples. (See John 3:26, 4:1&2.)

3 “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:21).

4 “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).