



The Reflector

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Conversion Means Total Commitment

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Matthew's account of what is generally called "The Great Commission" is quite interesting in its wording as translated in the American Standard and more recent translations of the New Testament. The ASV reads:

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Notice:

The first phrase tells what to do:

Go make disciples.

The next two phrases both modify the first by telling how to do it:

1. **Baptizing** them:

2. **Teaching** them to **observe all things** the Lord commanded.

One has not made a disciple until both modifying conditions are done. It like telling one to "Go therefore and build a house of brick, laying the foundation: erecting the superstructure." The thing to be done is to build a brick house. How? By laying the foundation and erecting the superstructure. The job is not done until and unless both modifiers have been completed.

Disciples are not made by just baptizing them but also by teaching them to observe all the Lord commands. In other words, teaching them to totally commit themselves to observing **all things** commanded. They will not know at the time **all** things commanded, but as disciples they will learn

more and more of what they are commanded as they grow. But when they learn a thing commanded, they have already committed themselves to obey it. They have been taught from the beginning that they are to observe it. One of the things that made them disciples was their commitment to observe all things commanded.

I must admit that it took me a while after I began trying to preach the gospel to learn what this passage was really saying. After it dawned on me that this was the import of this commission I changed some of my ways of answering questions from folks as I tried to bring them to the Lord.

Before, a person might ask if they would have to give up a certain thing or practice they really liked or would they have to start doing something they did not particularly look forward to doing if they became Christians. I used to try to take each individual item brought up and try to give reasons why I believed or did not believe they would have to give that up or why I believed or did not believe they would have to start doing what they were concerned about.

Now, when such a question comes up, I simply ask the person if after being baptized, he learned from scripture that he would have to give up the thing that concerned him, would he be willing to do it? Or if he learned that he would need to start doing the thing he was concerned about, would he be willing to do it? If he says that he doesn't think he would, I tell him we still have some more studying to do. Why? Because he is not ready to be a disciple until he is committed to obeying all things that he learns that the Lord has commanded him.

This is the kind of commitment that Jesus had in mind when he said:

*“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doth not **first** sit down and count the cost, whether he have wherewith to complete it? ... So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:28, 33 ASV)

Notice that the cost counting comes before the building begins. ■

That Mysterious Disciple

Wayne Jackson

“John said unto him, Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in your name; and we forbade him because he followed us not. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man who shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able to quickly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us” (Mk. 9:38-40).

In recent years, this passage in the Gospel of Mark has become the center of a doctrinal storm. It has been cited frequently as a proof-text for the allegation that there are individuals in practically all denominational bodies who are true Christians (Shelly, 123ff). This includes religious leaders like Billy Graham, John Stott, and James Dobson (Cope, 7).

Those who dispute this saints-in-the-sects dogma are accused of exhibiting an arrogant, exclusive attitude, similar to that of the Lord’s disciples, and for which they were rebuked.

John’s Testimony

What are the actual facts of this case? A careful consideration of the available data will reveal that this rather obscure incident does not afford any comfort to those who are unscripturally ecumenical in their orientation.

John, an eyewitness to the controversy, plainly stated that this man was “casting out demons” in the name of Christ. There are several crucial considerations to be noted.

Christ’s Response

The Lord instructed his disciples: “Forbid him not,” or, as the Greek suggests: “Stop hindering him.” The Savior then explained why this fellow was

not to be opposed. “No man who is doing a mighty work in my name will be able to quickly speak evil of me.”

Jesus acknowledged that: If the man was actually casting out demons, then he obviously was teaching the gospel, because supernatural signs were designed to confirm the truth of the miracle-worker’s message. “Signs” were never granted as mere ends within themselves; they were intended to accompany, and validate, divine instruction (Mk. 16:17-20; Heb. 2:2-4). Supernatural gifts would never have been given to authenticate a false teaching.

How can this case possibly serve as a precedent for today, justifying fellowship with those who are propagating denominational error?

Conclusions To Be Drawn

What do we learn from this episode? We are forced to conclude that this unknown disciple had, on an earlier occasion, been associated with Christ, and that the Lord had enlisted the gentleman in His divine mission.

The disciples were unaware of the man’s identity; nonetheless, he was one of the Savior’s workers. He possessed a spiritual gift. From whom else would he have received that power, if not from the Son of God? Jesus plainly suggested that though this man was not in the *immediate company* of the twelve, he was nevertheless “for us.” And so the disciples were not to hinder his labor.

What relationship does this episode bear to a modern situation involving folks who have never obeyed the gospel, and who are unquestionably teaching anti-scriptural doctrines? None at all. It certainly does censure an aloof attitude on the part of any disciple who would hold himself apart from others who are faithfully serving the Lord, but it does not sanction the teaching of error.

The Current Problem

What theologically liberal people need, in order to justify their interdenominational-fellowship, is a case where Jesus rebuked his disciples for not fraternizing with those advocating error.

Our current problem is this: We have men within the church (and they represent a sizable segment) who have lost all respect for New Testament authority. They have become sectarian to

the very core of their souls. They desperately want to be affiliated with the denominations, but various factors prevent them from leaving the church outright and joining themselves to the sects. Some of them have already swayed the flocks with which they work, naive souls whose superficial Bible knowledge has made them vulnerable to the charms of slick-talking technicians who masquerade as gospel preachers.

Some of these feel they are “reformers.” They fantasize that they have been specially called of God to bring “the Church of Christ denomination” out of its suffocating sectarianism into the conglomerate of modern “Christendom.” They actually envision their names inscribed in the books that will chronicle the epochal deeds of ecclesiastical history.

There are a couple of crucial principles that must be kept in view in considering the issues of the current controversy.

Those who wish to remain faithful to the Lord will not be swayed by this new sectarian mentality.

(Editorial Note: We differ with Wayne Jackson on some vital issues, but his observations on this topic are right on target.) ■

Painless, Pointless, Profitless Preaching

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The doctor, looking at the routine test results, announces to the patient, “Hey, man, give me five. Have I got good news for you? Your blood pressure is super. Your pulse rate is fantastic. And, man, what a fabulous gall bladder. It is beautiful to behold. You are in marvelous shape.”

Now the patient really feels good about himself. In fact, it confirmed what he had thought all along - there was nothing wrong with him. He only went in to satisfy his wife. She is one of those health nuts that thinks one should have a periodic checkup even when he is feeling good about himself.

Then the doctor says, “Sit down, I want to tell some really good news about our treatment plan for folks like you - you will love it and hardly feel a pain - I tell you it is sensational.” The patient asks, “Treatment for what, Doc?” “You just said I

was in great shape.”

“Well, you are, or at least we believe you need to think you are (haven’t you ever heard of Positive Mental Attitude), but everyone needs a treatment plan,” replies the doctor.

“How much is this going to cost me, Doc?”

“You don’t need to concern yourself about the cost now, I will explain that to you a bit at a time while you are recovering from the initial surgery.”

“From initial - what?”

“Initial surgery for that nice tumor that I think you may have - isn’t that super! Can you say ‘super’?”

“To tell you the truth, Doc, ‘swell’ is about the best I can do until I find out what will happen if I don’t have surgery. What will likely happen?”

“Do I detect that you are beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable about yourself? I was afraid of that. We can’t have that!”

“But, Doc, why didn’t you tell me to start with that I had a tumor and needed an operation?”

“What kind of doctor do you think I am? I am of the new school that tells patients how well they are, rather than that old negative school that tells folks how sick they are. How can I claim to be a ‘good news’ doctor if I keep telling folks the ‘bad news’ about their health and what all it is going to take for them to get well?”

“Doc, I think news about the surgery and its cost would have been ‘good news’ to me had you honestly told me first, with convincing evidence, the ‘bad news’ about my illness.”

The above fictional doctor’s approach parallels a growing approach to preaching among us. One who sees no flaw in the doctor’s approach will likely see no flaw in this new style of preaching.

The idea that we can help sinners without first convicting them of sin is both unscriptural and illogical. The first order of business of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles was to “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8). As they went forth preaching under the direct guidance of the Spirit, they first convicted men and women of their sins; then they gave them the good news about how to be saved from sin.

Notice the order in Acts 2. Peter first convicted

them of their sin by plainly pointing out, with ample evidence, that the One they had rejected and crucified was the Christ of prophecy. He concluded “that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” That made them rather uncomfortable about themselves. It even cut them to the heart. They asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37). They were now ready for the good news. There was a way out of their sinful condition. (v.38). They gladly did what they were told to do. (v. 41).

Of course, they were not made to feel bad about themselves and left hanging. They were given good news of the way out of their sinful and lost state. They would not have been ready for the good news until they no longer felt good about having crucified Jesus. As long as they felt that they were innocent of wrong doing they would have felt no need for the gospel. They would have not considered it good news.

Once men and women are faced with the guilt and consequences of their sins. When they understand that they are lost and hell bound. Then the news of the gospel plan of salvation indeed becomes great news. It is good news even when they understand that discipleship involves effort, hardships and sacrifices.

No, we are not saying that every sermon or every article or every class lesson must be to convict one of sin. There are other purposes in preaching and teaching. But, there is entirely too much emphasis in today’s preaching upon trying to make people feel good about themselves rather than convicting them of sin. Too much psychology and not enough gospel in lessons directed to those in and out of the church. A preacher friend recently told me about hearing a young visiting preacher preach an entire sermon on “the grace of God” without even mentioning the plan of salvation. A few years ago, I stopped at a place on a Sunday night and heard a sermon on “the new birth” without baptism being mentioned – much less showing that people needed it and urging them to do it. There is less and less emphasis upon what we must leave behind and what is involved in being saved from sin and condemnation.

The world hasn’t changed so much since the first century that it does not need convicting of sin. The

church has not changed so much that there are no brethren that need convicting of sin. The word of God has not changed so much that it is not still designed to make us see what manner of men we are – prompting us to do something about it (cf. Jas. 1:25).

If our preaching makes one still in his sins feel good about himself then we have done him an injustice. It is likewise an injustice to make one think that salvation and discipleship are without cost. But once one understands the gravity of his sinful condition and the rewards of salvation – he will eagerly accept the cost of obeying the Lord. The gospel, with all its conditions, tribulations and blessings will indeed be good news to him, because he has fully understood the bad news of his condemnation.

It is time that we quit trying to spare the sinner the pain of honestly facing the reality of his condemnation; so that we might introduce him to the glorious relief in the gospel of Christ. It is time that we quit trying to make disciples of Christ without painful decisions having to be made. Repentance is not painless. It is prompted by godly sorrow. (2 Cor. 7:9,10).

When one obeys the gospel there are sinful pleasures that must be sacrificed. There are often beloved hindering relationships that must be severed. When preachers preach and people understand the whole picture, the Lord will be pleased and souls will be saved. When one understands the profitableness of godliness for the life that now is and that which is to come (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8) – he will gladly count the cost worth it all. But one can hardly understand and appreciate the profitableness of godliness until he understands the unprofitableness of ungodliness.

Maybe we need to be more concerned that our preaching be profitable than painless.

(Editorial Note: We first published this article in *The Reflector* in 1988 and it later appeared in *Guardian of Truth*, October 19, 1995. We wrote this before PowerPoint presentations became so popular. Recently I have been known to say, that I have not objection to the use of PowerPoint unless the preaching is powerless and pointless.) ■