

The Mission – Live the Good News

April 10, 2016 - Pastor Randy Eliason

Matt. 28:19,20 "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations (SHARE), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach (LEARN) these new disciples to obey (LIVE) all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Last week I began a series dissecting our church mission statement: "Our mission is to learn, live and share the good news of Jesus." We saw that learning, living and sharing the good news is what discipleship is all about. Last week I focused on our need to learn. Today we are going to focus on the "Why" behind the challenge to study.

Look at our text again. The discipleship process begins with "baptism" because baptism is the declaration that a person has come to a saving faith in Christ. It marks the beginning of the journey of following Christ.

Salvation first changes our relationship to God positionally, and then it changes it actually. Salvation places us in right relationship with God so we can begin to relate rightly to God.

After baptism, we need to learn...TO LIVE the good news. Disciples don't learn just to know truth; they learn to live according to the truth.

But here is something very important to understand. In the life of every Christian, for every disciple of Christ, a gap exists between what we know we should do and be and who we presently are and actually do. Discipleship is about shrinking that gap.

I have three slides that I want to use to help you visualize this. The first slide shows a large gap between the top line which represents what we know and the bottom line which represents what we do. The next slide shows a shrinking of the gap between these two bringing them into closer alignment. The third slide shows the gap completely gone with what we are being brought into perfect alignment with what we know.

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Beautiful, isn't it! There is just one problem. This perfect alignment never arrives until Christ returns.

I have one more slide that illustrates the reality for the Christian. For now, for everyone here, a gap remains. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives and hearts of God's people to shrink the gap and God's grace is ever present to fill the gap.

It is critical that you recognize this in order to avoid two extremes. On the one hand are Christians who forget or deny that the Holy Spirit has been given to us to shrink the gap. They neglect the truth that conversion is intended to lead to a transformation that brings us in closer conformity to the image of Christ. This is evidenced by Christians that have either no hope for a change in their character and behavior or simply don't think that it matters.

On the other hand, some Christians fail to truly grasp the nature of, and need for, the grace of God as the basis for our right relationship with God and consequentially, the basis for our peace and joy. God's grace is manifested through Christ's righteousness being the basis for our acceptance before God. If you are not trusting in that, but in your ability to eliminate the gap you will be forever frustrated and miserable or you will be a self-righteous Pharisee who denies that the gap exists in your life. Unless you can settle on the fact that the gap will always be there, but you are accepted and loved in by the Father because of the Son, you will have a problem. You don't have to be perfect, but neither do you have to be what you used to be!!

How do I Grow? How do I become this new creation? How do I "shrink the gap". First of all, I need to clarify that although my slides refer to a behavioral gap, the gap that exists between who we are when we come to Christ and the persons God intends for us to become is not just a matter of behavior. In fact, it is not even primarily about behavior. The gap we are speaking about shrinking in order to bring our lives into alignment with God's word and will includes three areas:

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Ephesians 4:17,18 “With the Lord’s authority I say this: *Live no longer* as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their *minds are full of darkness*; they wander far from the life God gives because they have *closed their minds and hardened their hearts* against him.

Our Actions (The Hands & Feet) – “Live no longer...” God wants to put your bodies to good use for His glory and for the good of others.

Our Attitudes (The Mind) – God wants to renew your thinking. It wants to brainwash us! We need our brains washed clean of or stinking thinking.

Our Affections (The Heart) - God wants to warm your cold heart towards him and others. The Holy Spirit ministers to our emotions.

1. All Spiritual Growth takes place due to the influence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:5 tells us that the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The NT speaks frequently about our need to have our minds renewed and attributes this renewal to the work of the Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit in our hearts and minds that motivates us to redirect our behavior to God-glorifying ends.

2. No Spiritual Growth takes place without our effort.

While it is true that the Spirit is the necessary influence behind any real life transformation, it is also true that we need to yield to the Spirit’s influence. Effort on our part is also necessary. Peter wrote, “...make every effort to add to your faith goodness...” (2 Peter 1:5).

When someone provokes you with their words this week, either at home, at school, or at work, The Holy Spirit will not force your mouth to stay shut and not retaliate. There are no Holy Spirit handcuffs to keep you from using devil-inspired gestures or worse. There are no Holy Ghost blindfolds that cover your eyes to keep you from staring at a member of the opposite sex, regardless of whether in person or in pictorial.

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How do we realize the influence of the Spirit in our lives? Remember that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force. How have you been influenced by persons? By spending time with them. The more time you spend meditating on the Spirit-inspired scriptures through reading and study, and the more time you spend in prayer and worship with the Spirit, the more you will experience your mind and heart being renewed. After that, go and do!