

Focus on the Kingdom

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Basic Steps in the Quest to Follow Jesus

A Study of Matthew 5-7

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

When one surveys written Scriptural tenets of what it means to faithfully obey Jesus, there are a variety of biblical approaches to consider. One might reasonably start by focusing on what is declared to be of greatest importance in Jesus' teachings throughout the four gospels. Clearly, Jesus' overall theme of preaching is "God's Gospel" (Mark 1:14), and in verse 15: "The time is fulfilled," Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in that Gospel." Jesus' continuous, repeated emphasis on repentance (real change in thinking and actions) connected to this dynamic future Kingdom theme, rooted deeply in the Hebrew prophetic Scriptures (Dan. 2:44-45; 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27; Isa. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; Mic. 4:1-5) is quite evident from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matt. 4:17, 23; Luke 4:43). As one takes in all of Jesus' speech regarding this prominent subject (as in Luke 22:28-30) and its wider new covenant context, it is not hard to see that he promised the upcoming fulfillment of God's panoramic purpose for the ages: to bring about, through his own Messianic function, a perfectly just worldwide government (Kingdom) when he returns to earth. This would include the great expected events (Dan. 12:1-3) of two future resurrections, beginning with the resurrection of the "just" from among the dead (Rev. 10:7; 11:15-18). As a decisive result, all of the defective, worldly governments during present times will be lovingly and powerfully replaced when Jesus returns!

Another key priority, stressed by Jesus, is his concise, two-fold summary of "the Law and the Prophets" with a highly spiritualized focus — which essentially constitutes the revamped basis for new covenant thinking (Matt. 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34). Note that according to the reference in Mark, it is absolutely unmistakable (quoting Deut. 6:4) that loving God means understanding who He uniquely is — "the Father," "the only one who is truly God" (John 17:3). It is also obvious through simple, careful reading that many, many practical details about loving God and loving one's neighbor thoroughly permeate Jesus' teachings as well as all the New Covenant (N.T.) writings!

There are certainly other emphatic aspects of Jesus' comments and teachings, such as his sure belief in the

integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures (John 10:35b: "and the Scripture cannot be broken"). Luke 24:44 shows Jesus' keen, overall view of the entire body of Hebrew (or O.T.) Scriptures as the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (the first book of the "Writings").

With this quick view of several thematic "umbrella" realities already firmly in mind (including Jesus' contextual use of water baptism John 3, 4 and later commanded in Matt. 28:19), it should be a marvelous blessing to peruse some specific aspects of Jesus' very first major teaching in Matthew: chapters 5, 6, and 7 in the context (Matt. 4:17, 23) of his dedication to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, also idiomatically called (only in Matthew) "the Kingdom of Heaven" — since it will come from the God of Heaven and be manifested on earth (Dan. 2:44).

Kingdom Blessings: Matthew 5:3-20

When one studies the details of this "Sermon on the Mount," it becomes apparent that Jesus is offering a very generous invitation to the "poor in spirit," the grieving, the gentle (or meek), etc., so that they may respond now in repentance — in order to inherit the land (the whole earth) in the future (Matt. 5:5, quoting Ps. 37:11). That inheritance is to occur when God's Kingdom will certainly come to arrive on earth, with God's will being done perfectly on earth (Matt. 6:10), for which reality believers should be now praying day by day!

As well as carefully comparing the noteworthy "blessed" phraseology of Matthew 5:3-12 with the parallel vocabulary which uses contrasting "blessed" and "woe" (or "alas") terms in Luke 6:20-26, one might also evaluate the similarity with a couple of other biblical passages. In Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 one sees how the downtrodden and poor are eventually to be exalted by God, and Mary's joyful expression in Luke 1:46-55 also displays God's ultimate exaltation of the humble. The list of blessings in Matthew 5 (and also Luke 6) culminates with future Kingdom "rewards" (presently stored with God "in heaven") being given (literally, in the future, but in promise now), to those who are currently insulted, persecuted, and lied about — because of loyalty to Jesus.

This opening Kingdom invitation is really for everyone, but it is implicitly apparent that the initial embracing of a changed attitude is quickly required. For example, these Kingdom blessings are not offered

here to the proud, the arrogant, the “popular,” the contentious, or the hardhearted. Ironically, though, such deceiving traits (often associated with “success” in this present age) permeate those who are adamant in their pursuit of misguided religion!

Nowadays, among the genuinely “poor in spirit,” one might endure persecution, suffer grief, experience hunger, struggle to pursue peace, strive to be merciful, etc., without any apparent benefit during this present time frame. Nevertheless, the eventual resolution of the coming Kingdom and its inherently powerful reversal of circumstances are quite obvious in the blissful or “blessed” status of those who humbly respond to Jesus’ invitation!

Shortly after Jesus calls on his listeners to persevere as useful “salt” and shine (through helpful, fruitful actions) as “light” (Matt. 5:13-16), he begins to undertake a presentation of what it means to obey the Law in a new, spiritualized sense in 5:17-20 and in the practical matters which follow. Jesus here is effectively initiating the understanding of how to live by new covenant norms, which are not a mere repetition of the old, Mosaic Law. Jesus teaches a revolutionary message, plumbing the depths of human minds and hearts, while at the same time staying grounded in the roots of Israel’s Scriptural heritage.

Loving All People: Matthew 5:21-48, 6:12-15, 7:1-5

Jesus repeatedly targets how one should love his/her neighbor in Matthew 5 by contrasting a literal, traditional Mosaic paradigm with a new, deeper command involving a spiritual level of obedience from the mind and heart. For example in verses 21-26, committing murder is now profoundly extended by Jesus into being careful not to give into the underlying fallacy of human anger, while at the same time refraining from using abusive speech (like referring to folks as “idiots,” etc.). A few hyperboles stress these points. Similarly, the Mosaic view of adultery is revamped into avoiding inappropriate lust (desire) from the heart in verses 27-30. Jesus then boldly disagrees with the Mosaic divorce standard cited in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 by banning divorces except for cases of infidelity (v. 31-32). (Mt. 19:1-9 gives even more insight into Jesus’ thoughtful, new commands regarding divorce and the priority of Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 over what was later permitted by Moses in Deut. 24:1ff, “Because of your hardness of heart.”)

Jesus also challenges the Mosaic norm of being able to claim retribution, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Ex. 21:24) by offering a new standard: “Do not resist an evil person, but turn the cheek” (calmly allow further insults, v. 38-42). In other words, instead of “standing on one’s rights,” as we say so often in the modern world, we should cheerfully “let

things go” when mistreated or when unfair demands are placed upon us. We are to keep shining as lights, and we are not to become vindictive toward anyone!

Loving one’s neighbor (Lev. 19:18) is no longer (under Jesus’ new covenant “Law”) to be tempered with a harsh, unforgiving attitude toward traditional “enemies” (as reflected perhaps in Deut. 23:3-6). Jesus commands us to love even our enemies (v. 43-48), loving them truly as God does — who gives the blessing of sunlight and rainfall on good and evil alike. Necessary forgiveness of others is importantly given a triple emphasis in 6:12, 14-15 as a bona fide condition of our being really forgiven by God. Furthermore, we are to restrain ourselves from hypocritically judging others (in the sense of severely chalking them off with a condemning attitude, while being carelessly oblivious to our own defects, 7:1-5). Jesus is not saying that we should not maintain high moral standards in our own lives, but it is clear that we should hold them without a self-righteous type of hypocrisy. Also, he is not implying that we can never help others with specks in their eyes, but we must surely do so honestly. Vital newness abundantly infiltrates all of Jesus’ authoritative decrees!

In the above listing of different aspects of loving our neighbors, it should be noted that Jesus, in this first recorded teaching in Matthew, points our hearts now perceptively toward future Kingdom realities! In times to come (when Satan is to be bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations, Rev. 20:1-3), folks everywhere will be learning YHWH’s loving precepts instead of developing weapons for war, and learning war (Isa. 2:1-4). It only makes biblical sense that those who obey Jesus now (to prepare to inherit this worldwide, non-violent future government) be trained by God’s mercy in authentically loving others to the degree of desisting from seething anger, holding grudges, frivolously using ugly insults, pursuing vengeful retaliations, displaying a blatant lack of forgiveness, exhibiting callous indifference, and embracing hypocritically harsh, condemning attitudes!

Loving the Only True God: Matthew 5:33-7:20

In addition to all the above considerations about devotedly loving our neighbors, this first teaching (Matt. 5-7) is filled with sterling insights into what it means to genuinely love the Father, the one true God. One should avoid making “oaths” (empty, wordy assertions), but say, “Yes or no” with simplicity (5:33-37). One must not practice things (like giving generously, praying, or fasting) ostentatiously, or “for show,” but rather build a heart focused only on God — and quietly receive the often hidden rewards given ultimately by Him (6:1-18). Instead of being constantly distracted by material wealth and being worried or

stressed out about basic needs in life, one is to give undivided attention to being committed to God (and doing what is right before Him) while seeking His Kingdom, knowing confidently that the Father will supply all of our needs and will surely take care of us in future days (6:19-34). Though we must avoid making hypocritical judgments, we must still be keenly discerning about our care in giving out what is holy (7:6), as well as being carefully aware to assess the devious influence (“bad fruit”) of the false prophets (ravenous wolves disguised in sheep’s clothing!) as seen in 7:15-20. Diligent faithfulness in honest, ardent prayers (while truly trusting the reliable heavenly Father) is mentioned throughout this whole teaching: 5:44, 6:7-15, and also quite dynamically in 7:7-11. We will shortly look a bit more at the solemn conclusion here about truly heeding Jesus’ **words**!

Jesus, after elaborating on continuously asking, seeking and knocking in prayer, then states “the Golden Rule” in 7:12: “Whatever you want people to do to you, do to them too. This sums up the Law and the prophets.” He is not merely using a lighthearted cliché about being “nice” in a general sense. He is carefully summarizing the whole contextual focus of being fervently devoted to the one true God and equally being dedicated to loving others within that proactive love of God! The following verses (13-14) demonstrate that painstaking effort is required to enter “the narrow gate” which uniquely leads to “Life” (meaning Life of the Age to come).

The Conclusion: Matthew 7:21-27

After the serious warning, in this chapter 7 context, about the deceit of “false prophets” (who can be perceived as false due to producing obvious bad fruit), Jesus presents a startling conclusion (7:21-27), starting with a future scenario regarding entrance (or denied entrance) into God’s Kingdom. He directs his words toward many who will call him, “lord, lord.” No doubt such folks will be sincere, while offering “spiritual” evidence for their allegiance to Jesus, but they will be sternly rejected for one basic reason. Such people actually would have heard (or listened to) Jesus’ message, but they would not have practiced what he had carefully taught them! Thus, they would suffer the metaphorical catastrophe of having an unstable house built “on the sand” which gets violently knocked down. This whole Matthew 5-7 Kingdom-oriented theme (and its stark chapter 7 conclusion) has nothing at all to do with people being sent to “heaven” or to “hell” at death, according to a deceptively popular, but paganized tradition. But this teaching’s finale has everything to do with God’s generous, doable offer — through Jesus — of the real possibility of producing obedient fruitfulness (to be actively practiced now), in order that people be

saved and ultimately useful, according to God’s loving agenda, when His Kingdom will arrive on earth. Those who hear Jesus’ words and truly practice them will have their house “built on a rock” and inherit God’s Kingdom!

Dealing with Anger

Jesus’ thorough teaching here is not an abstract, ethereal exercise in flowery words, nor is it a mass of disjointed tidbits of random ethical ideals. When he tackles a concrete subject (for example, in using the Mosaic Law regarding the avoidance of murder), he plunges deeply into the nitty-gritty challenge of dealing personally with smoldering human anger. As a matter of daily living, one might certainly feel initial anger due to adversity (even rightly so, as Jesus occasionally did: Mark 3:5). Nevertheless, a true believer must be prompt and humbly diligent about obeying God’s new covenant precepts concerning the “putting off” of anger, wrath, bitterness, cursing, etc., instead of letting such things fester (Eph. 4:26-27, 31-32; James 1:19-21). To put it bluntly, if one fails to biblically challenge his/her own angry tendencies, he/she has simply not even begun to obey one of Jesus’ very basic directives!

Personally, I was formerly indoctrinated with an erroneous view which strongly justified over-the-top anger in a perverse way! Nowadays, it is apparent that folks (even “Christians”) tend to be content to go with the flow of justifying and defending their anger — instead of learning to conscientiously get rid of it! But why not, in deepest honesty, try out what Jesus has clearly commanded? Thus, one can grow to become faithfully prayerful, even when dealing with abrasive enemies! This new covenant behavior would result dramatically in a person developing a loving heart, which is very far from even wishing that so-and-so were dead! Similar observations might be made about each of Jesus’ precise, practical commands as overviewed in the study of this first recorded teaching.

To me it is quite striking that Jesus directly tackles the issues of anger control and adulterous lust in the heart in back-to-back fashion (Matt. 5:21-30). Nowadays, people tend to carelessly follow certain devious norms of pop culture regarding the unrestrained venting of anger, and also acting boldly according to any sexual urges; they even promote ideas that it would be harmful to limit such strong human feelings and impulses! Nevertheless, Jesus’ first teaching in Matthew demonstrates with bold clarity that human beings really do have free will abilities (with God’s help) to obey beneficial words of genuine **life**!

Of course, it is imperative that we not give into any modern theologies which either subtly or blatantly downplay these vital words of newness provided by Jesus! For example (perhaps due to the widespread

influence of modern, popular “false prophets”), one might wrongly assume that biblical “grace” means not having to earnestly wrestle with certain difficult-seeming instructions. Consequently, one can casually drift into a sloppy mindset which then makes habitual excuses for outright disobedience. Tragically, such a hoodwinked person might, despite sheer unbelief of heart, enthusiastically praise Jesus and God (as is sadly quite common nowadays in much traditional religion). Also, one could be very badly deceived into thinking that Jesus’ teachings were only for Jews during an ancient time frame (or “dispensation”), but are not now applicable or relevant to Christians.

As well as prayerfully and meditatively reading and rereading Matthew 5-7 in various translations (while keeping Jesus’ panoramic Kingdom priorities in mind), one might enjoy quite a few valid insights from certain thoughtful writers, such as N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (p. 34-81) and Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (p. 111-408).

The New Moses: Five Blocks of Teaching

Another avenue for further study might be systematically observing how this first major teaching (Matt. 5-7) is directly connected to four other sections of teaching in the book of Matthew. “When Jesus had finished these words” (7:28) is a phrase parallel to four other phrases in 11:1, 13:53, 19:1 and 26:1. Therefore, five blocks of teaching are closely correlated:

- (1) Matthew chapters 5-7 (as studied briefly here),
- (2) Chapter 10: instructions to the twelve Apostles involved in Kingdom-oriented outreach
- (3) Chapter 13:1-53: a series of Kingdom parables
- (4) Chapter 18: being like little children to enter the Kingdom, avoidance of being stumbling blocks, seeking the lost with a shepherd’s heart, solving disputes involving sins which must be corrected, and a powerful lesson and parable about repentance and forgiveness, and
- (5) Chapters 23-25: a scathing rebuke of false religious leaders, followed by prophetic details concerning the times of Messiah’s future return, and, meanwhile, being actively prepared for that predicted future.

It has been noted by observant scholars that Matthew’s five-fold emphasis in major teaching presentations really projects Jesus as the new “Moses” (Deut. 18:15-19). Of course, the original Moses was intimately associated with the Law and the first five books of the Bible. Just as Moses announced God’s Old Covenant standards strictly to Israel, Jesus heralded God’s renewed and revamped New Covenant norms to

Israelites — and eventually to folks from every tribe, language, nation, and ethnic group!

So, **basic steps in the quest to follow Jesus** are beautifully outlined in his first recorded teaching (Matt. 5-7) and then woven in a consistent way throughout the entire book of Matthew — and really throughout all the New Covenant (New Testament) writings. As in Jesus’ first detailed teaching, one can easily detect how his New Covenant Kingdom-based standards are rooted in a blueprint of understanding the hope of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Such a cohesive big picture (which is clearly applicable to our real lives) means that believers need never doubt that a “solid rock” foundation is already provided in Jesus’ exact words, to be obeyed from the heart (Matt. 7:24-27; John 12:44-50) — as well as the “rock” of his Messianic, “Son of the living God” identity, as confessed by Peter in Matthew 16:15-18. ✧

Bearing Witness Silence Please — OR NOT!

by Barbara Buzzard

I had the opportunity just recently to study a child who I guessed to be around three years old, and what caused me to pay attention to him was that even in the midst of an outdoor pool event, he made no sounds at all. On the second occasion it was the same; he was an active participant in the fun, although silent throughout. I have no idea why this darling boy did not speak. If I could have, I would have *willed* him to speak.

I began to wonder if perhaps that is how God sees us. Does a similar situation exist between us as God’s children and our Father? Is He *willing* us to speak when we are silent? Perhaps He agonizes over us as we fail to speak on His behalf, as we fail to relay to others that He has a Plan and that they could have a part in it.

I am reminded of a similar situation years ago when I was alerted to the fact that the children we had invited to play badminton were playing silently. When our family played, we played raucously with whoops and shouting. In this case an abusive father had shaped these children into wooden figures who were silent so as not to disturb him.

Silence is unnatural. It is often a warning sign that all is not right. Aren’t we all relieved when after a moment of silence honoring the memory of someone, we are free to speak again? Imagine if that freedom was never restored! And now when our freedom of speech is being curtailed for political reasons, this right becomes all the more valuable. Our obligations in this age of corruption and lostness are surely even greater.

Who or what has silenced us as Christians? We are meant to proclaim, to testify to, to speak about the

Scriptures with enthusiasm, to relate to others our discovery of what it means to be saved and what we are saved **for**! And how awesome the *two* passions of Jesus are: his teachings and his sacrifice. The two greatest fears shared by Americans are said to be: 1) fear of public speaking, and 2) fear of snakes. Since I suffer from both of these, you simply couldn't outdo me here. Although speaking of one's faith is not exactly public speaking, I believe that the fear factor is in operation here. We must not allow it to rule the day!

I love the fact that whenever angels appeared to men or women in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, they always said, "Don't be afraid."¹ Rabbi Harold Kushner has pointed out that the most frequent statement of God to man in the Hebrew Bible is "Do not fear."² In fact, some claim the thought is found 365 times, in various forms: e.g. "Fear not!" "Do not be frightened!" "Be not afraid."³

Since fear will cause us to disobey our "marching orders," we need to address it and overcome it. We dare not risk God's disappointment. His approval of our actions (our words in action) is essential for entrance into the Kingdom. We must grow in favor with God as did Jesus by his obedience (Luke 2:40, 52). There is no sitting still, no resting on our laurels, no hiding, no silence. There is no freedom, whether male or female, to be a coward. It's a freedom we do not have — a dishonest way to go, a form of cheating, and at worst betrayal. It seems that much of Christendom comes up short when it comes to voicing our convictions.

Steel Magnolia

Let me first describe for those not fortunate enough to have seen a magnolia tree. It is a staple in southern gardens, having huge white, pink, or yellow fragrant blossoms in early spring. The tree can be massive and can withstand gale force winds. The bloom is said to represent nobility and purity. A "steel magnolia" is a term given to a woman who exemplifies both traditionally feminine traits and uncommon fortitude, often a southern woman who is strong and independent, yet feminine. She is unflinching in character and is often the backbone of the family. A steel magnolia possesses indefatigable strength, determination and resolve. As one writer put it, the image of a steel magnolia "melds beauty with perseverance, softness with backbone, delicacy with durability, sweetness

with stamina." (Sounds awfully like that Proverbs 31 woman!) A steel magnolia is very powerful but she uses that power judiciously.⁴

One biblical steel magnolia was Joanna who was one of Jesus' main followers. She was the wife of Chuza, Herod's financial steward. She was obviously a woman of means. She accompanied Jesus during his ministry for at least two years and financially backed much if not most of the disciples' cost of living.

I am certainly not the first to credit Mary Magdalene with being a steel magnolia. While not from the South, she was a source of strength throughout Jesus' ministry. She is mentioned *fourteen times* in the gospels; in eight of these accounts she is named with other women, but she always is first in the list. It is noteworthy as well that she was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. What an honor!⁵

It is also noteworthy that she and the other women stood steadfast at the crucifixion (as the men fled) until the very bitter end. She followed Jesus on his last journey to Jerusalem, was there at the trial where he, who was without sin, was pronounced guilty. She must have witnessed Jesus being spat upon and violently beaten, and yet she was still there. She would have seen his dreadful walk to Calvary and the torture of being nailed to the cross. How did she bear this? She would have heard Jesus' agonizing cries and been heart-broken as the spear thrust into his side pronounced him dead. Was Jesus comforted by their presence, by their closeness which displayed their love and loyalty? Her presence throughout this vicious ordeal spoke volumes about her. The anguish of watching Jesus die and the hideous passions of those who mocked him and wanted him dead did not cause her to abandon her watch. She never ran away. She remained steadfast there until the very bitter end. I think her fierce love for Jesus and her courage (and that of the other women) is utterly remarkable, almost unimaginable. She was the last to leave the cross, staying close to Jesus' body. She allowed nothing to disrupt her witness, her loyalty to Jesus. She watched as Joseph of Arimathea sealed his body in the tomb and surely went away with one of the greatest griefs known to humankind.

But then, her world was shaken by our all-powerful God and she was allowed to be the first one to witness history's most important event ever. Not only is Mary the most unlikely of candidates for this honor, but her

¹Or similar words such as "Do not fear" (e.g. Matt. 1:20; 28:5; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; Acts 27:24).

²Prager, *The Rational Bible*, Genesis 15:1.

³Hidalgo, *Changing Faith*, 2015, p. 153.

⁴Steel magnolias are credited with the creation and use of "bless their hearts," a phrase with multiple meanings from the genuine, sympathetic and sincere, to a near insult

used with condescension and even contempt. It *can* be a way for southern women to excuse themselves for speaking ill of someone. Men are now borrowing this tool as well!

⁵We normally give great honor to "first" things. In this case Jesus' first appearance was not to one of the twelve, but to Mary.

story reveals Jesus' going against what is expected, working via surprise (as is God's method as well). The fact that Jesus and his Father used one of the most unlikely is in itself a wonderful testament to the fact that if we allow ourselves to be used, God will do totally amazing things (Luke 7:43).

When Mary realizes it is Jesus who is speaking to her, she addresses him as Rabboni, which means teacher, and obviously in this case, her beloved teacher. (It is interesting that before she recognized who it was who was speaking to her, she addressed the man as "Sir," — *kurie*, "lord," a title flexible enough to be applied to God and a gardener!⁶) Mary was then the first commissioned to tell the twelve, and no doubt she told and re-told her teacher and lord's victory over death for the rest of her life. What a witness she had as the most pre-eminent witness to resurrection! She would have spoken with passion about the resurrection of Jesus. What she experienced — seeing him with her own eyes go from death to resurrected life — would be the preview and model for his followers.

To Be Examined

This well-known quotation attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words" is disturbing in a number of ways. This saying has almost taken on a life of its own, but it does violence to Jesus' words. It depicts a theology foreign to the Gospels and certainly foreign to the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus emphasized over and over again the supreme importance first of listening⁷ to his *words* and secondly of obeying his *words*. While I understand the dramatic effects a life of service can have, it is limited, limited in not being able to bless others with the critical directions necessary for entrance into the Kingdom.

Why is this so disturbing? Because there is an element of truth in it, but we know that a half-truth is still a lie. It is disturbing because implicit in it is the false assumption that the most powerful sermons would be unspoken. This is backwards thinking. This is to contradict Jesus flatly: "Therefore everyone who hears these **words** of mine, and obeys them, is like a wise man who built his house on solid rock... Everyone who hears my **words**, and does not obey them, is like a moron who built his house on the sand" (Matt. 7:24, 26).

It is disturbing because it is basically saying that proclaiming the Gospel by example is *more virtuous than by voice*.

"It's important to examine what kind of biblical doctrine that quote is trying to teach us. It's particularly dangerous primarily because it immediately creates an unnecessary and false dichotomy between gospel demonstration and gospel proclamation. The quote assumes and asserts that living like Jesus supersedes proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. It is as if to say, '*Don't worry about talking about Jesus; just live like Him and everything will take care of itself.*' This is a really popular position in our culture today because most Christians are super sensitive to the potential reality of offending anyone with their Biblical worldview. Therefore, in an attempt to not offend anyone, we adopt a weak missiology that neither Jesus nor the apostles practiced themselves. We must remember that **right thinking** (theology) **leads to right living** (missiology)."⁸

The making of a disciple would and must involve both demonstration and teaching via speech. Acts displays this harmony. Of course we should display qualities which will lead people to believe and to follow Jesus — but never to the exclusion of voicing the story. It is not either/or. It is both/and. Testifying to Jesus' words and following his lifestyle are both required. They are not at odds with each other. Stephen models this for us in that his acts matched his words, the most passionate and hard-hitting sermon ever (Acts 7). If as a Christian, you have been tempted to believe this unbiblical and damaging assertion that words are not necessary, please be reconciled to the Truth and listen all the more urgently to Jesus' words and then practice them.

"The majority of the Christians I know personally who love this quote are scared of sharing their faith with others and almost never even talk about their faith in general. Is this really what Jesus had in mind for his disciples when He rose from the grave and gave them His great commission? (Matt. 28:18-20). Live good lives but only talk about it when and if it comes up?! I struggle to see how any person can exegetically come to that conclusion after reading the book of Acts (not to mention any other New Testament letter). The early church community frequented public spaces and went from home to home on a daily basis (Acts 2:46) sharing the gospel, proclaiming the Kingdom, and teaching about the resurrected Christ as those who were eyewitnesses. Speaking about Jesus and the Kingdom was all the disciples did every day. Granted, they were loving people, serving people, selling possessions, etc. but **those acts of love and**

⁶ John 20:15, onegodtranslation.com

⁷ Shema!

⁸ Brett Ricley, "3 Problems with 'Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary'" displaythegospel.com, June 4, 2018, emphasis added.

compassion were never divorced from faithful gospel proclamation.

“The most concerning part of this quote is the phrase ‘if necessary.’ If necessary? Think about what those two words mean. The logical assumption here must be that Christians can and should live like Jesus without ever talking about Jesus or the gospel. It also includes the faulty assumption that talking about Jesus or the gospel should be our last resort. Really?! Is that the impression you get from the book of Acts? They only talked about Jesus as a last resort in leading people to Him? Not a chance. Jesus was the first thing on their minds, hearts, and lips...

“In no other facet of life and culture do we assume that if someone just watches our behavior, they will then automatically come to an understanding of what we’re doing. We don’t go to school and just watch the teachers color, draw, or write. They teach. They speak instructions, explain concepts, and guide us as we learn, all while modeling the proper way to complete the assignment. The natural way we learn almost everything includes cognitive knowledge and putting that knowledge into practice somehow.”⁹

“How then will people call on him [Jesus] unless they have believed him? And how will they believe him unless they have heard him [Jesus] preaching the Gospel? And how will they hear it unless someone preaches it to them?...So then belief is based on hearing — hearing the Gospel Message preached by the Messiah” (Rom. 10:14, 17). As we are told to “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15), we are, in fact, commissioned by Jesus to do what he did (Matt. 7:21). Our society is in a desperate state of lostness, experiencing a void which only the Truth of Jesus’ and his Father’s words can fill. May we be present in that adventure (and be wise!) as we obey those life-giving words and thereby take the blessing which we have received to others. ✨

Comments

• “Don’t forget Revelation 1:6: ‘He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and power forever and ever!’ As I consider the prospects of the Age to Come, imagine what it must feel like to have ‘virtue’ inside you — the essence of the Spirit of the Living God — and to have the virtue flow out of you to heal, teach, preach and be a fountain of righteousness for those around you. This is what I think those who rule and reign with Jesus will have and do. And virtue is what they will need to rule and reign over a truculent world, where so many must be chastised with a rod of iron because they do not love

the truth. Such are the ones who will join with Satan when he is loosed at the end of the Millennial Reign.” — *California*

• “I am writing this letter to tell you how much I appreciate all that I have learned from you and J. Dan Gill of 21st Century Reformation (21stcr.org). You and Dan and others made me realize that Jesus was really a man, and then everything else in the Scriptures finally made sense. My wife was raised Catholic and I was raised Lutheran, but we fell out of faith in both religions. We did study with Jehovah’s Witnesses for a time and came to realize that the Trinity and many of the Christian doctrines were false. I studied these things historically and found out how these false doctrines came about in the fourth century. It’s hard to believe that these non-biblical ideas took over Christianity as we know it.” — *Virginia*

• “The Bible unitarian ministry is still going on at this correctional institution. It has been around 2 years now. We have had 20 who regularly attend, and sometimes 30 or 40, once 58. We have lost some people due to me explaining that Jesus is not God, dead people are dead, and the lost burn up, not burn forever. But we would rather preach and teach the truth to a few, than preach and teach a lie to a large group with itching ears.” — *North Carolina*

• “I stumbled on your work recently as I have been having to face head on what I actually believe about the nature of God. Almost since I became a Christian at age 20 (21 years ago) I have had this sense that the Trinity was something that was a major stretch in Christian scholarship. I have rarely mentioned this to anyone out of the obvious fears of alienation. Two years ago I left being a Calvinist. Thank the Lord I didn’t lose my faith! Ever since then, I made up my mind to be ‘my own man.’ I have pursued various studies of all the major tenets of our faith that still remained within the boundaries of an orthodox Christian position, but still wherever the truth may lead. I have since found myself closer to the open theist position on foreknowledge, but very moderate. I feel like the final frontier is an honest reevaluation of the doctrine of the Trinity. But if I’m being transparent, I am absolutely terrified. The implications of where I think I might end up are so big that it is hard to even get started. I am trying to get the courage to go the next step, but I am fearful. I guess the Unitarian label has so much baggage. For me it conjures up images of apostate New England Puritan Churches and their liberal-modernist descendants who have no regard for Biblical morality whatsoever.” — *Georgia*

⁹ Ibid.