

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 1

The Great Commission and the Commands of Christ

This new series was actually suggested to me by Dr. Clifford Clarke some weeks ago, so if you don't like it call him and complain. Seriously, he and I were talking and he said he had read of a study by Bill Gothard [1] based on Christ words found in the Great Commission which stated *"and teach them to observe all the things that I have commanded you."* He encouraged me to work on a series based on this text. I have done some reading and I think this is a worthy goal and tonight we begin the journey together.

So first of all let's turn to the Great Commission and read again what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

The central core of the purpose of the church is outlined in these verses. First let's dispel the erroneous thought that the command in this verse is that we *"go."* Certainly *"going"* is an essential part of carrying out the Great Commission. If we don't go, then we can't tell. But the fact is that this is not the command associated with the Great Commission. *"Going"* is assumed for all genuine dedicated followers of Christ. The text literally says, *"even as you go."* The three components of the Great Commission then are; Evangelize, Incorporate and Disciple.

First, Jesus says *"go, therefore and make disciples of all nations."* The KJV says, *"teach all nations"* in fact it uses the word *"teach or teaching"* twice in this passage. But the word translated *"teach"* (v. 19) (*matheteusate*) literally means *"make disciples."* We have to reach them with the gospel, we have to evangelize.

The second thing Jesus says that we must do is *"... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."* In the command to *"baptize"* we see the importance of not only reaching the lost with the message of the Gospel but the need of incorporating these new believers into the body of Christ. If we are to establish fruit that will remain we must see new believers led to an involvement in the life of a local church.

The final part of the Great Commission could be called discipleship, *"... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."* The word *"teaching"* (*didaskontes*) means *"instruction."* Instruction in *"observing"* or *"keeping"* the commands of Christ. *But just what is it that we are to teach these new believers in Christ?* Some believe that we are to teach them a

list of rules, the do's and don't, if you will. Tell them, *"If you keep this list, then you will please Christ."*

Others believe that we should teach these believers social responsibilities. Or as one little girl said, *"Jesus wants us to be nice."* But that is hardly words to live by.

Some Christians want to focus on social programs and social problems. There was church out west that I heard of that put on a program about rain forests and how we should save them....as a part of a worship service. All of those issue oriented things may be good but they are not the purpose of the church.

I heard of another woman who was giving part of her tithe money to "Save the Wildlife" organization. That is probably a noble project, perhaps even worthy of support but if you want to give don't give out of money that belongs to God.

Is there a sense that discipleship is being conscious of the *"all those things commanded by Christ?"* Tonight I want to embark on a study of just exactly what did Jesus command us to teach? Bill Gothard in his study has identified 49 general commands of Christ found in the Gospels. I am not telling you that we are going to spend the next 49 weeks in this study, how long we continue will depend on what I hear from you.

Repent, For The Kingdom Of God Is At Hand. (Matthew 4:17)

Early in Jesus ministry when he hears of the imprisonment of John the Baptist, in Matthew 4:17, he says *"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Repentance is not a one-time act. It is a continual attitude of a humble and contrite heart toward God and others. It begins by changing our minds about what is right and what is wrong. There are two aspects of repentance in the lives of believers. The first aspect is the repentance that leads us to salvation. But there is still an ongoing need for repentance in our lives. Repentance in the believer's life is characterized by a daily confession and forsaking of sin. 1 John 1:8-10 directs the believer, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*

David demonstrated picture of true repentance in Psalm 51(1-2, 17). *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. (2) wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ... (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these O God, you will not despise."*

A good example of what repentance is and is not is seen in a comparison of the experiences of David and Esau.

Esau's actions are said in Gen 25:34 to demonstrate that he *"despised his birthright."* He demonstrated this when exchanged in for a meal with his brother, Jacob. The writer of Hebrews (12:16-17) tells that Esau, *"for one morsel of food sold his birthright. (17) For you know that after-ward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."*

Likewise, David also sinned when he saw Bathsheba bathing from a rooftop and he allowed lust to overcome all the good things that God had done in his life. The Bible says his adulterous relationship revealed that he *"despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in His sight. You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife..... (13) Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.. "'* (2 Samuel 12:9)

There are many similarities between the experiences of Esau and David. Both satisfied a physical desire in a wrong way. Both despised the commands of God by their actions. Both exchanged spiritual treasure for earthly pleasure. Both wept over their sins. But only one of them repented.

Whereas Esau wept bitter tears of regret over the loss of the blessings of God, David wept tears of repentance over the damage to his relationship with God. This is the essence of true repentance.

Tonight I would like to share with you the four attributes of true repentance.

1. True Repentance Recognizes How Sin Relates To God.

The confession that is the beginning of repentance is not just recognition of a made a mistake that we have sinned, but it is the understanding that we have offended God. In Psalm 51:3-4, King David recognizes his sin is an offense against God when he says, *"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is every before me, (4) Against you, you only, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight."* David is not saying that his sin has not involved anyone else or hurt anyone else, it most certainly has. The phrase *"against you, you only"* is literally *"against you and you in particular"* it is recognition that all sin is first and foremost a sin against God.

When we see our sin from God viewpoint, we realize that our sin is not excusable. We realize that we are much worse than we thought we were. With repentance comes the awareness of the seriousness of our sins and a corresponding desire to get this problem taken care of.

2. True Repentance Reflects A Change Of Direction.

Think of a husband and wife in a car making a trip, he's driving she is navigating. The wife tells the husband to make a right at the next inter-section but instead he makes a left. (I know that has never happened to you, but try to stay with me!) When he realizes what he has done, He says, *"I am sorry dear, I turned the wrong direction."* But if that it is all he does, it isn't enough. His admitting he went the wrong way does get them any closer to where they need to be; it isn't even preventing them from getting even further away. To get to where they need to go he is going to have change directions that he is traveling. That is repentance.

3. True Repentance Rouses A Sense Of Grief In Our Hearts Over Our Sin.

When we realize the consequences of running our own lives, we should be grieved. But this is more than regret, regret is not enough. In Matthew 27:3 we are told that Judas *"... seeing that he had been condemned was remorseful.."* (KJV says repented)" but remorse or regret is not repentance. Our American prison system is full of people that full of regret, but it regret for the consequences of their sin, not repentance for their sin.

4. True Repentance Ripens Into Lasting Change.

It there is no turning from what we know is sin; there is no repentance, no matter what we say. It is not enough to say that we are sorry that we have sinned. If we have not changed our minds enough to walk away from sin, we will return to it. An essential part of genuine repentance is that it leads to a changed life. Paul bears testimony in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new."*

When John the Baptist dealt with those who had come in repentance he said to them, *"bear fruits worthy of repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). This is can be understood to mean *"fruit in keeping with repentance."* The surest evidence of true repentance is a turning from that which know to be sin.

J. Edwin Orr, a professor of Church history has described the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the Welsh Revivals of the nineteenth century. As a result people did all they could to confess their wrong doing and to make restitution. But it unexpectedly created serious problems for the shipyards along the coast of Wales. Over the years workers had stolen all kinds of things, from wheelbarrows to hammers. However, as people sought to be right with God they started to return what they had taken, with the result that soon the shipyards of Wales were overwhelmed with returned property. There were such huge piles of returned tools that several of the yards put up signs that read, "If you have been led by God To return what you have stolen, Please know that the management forgives you and wishes you to keep what you have taken." We need that kind of repentance in the church today!

Conclusion

When Christ commands us to “*teach them to observe all the things he has commanded,*” one of the first things he has commanded is that we should “*repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.*”

True Repentance will be seen when it

- Recognizes How Sin Relates to God
- Reflects A Change of Direction
- Rouses A Sense of Grief In Our Hearts Over Sin
- Ripens Into Lasting Change

[The Commands of Christ: The Curriculum of the Great Commission. (Oak Brook, Illinois:Institute in Basic Life Principles, 2002).