

## Articles and Sermons :: Disciple-Making and Building the Body of Christ by Zac Poonen

### Disciple-Making and Building the Body of Christ by Zac Poonen - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2019/6/14 14:19

Some believers consider God's Word as having almost only one command - to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). This command must certainly be obeyed by the total body of Christ worldwide - particularly by those who are given by Christ as evangelists to the body (Eph. 4:11). But the work will still be unfinished, if this command of Christ is not balanced by His other command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

We thank God for all those who, at much personal cost, have gone out into all the world and preached the gospel to those who have never heard the name of Jesus. But it is a sad fact of twentieth century evangelism that the threefold command of Matthew 28:19,20 - to make disciples, to immerse them in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to teach them obedience to all of Jesus' commands - is almost totally ignored. When multitudes of believers are emphasizing evangelism without making disciples, it becomes our task to restore the lost emphasis - to make disciples - and to complete the unfinished task.

" Our love for Jesus is not proved by sacrifice but by obedience to His commandments."

Many think only of the unfinished task of various areas of the world yet to be reached with the gospel. God gives that burden to those who have that evangelistic calling. But to others God gives the equally important task - the more difficult task - of making these converts into disciples.

This can be illustrated by a carpentry shop engaged in making tables where multitudes of carpenters are busy making just the four legs and very few are employed in making the table tops to complete the tables. The result is that the shop is piled high with unfinished tables and the carpenters are still busy producing more half-finished jobs. We can be sure that Jesus, in the carpentry shop at Nazareth, always finished a table before moving on to the next one. He always believed in finishing a task begun (even as He cried, "It is finished", on the cross) and He is the same today. We are co-workers with Him and must also believe in a finished job. All converts must be made into disciples.

In the Old Testament, it was impossible for God's people, the Jews, to become one body. That became possible only after Jesus ascended up to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit to indwell man. Now, two can become one. In the Old Testament, Israel was a congregation. The nation grew in size, but it was still a congregation. In the New Testament, however, the church is to be a body, not a congregation.

If two do not become one, then all that you have there is a congregation. The important thing in Christ's body is not size but unity. And by this standard it becomes difficult to find a 'church' that is not a congregation. Everywhere one finds congregations that are increasing in size - but not in unity. Strife and jealousy and competition are found even at the leadership level.

God desires to have an expression of Christ's body in different places all over the world. Babylonian Christianity cannot accomplish this. But God's work still goes on through a remnant who realise that the mark of Jesus' disciples is fervent love for one another and not largeness of number.

In the body of Christ, each person is valued, even if he is not gifted. He is valued because he is a member of the body. In fact, it says that God gives greater honour to the member who lacks gift so that there may be unity in the body (1 Cor. 12:24,25). In the church, we have to follow God's example and honour even those who have no gift at all, if they are God-fearing and humble. In Babylon, the gifted preacher, the gifted singer and the converted astronaut are honoured. But in the church (God's tent), we honour those who fear the Lord (see Psa. 15:1,4).

Jesus said that we were to teach all Christians to obey all that He had taught (Matt. 28:20). God requires obedience more than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). It is a heathen concept that God requires us to go through various forms of physical suffering in order to prove our love for Him. This is very prevalent in the heathen culture in India and has unfortunately pervaded Christianity in our country as well. Spirituality is therefore seen as giving up one's job and going out to some difficult place, undergoing various hardships, etc. All this may involve much sacrifice, but it can never be a substitute for obedience to God's Word.

Our love for Jesus is not proved by sacrifice but by obedience to His commandments - as Jesus Himself said in John 14:

15. To obey everything that Jesus has taught us in Matthew 5-7 is a far greater proof of our love for Him than even giving Him 50% of our salary or giving up our job and becoming a missionary.

Holiness is the characteristic of the true church (Jerusalem). So growth in Jerusalem is measured by growth in holiness - which includes love for one another. Jesus said that the way to life was narrow and that few would find it. Those who proclaim the narrow gate as narrow as Jesus made it will find that very few join their church (Matt. 7:13,14). If, on the other hand, we make the gate broader than Jesus made it, we shall increase in numbers easily. This is where much of today's Christendom has gone astray. Jesus spoke about the narrow gate and the narrow way in the context of the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matt. 5 - 7). The content of those chapters is therefore what constitutes the narrow gate and the narrow way.

**Re: Disciple-Making and Building the Body of Christ by Zac Poonen, on: 2019/6/15 14:20**

Greg,

This particular message has some very important, relevant points. The emphasis placed upon the key characteristic of the true Christian being obedience to all of Jesus' words, following the narrow way/entering by the narrow gate (which is extremely narrow, as Poonen implies toward the end) is essential and much lacking in our day. His observation about people being more willing to sacrifice - rather than picking up one's cross, dying to self, obeying God at all costs to self and personal will - is an accurate assessment of the prevailing sentiment among many (if not the majority).

I am reminded of the lyrics to a Keith Green song: "To obey is better than sacrifice, I don't need your money, I want your life. And I hear you say, that I'm coming back soon; but, you act like I'll never return! Well you speak of grace and my love so sweet. How you thrive on milk; but reject my meat. And I can't help weeping at how it will be, if you keep on ignoring my word."

The contrast between "congregation" and "church" is appropriate, too. For years, now, God has taught me to hesitate - actually refuse - to use the word "church," if referring to the general plethora of religious gatherings by numerous camps - all labeled as "Christian." Until I'm given the discernment in the Spirit and/or get to know people or groups on a spiritual level, who claim to fellowship as true disciples and believers, I don't loosely presume they are part of THE Church. The perspective Christ wants his true disciples to have is one which recognizes there is one, true body of Christ, as defined by Spirit-born and led members, who are not necessarily to be found in readily visible, well organized "congregations." Until true disciples allow Christ to be their true Head, building them up into a healthfully functioning, more singular and spiritually unified body, there will continue to be mostly congregating - not church fellowship.

As a related, underlying thought, I'd like to add and suggest the problems start even before failing to properly disciple people - which, again, is greatly lacking. Frankly, the spreading of an incomplete gospel, seeking "converts" to less than the life-giving power and true grace of God, is rampant as well. There is far too much appeal to emotion and logic, rather than response by faith to the true call and choosing of God on a person's life. The result is more numbers, which leads to more congregating - not fellowship of spiritually unified disciples.

It's past the time for those who have "ears to hear" to step back, humbly waiting upon the Lord Himself, in order to first offer all of ourSELVES as living, holy sacrifices - realizing all true worship of God and service of Him begins (and continues only) with this. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB) As true disciples pick up their crosses, learn to obey God in all things (which is the definition of loving Him), die to self - letting the Holy Spirit guide, gift and raise up people to be unified members of the same body who serve one another - Christ will be able and sure to knit those members together into actual churches - expressed similarly and singularly by Christ's love in all regions of the world, as Poonen envisions.