

LESSON 13

THE CHRISTIAN CALLING - WINNING SOULS TO CHRIST

It is the responsibility of every believer in the New Testament Church to win souls to Christ. That is the Christian calling. It is not an option for believers, but a command that has to be obeyed: Christ has commanded it (CP Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Ac 1:6-8; 10:42-43). Christ's directive to His followers in Mt 28 and Mk 16 has been termed the *Great Commission* in the contemporary Church, but that term is a misnomer. Christ's directive is more than a commission - it is a command. A commission can be rejected - and there are many in the contemporary Church who do not see that winning souls to Christ is a duty incumbent upon them personally. But a command has to be obeyed, and we can only prove our love for Christ, and ensure our place in His eternal kingdom by obeying His commands (CP Ps 119:9, 16, 24, 47, 77 174; Mt 19:17; Jn 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:10; 1Cor 7:19; 1Jn 2:3-5; 3:22-24; 5:2-3; 2Jn 6; Rev 22:14).

All those scriptures teach the same thing: if we love Jesus and want to ensure our place in His eternal kingdom we will obey His commands (commands and commandments mean essentially the same thing). The word *observe* in Mt 28:18 means obey, fulfil a duty. If we are to teach new converts to Christ how important it is to obey His word then we must obey it too. Mt 28:19-20 highlights our responsibility to safeguard the teachings of scripture and commit them to those we win to Christ. The command to believers is "Go ye". *Ye* is plural, which means that each and every one of us has to go and preach the gospel and win souls to Christ, not only those in public ministry, as many in the contemporary Church think (CP Ac 8:4; 11:19-21). These were ordinary, everyday believers here who took the gospel that saved them to others who were not saved, exactly as Jesus commanded us to do in Mt 28 and Mk 16. *Teach* in Mt 28:19 (KJV) means literally *make disciples*. Making disciples means winning souls to Christ. So the clear command to every believer in the New Testament Church is to go and win souls to Christ, baptize them, and teach them - among other things - that they in turn must also win souls to Christ (CP Lu 8:4-18). This is called the parable of the sower (CP Col 1:3-6).

We learn from these scriptures that the gospel of Christ is essentially a reproductive organism whose seed is in itself. It is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, but it must be preached for it to reproduce (CP Ro 10:13-17). The central truth in all these scriptures is that the gospel, faithfully proclaimed, will never fail to produce fruit. The good soil in Lu 8:15, and the Christians in Col 1:3-6, typify those who, having received the word for their own salvation, have sown it again for others to hear and be saved, which is what the believers in Ac 8 and 11 did. The first century Church knew the purpose of their Christian calling and obeyed Christ's command to the letter. The word *patience* in Lu 8:15 (KJV) means endurance, perseverance, or constancy under suffering, in faith and duty,

which stresses the need for believers to persevere and be constant in proclaiming the gospel, and even be prepared to suffer for it if need be (CP He 13:13-14). Even though the majority of hearers may reject the gospel, as the parable of the sower teaches, believers must keep sowing it, and in due season if they do not give up, they will reap a harvest of souls for Christ. That is the promise of God (CP Ga 6:7-9). This is God's law of sowing and reaping. It cannot fail (CP Gen 8:22).

Knowing that the gospel saves is not something believers can keep to themselves. It has to be shared with those who are not saved (CP Lu 8:16-18). Jesus warns us to take heed to what He says here: we have not been given the light of divine truth for it to be obscured by our business or domestic affairs, but we are to proclaim it for others to hear, and whoever does this will be given more light, while those who do not will lose even what little light they have. We need to heed this warning - it is for our admonition also. Only faithful hearers and doers of His word can be Jesus' disciples. There is no such person in God's order of things as a silent witness. Everyone who is saved must bear witness to the Saviour (CP Mt 12:30). Jesus makes it quite clear here that there is no neutrality in Christianity. If Christians are not actively involved in doing the work of the gospel for Christ, then they are actively involved in doing the work of the devil in opposition to Christ. That is what this scripture means: anyone not doing the work of God as commanded by Jesus is doing the work of the devil and it is hardly likely that anyone doing the work of the devil in this life will rule and reign with Christ in the next life (CP Mt 7:21-27; Lu 6:46-49; 13:22-30). Jesus clearly teaches here against professing faith in Him for salvation without doing the work of His word.

Many Christians in the contemporary Church do not properly understand that what Jesus teaches here applies to everyone who is not doing the work of God's word who profess to love Christ but do not obey His commandments. They will forfeit their salvation. We cannot play down this meaning because this is what is taught throughout the New Testament (CP Mt 12:30; Jn 15:5-6, 10; Ro 2:7-11, 13; Ga 6:7-8; Jas 1:22-25; 2:14-26).

Let us find out now what value God has put on souls going to hell (CP Jn 12:23-27; 1Pe 3:18). The life of our Lord Jesus Christ is the value God has put on souls going to hell - His life for their life (CP Jn 3:14-18). This was the purpose of the cross. Jesus said "...if I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto me" (CP Jn 12:32). Once we fully appreciate that Christ died for all sinners, not only us who are saved, and that there are countless lost souls going to hell without our witness to His saving grace, winning souls to Christ will become

the most important part of our Christian walk, as Jesus means it to be. Everything else in the life of the Church is simply a consequence of winning souls to Christ. It is an urgent matter. Jesus and Paul both taught the urgency in getting souls saved (CP Lu 9:59-60). Jesus is not being insensitive to the propriety of funerals here, but is teaching against procrastination - deferring or putting off taking the gospel out into the world and winning souls to Christ (CP Jn 4:34-38). Here again Jesus warns us against putting off taking the gospel out into a world of sinners waiting to be saved (CP Jn 9:4 with Jude 21-23). *Day* in Jn 9:4 signifies life and *night* signifies death. Believers are to take the gospel out now because soon it will be too late (CP 2Cor 6:2). *Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation (CP 2Ti 4:2). Paul's command to Timothy here is for our admonition too. It teaches us that we must be in a constant state of readiness to win souls to Christ whether we consider it to be an opportune time or not, and whether we feel like it or not.

There is a teaching within the teaching in those scriptures, and that is that it is the gospel alone that saves. Sinners must be confronted with the gospel for their salvation, yet there is a false teaching that persists in the contemporary Church called "lifestyle evangelism", which advocates that sinners can be won to Christ by letting them see the exemplary lifestyle of Christians. But as is evident from our study of scriptures here and elsewhere in the Bible, scriptures clearly refute this teaching (CP Psalms 22:22; 40:9-10; 119:13; Eze 33:9; Jn 5:24; Ro 1:16; 10:17; 1Cor 1:21; 4:15; 1Ti 4:16; Jas 1:18; 1Pe 1:23). These scriptures are not exhaustive but representative of the many that refute lifestyle evangelism. Every one of those scriptures teaches that the gospel has to be proclaimed for sinners to receive it and be saved. Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that sinners can be saved by observing the lifestyle of Christians, no matter how exemplary a lifestyle they live. No one lived a more exemplary lifestyle than Jesus, yet nobody got saved as a result of it. They got saved because Jesus confronted them with the gospel, and it is the same throughout scripture (CP Ro 10:13-17 with Jn 17:14,20; Ac 4:1-4,29-33; 10:37, 42-44; 12:24; 13:2-5,26,38-39,42-44,48-49; 17:1-4; 28:23-24). Lifestyle evangelism places no urgency on winning souls to Christ which Jesus and Paul both emphasized. It teaches another way of evangelizing which is totally unscriptural. It could be weeks or even months before sinners can be confronted with the gospel, yet they could die in the meantime and be lost forever. If that should happen their blood will be on the hands of the Christians involved, but if those Christians had already confronted the sinners with the gospel and they rejected it, then God will not hold the Christians to account (CP Eze 33:7-9). This is essentially what Paul also teaches in 1Ti 4:16 (CP 1Ti 4:16).

Christians must never be afraid to confront sinners with the gospel for fear of driving them further

away from God. We cannot drive them any further away than they are now. They are already dead in their trespasses and sin and telling them the good news about the salvation that is theirs in Christ cannot worsen their situation (CP Eph 2:1-2). Another fallacy which many Christians cling to and which scriptures also clearly refute, is the belief that one must wait on the leading of the Holy Spirit before confronting someone who is lost with the gospel of their salvation. Christians are commanded to preach the gospel, whether or not we consider it an opportune time and whether or not we feel like it, so we do not have to wait for the Holy Spirit's leading to do so. All we have to do is obey Christ's command and the Holy Spirit will work through the gospel we preach to convict those who are disposed to believe, of their need of salvation (CP Jn 16:7-11; 1Cor 1:21).

It needs to be restated here that Christ has assigned to every believer in the New Testament Church the responsibility to preach the gospel and be a soul winner for Him (CP 2Cor 5:18-20). It is obligatory upon us to get as many sinners saved as possible (CP Ro 1:14-15). As Paul was a debtor to the lost, so are we (CP Eph 2:10). This teaches us that God has saved us to serve Him, and He expects every one of us to bear fruit for Him (CP Lu 8:4-18; Jn 15:2, 5, 8, 16; Ro 1:13; Col 1:3-6). Fruit in this context is used metaphorically of souls won to Christ. The gathering of lost souls is also compared to harvesting grain in scripture (CP Psalms 126:5-6; Mt 9:37-38; Jn 4:35). Christ demands that our fruit be commensurate with what He has invested in us (CP Mt 25:14-30; Lu 19:11-27). Christ condemned the unfaithful servants who failed to show results in their life as stewards while their master was absent in Mt 25 and Lu 19, and while those scriptures do not refer to soul winning specifically, nevertheless, soul winning is included in Christ's investment in us by way of the variety of gifts and graces He has bestowed upon us, represented by the talents in the parable of the talents, and the word of God He has committed to each and every one of us, represented by the pound in the parable of the pounds (CP 2Cor 5:18-20). How we use our talents and God's word in this life will determine our eternal destination in the next life (CP Ga 6:7-8). When He comes again Jesus will reward everyone according to their works (CP 1Cor 3:8-15; Rev 22:12).

There is one other aspect of soul winning that needs to be addressed here and that is what to do after repentant sinners acknowledge their need of salvation. Let us go back and see what Christ has commanded us to do (CP Mt 28:19-20). After sinners acknowledge their need of salvation, we are to baptize them in water. Jesus gave three distinct and separate commands here, and He stipulated baptism second to salvation in order of importance. That means that as soon as repentant sinners acknowledge their need of salvation they are to be baptized, and then, after they have been baptized we are to teach them the way of God and how necessary it is to conform to His way. These

commands are directed to the entire New Testament Church, not only those in public ministry. Every Christian has been authorized in Mt 28:19-20 and Mk 16:15-16 to get saved, to baptize, and to teach repentant sinners the way of God, and it is incumbent upon every Christian to do so.

Sadly though most contemporary Christians do not do this and we are remiss in our sacred duty to God's word for not doing so. Generally it is left up to the Church leaders to baptize new converts, which invariably means that baptisms then have to fit in with Church timetables. This should not be. Sinners do not have to be taken to Church to get saved and neither do repentant sinners have to be taken to Church to get baptized. This is not denigrating Church-held baptismal services, but directing the Church's attention to the biblical pattern for baptizing new converts, which is the example we should follow.

Baptism is the repentant sinners' pledge of a good conscience - inward cleanliness - toward God, a conscience reconciled to God by the repentant sinners' new-found faith in the resurrected Christ and the salvation benefits He has purchased for them with His blood (CP 1Pe 3:18-21). Obeying Jesus' command to be baptized is the repentant sinners' first act of obedience to God's word and it should not be delayed wherever water is available and the new convert is able to be baptized. Jesus placed baptism second to salvation in order of importance in God's redemptive plan. The first century Church followed this order and we should too (CP Ac 2:36-42). You will notice in V41 here that those who received the gospel for their salvation were baptized immediately thereafter "...then they that gladly received His word were baptized, and the *same day* there were added unto them about three thousand souls". When the Jews asked Peter "...what shall we do?", he told them to repent and be baptized. He did not mean that salvation depended upon being baptized - he was simply restating what Jesus commanded the Church to do. Notice also the order of events in this teaching: first, they were won to Christ (CP V37-38); second, they were baptized (CP V41); third, they were taught (CP V42) - exactly as Jesus commanded in Mt 28:19-20 (CP Ac 8:12, 36-38).

Here we learn that Philip stressed the importance of baptism as part of his gospel message to the Ethiopian Eunuch because as soon as he saw water in V36, the Eunuch asked to be baptized - he knew it to be an integral part of God's redemptive plan,

and immediately he confessed his new-found faith in Jesus, Philip baptized him and that is the pattern throughout all the other scripture references to water baptism by the first century Church in the book of Acts (CP Ac 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; 19:1-7). As soon as repentant sinners acknowledged their need of salvation they were baptized. Baptism does not have to be a public ceremony to be valid in God's eyes. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Ac 8:36-38 was baptized privately, and his baptism was no less valid than that of the three thousand who got baptized on the day of Pentecost in Ac 2:41. None of this is teaching that water baptism saves. It does not, as Peter clearly teaches in 1Pe 3:18-21, but it is to remind the Church that to be an effective witness for Christ we must conform strictly to His way, not ours, and that means that we have to instruct repentant sinners that the next step after acknowledging their need of salvation is to be baptized as their pledge of a good conscience toward God and the affirmation of their faith in the resurrected Christ and the salvation benefits He has purchased for them with His blood.

In closing this study let us sum up the Christian calling with these scripture keys (CP Pr 11:30; Jas 5:20). Righteous soul winners produce eternal life for others by winning them to Christ (CP Dan 12:3; 2Ti 3:15-17). Those who win others to Christ are as the stars forever - the glory of God is reflected in and through them. Now let us ponder the words of Jesus (CP Jn 13:17). Soul winning is a personal, individual responsibility. The onus is upon each and every one of us to go out and win souls to Christ. We do not have to be afraid to evangelize because our knowledge of scripture references for winning souls to Christ is limited. That is easily overcome with a **Quick Scripture Reference Guide For Counseling, a Personal Worker's New Testament, The Christian Life New Testament with Master Outlines** or suchlike, which have all the relevant gospel verses outlined and all the other relevant scriptures pertaining to the theme of salvation collated under their respective headings, as well as answers to objections put up by unbelievers. These are inexpensive books and readily available at all Christian book shops. We need to familiarize ourselves with what they teach and then go out and do it. Soon it will be too late.

"Say not ye there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (Jn 4:35).