

Obedience Based Maturity

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Jesus said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:18-20 HCSB

The needs around us are great. In Mecklenburg County, with over 900,000 residents, at least 600,000 have no relationship with any kind of church. We have so many neighbors who do not know Jesus personally. Jesus gave us the Great Commission, that we are to go and make disciples of all nations, starting right where we live.

In the churches, we are not seeing significant numbers of people beginning relationships with Jesus. Most of the growth we see is transfer growth, not conversion growth. So, churches that are growing are growing primarily by adding Christians coming to them from other churches.

Then, when we do see new believers born into the Body of Christ, we too often do too little to fulfill what the Great Commission actually says we are to do – make disciples. We start the process, and then drop the ball, not following through with actual disciple-making, and we act like we have done all we are supposed to do.

So, what is the problem?

I believe too often we have misunderstood what Jesus wanted us to do, who He wanted us to be, how He wanted us to live in the world, what He wanted us to do as His witnesses and servants with our neighbors.

He did not tell us to become Christians, join the church, learn all you can, and let others do God's work in the world.

Remember the story about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody? There was a world to be reached and disciples to be made, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when actually Nobody asked Anybody. Well, you're being asked as you read right now. Everybody.

It's not just for the pastor, the church staff member or the deacon - it's everybody's job. We cannot assume that somebody will do what everybody must do. All of us must do all we can do, with God's help, to reach those around us in Jesus' name.

In the church, there must be a balance between knowing and doing. Between information and implementation. Between understanding and activity.

In James 1:22, the Bible puts it this way: *"Don't just listen to God's Word. You must do what*

it says." As we face the days in which we live, our focus as Christians needs to be on what we are doing to live and serve as part of the church, as part of the Lord's work in the world.

This is personal, so do a spiritual self-examination: In practice, are you more an admirer of Jesus or a follower of Jesus? Are you one who knows what Bible teaches or who does what Bible teaches? As a Christian, do you do what you know you need to do or think about what you know you need to do?

Do you consider yourself a mature Christian? A maturing Christian? And, what does that look like - maturity as a Christian?

In the church, we often say that we mature the more we know, meaning we have maturity with knowledge. This is knowledge-based maturity.

But is that what the Bible teaches? I'm convinced that the Bible does not teach knowledge-based maturity, but obedience-based maturity. When we are obedient to what He has told us to do, then we are demonstrating maturity as followers of Jesus.

Take all you have learned from Scripture, all of it - now, how much of that do you obey on a regular basis? What if you said 30 to 40 percent? Does that mean you're happy with 60 to 70 percent disobedience? Are we as parents happy if our children are disobedient 60 to 70 percent of the time? I didn't think so.¹

Oswald Chambers says:

All of God's revealed truths are sealed until they are opened to us through obedience. You will never open them through philosophy or thinking. But once you obey, a flash of light comes immediately...If you obey God in the first thing He shows you, then He instantly opens up the next truth to you. You could read volumes on the work of the Holy Spirit, when five minutes of total, uncompromising obedience would make things as clear as sunlight. Don't say, "I suppose I will understand these things someday!" You can understand them now. And it is not study that brings understanding to you, but obedience. Even the smallest bit of obedience opens heaven, and the deepest truths of God immediately become yours. Yet God will never reveal more truth about Himself to you, until you have obeyed what you know already.²

We're maturing as Christians not when we finish a boatload of Bible courses, but when we obey what we learn from God's Word, one lesson at a time, one day at a time. So, it's not necessarily the older person who has been in church a long time that is the most mature. It could be the younger person who is completely surrendered to Jesus and ready to obey Him every single day that demonstrates the greater level of maturity.

Focus with me on one of the most important Scripture passages we have on our mission as Christians and churches: The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. This commission from Jesus is to make disciples, by going, baptizing, and teaching. But what are we to teach those who follow Jesus with us? Matthew 18:20 says, "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you."

Consider three words from that verse.

First, we are to teaching to **observe**. Other translations use the word "obey." So, we're not teaching for information only, but we are teaching for the purpose of obedience and direction in life. The Greek word here used is *terein*, which means to observe, to obey, to keep, guard, and watch. So, we are not just imparting good information for storage, but presenting God's truth for living and sharing with others.

Second, we are also to be teaching disciples to observe everything Jesus **commanded**. Again, we go back to the reason for instruction: not for information, but for obedience and fulfillment. He gave us commands to live by, not suggestions, not ideas, not nuggets, but commands, instructions to follow, orders to obey. If He is Lord, He can command anything He wishes. Remember: if He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.

Third, we are teaching others to observe **everything** Jesus commanded – **everything**. We are to teach ALL that Jesus taught, not just a few choice lessons, not just the ones we like, not just the ones others prefer to hear. Do we get to choose which commands we will obey as His disciples, His followers? That is not an option we are given, but we still take it too often!

How long would it take to teach everything He commanded? A long time! Relationships are required to make disciples. It takes time, and commitment.

So, if we are going to be disciples of Jesus who make disciples like He commanded, what are we going to do about our obedience?

In the New Testament, believers matured by serving. They matured when they did what they knew they were commanded to do. They didn't have to finish a two year course to be qualified to serve God; they knew they had to do that day by day, and they trusted the Lord for the lessons they needed to make each day possible.

So what do we know we are supposed to do?

What do we know about who we're commanded to be as Jesus' disciples? Pause and think: what is a specific command, a specific instruction you have learned from the Lord that you need to obey today? It doesn't matter how much you've learned. How much are you doing that you know you need to do because the Lord told you so?

Are you moving toward obedience-based maturity as a Christian? Are we?

Consider some of the basics.

The Lord told us to pray, to practice prayer, to practice communion and communication with Him. So, am I spending quality and quantity time in prayerful devotion, building my relationship with the Lord? Am I interceding for others?

The Lord told us to love one another, to love our neighbors as ourselves. Not to just say we

love them, but to actually do it, in action and in truth. I am to love my brothers and sisters in Christ in the church, and I am to love and care for people I know who need to know Jesus. Am I developing relationships with others to fulfill this command to love? If not, why not?

The Lord told us we would be His witnesses to our neighbors and to the nations. This brings us back to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, starting at home. Do I assume that my pastor and other really committed Christians will do that work for the Lord? Or as a follower of Jesus, am I doing what Jesus told me to do in the mission field where I live and work?

These are some of the commands I know I have to work on obeying. How about you? What do you know you must do, starting today?

Remember what James 1:22 says: "Don't just listen to God's Word. You must do what it says." Jesus also said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commands" (John 14:15).

What happens when we obey? We show we love Jesus. We show we know what the Lord expects of us in His church. We demonstrate for the world, starting with our neighbors, what a Christian actually looks like in real life.

Aim for obedience-based maturity. Decide to do what Jesus expects us to do. What might He do here, with us, if we started obeying Him like we should? Let's find out, starting today.

Sources:

¹Steve Smith with Yink Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, 2011, pages 78-80.

²Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest: Updated Edition*, 1992, October 10.

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