

TEN POINTS OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE CHURCH FROM OUR LORD'S FINAL DAYS ON THE EARTH

John 20:19-23, Acts 1:8, Luke 24:44-49, Mark 16:15-19, Matthew 28:18-20

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Introduction

After Christ's resurrection, He spent forty days on this earth eliminating any doubt that He physically rose from the grave and provided His disciples final instructions for their future mission. He was not going to be with them; He was going back to be at the right hand of the Father. He would send them the Holy Spirit, and by following His instructions detailed in the four gospels and in the first chapter of Acts, they would be God's instruments for building the church. By diligently comparing the words of Christ found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, and Acts 1, His instructions can be organized into ten points for the purpose of study and application.

Ten Points

1. In John 20:22, Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49, Christ emphasizes that the power to accomplish the mission He has given us comes from the Holy Spirit. After the ascension, the disciples were told to wait for the Holy Spirit. and clearly, the importance of the Spirit's power, leadership, and involvement in the church cannot be overemphasized. Oftentimes the Holy Spirit is relegated to second-class citizenry within the Godhead, leading pastor and author Francis Chan to describe the Holy Spirit as the "Forgotten God." Clearly the role of the Spirit is integral in the NT church in so much as effective preaching, teaching, evangelism, and ministry is impossible without Him. We must pray that the Lord of the harvest will send the Spirit to the do the work that only He can do.
2. From John 20:23 and Luke 24:46, we see the importance of forgiveness. The KJV uses the word *remit* in John; the idea is to clear one from the guiltiness of the offense. The message that the disciples preached had at its core the truth that sins can be forgiven through Christ Jesus. The reality that God has forgiven our sins through the gospel has obvious implications in the way that families interact within the church. Offenses will inevitably occur, but the gospel demands that we forgive. Paul instructed the church at Ephesus to "be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake had forgiven them" (Ephesians 4:32).
3. Luke makes specific reference to the suffering of Christ in Luke 24:46; Peter does the same four times in 1 Peter. The writer of Hebrews says Christ suffered outside the gate, giving particular reference to the necessary location of Christ's death. The church must tell the world what Christ did for sinners. He suffered, and every way in which Christ suffered must be proclaimed; His emotional and physical suffering must be detailed and articulated to the church on a regular basis. His love is fully displayed for the world beginning with his departure from the glories of heaven and culminating in His death on a tree.

4. In Luke 24, Jesus also directs the disciples that repentance must be preached. Repentance is a demand to change; it is literally a change of mind created by God the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration. In Acts 11, God granted the Gentiles repentance leading to eternal life. Repentance is not optional, and it reminds both the converted and the unconverted of the truth that God has graciously accepted us, not that we are accepting Him. In Acts 17, all men everywhere are commanded to repent. Nowhere does the Bible command men to repent of sins in order to be saved. This may be implied in cases where a particular sin is keeping one from believing the gospel. Such as the example of the idolatry that the members of the church of Thessalonica turned from to serve the one true and living God (1 Thess.1:9). In a larger sense, repentance toward God and belief in the risen Lord go hand-in-hand; one cannot truly exist without the other.

5. Each church executes the mission to preach the gospel, baptize converts, and make disciples in its own Jerusalem first. This is what church planting is all about. Our objective must be to position a Bible-believing, gospel-preaching church in every village, town, city, state, and country on the globe. In this way, each church will reach a maximum number of people with the gospel with maximum efficiency. An exceptional focus on overseas missions does not excuse a church of the typical inward “us four and no more” mentality and culture that plagues many dying churches with dwindling membership. Jerusalem is mentioned in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and Acts 1:8 as the starting point for the disciples and as the model for all churches to follow.

6. While attempting to reach local residents of each church’s community with the gospel, there is also an expectation from Christ that the church preach the gospel to the uttermost (Acts 1:8), and to every creature without regard to ethnicity, race, creed, and/or socio-economic class divisions (Mark 16:16). Churches are often racially segregated as though the Bible is bereft of a requirement to reach a diverse audience. This fault comes from ignoring the commandment to reach every creature with the gospel and imposing our own social and racial biases into our approach to who deserves to be offered salvation.

7. With great specificity the church must emphasize that the means of avoiding damnation and receiving the forgiveness of sins is to believe on (faith alone) (trusting/depending) Christ and His gospel (Mark 16). To a great fault, the modern church has committed a critical mistake in teaching that one must “ask” Jesus to be one’s savior, much like one asks if someone will loan them money or join them for dinner or accompany them on a date. The gospel of John is overwhelmingly replete with an emphasis on *believing* (96 references in 85 verses). Because the gospel is a promise (Romans 1:1-2) to all who believe, there isn’t a need to “ask” Christ to save one’s self. Christ has already promised that all who will believe upon Him will be saved, and permission is unnecessary when a binding promise from a holy and righteous God has been enacted. Instead, what is required is faith in the person (Christ) and the promise (the gospel). And since the one making the promise is God, and God cannot lie, there is no doubt that He will fulfill His promise. Moreover, we do not accept Christ; He accepts us. God is the one that make us “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6, KJV, NKJV). We can no more make ourselves acceptable in the beloved than we can raise ourselves from the grave. Our faith is in the One who imputes His righteousness to our account.

8. The primary instruction given to the church from the Lord found in Matthew 28:19 is to “make disciples” (or fully functioning followers of the Lord Jesus Christ) of all nations. Unfortunately, the emphasis in making disciples of men and women from all nations is lost with the translators’ choice of the word “teach” in the KJV. Recognizing that the Greek word behind teaching is the verb form of the noun *disciple*, it becomes very apparent why all modern translations, including the NKJV, translate *mathēteuō* as “make disciples.” Can you believe that I have had Baptists tell me the church I lead puts too much emphasis on making disciples? Is that really possible? I certainly can see how a ministry could put too much emphasis on one or more of the ten points of instructions contained in this short article, but is it really possible to put too much emphasis on making disciples? Our Lord spent three and one half years making disciples; those twelve (minus one) in turn dedicated the rest of their lives to making disciples. Disciples are followers or learners or pupils of Christ; they pattern their life after Christ; they seek to know Christ and live according to His Word; they believe the gospel, and the gospel guides their lives. God’s plan is for disciples to make more disciples beginning in each home where one or both parents are disciples themselves. Supplementing and undergirding the family is the church with an emphasis on making disciples. Together, God’s first institution, the family, joins with Christ’s church in order to work together cohesively to make disciples of all people groups from all nations to the glory of God.

9. In both Matthew 28 and Mark 16, we find specific mentions of baptism, with Matthew 28 providing an imperative that disciples of Christ are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church as a whole has done this in varying ways for various reasons, but Christ’s example and words do not leave as much flexibility in mode and candidacy as one would think based on what different churches do today. In Matthew 16 belief precedes baptism—they believe and are baptized. In Matthew 28, the church is to focus on making disciples and these disciples are to be baptized. An infant cannot profess belief and therefore could not be classified as a disciple of Christ. Without evidence that a person is a follower of Christ, a church should not baptize a person. John the Baptist insisted that candidates for baptism exhibit fruit that provided evidence that their repentance was genuine. If the church of the 20th century would have insisted upon fruit worthy of repentance before baptizing converts (Luke 3:8), far fewer bodies would have been sprinkled and immersed, and fewer unregenerate converts would have been given false assurance of salvation. Christ’s example is worthy of consideration: Christ was baptized in the Jordan River as an adult at the age of 30 years old. This is a far cry from an infant being sprinkled or a five year old being dunked. The church would do well to make baptism part of its discipleship program. Baptism should be a serious step of obedience with a clear expectation that one is converted and will remain in submission to the will of the Lord for the rest of his or her life before being baptized as a public confession of being a follower of Christ.

10. Finally, Matthew 28:20 concludes with an expectation that “teaching” the Word of God will be a part of the life of the church. In fact, “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” is specifically what the Lord told his disciples to do. The simplest definition of teaching is to cause someone to know something they did not previously know. With sixty-six books of Scripture, all profitable for doctrine, correction, reproof and instruction in righteousness, there is a seemingly infinite amount of information that can be taught from the Bible. Elders and pastors must be “apt to teach” in order to be qualified for their respective offices (1 Timothy 2). Far too many preachers are not capable of teaching the Word of God. The next time you hear a sermon, ask yourself

at the end: what did I learn from this sermon? If the answer is “nothing,” was it because you know everything already, or was there not an attempt to truly teach during the preaching? In the four gospels, we find either an equal emphasis on teaching and preaching or a scenario wherein more attention is given to teaching than even proclaiming or preaching the truth. As a young adult in fundamentalism, I often heard, “How will they know if we do not go?” But the reality is that they will surely not know if we do not teach. I can remember hearing teaching being undermined and even mocked; all that mattered was souls that needed to be won to God through personal evangelism. This is based on an understanding of a single focus in the clearly multifaceted commission the church received from Christ. However, as you can see from the words in Matthew 28 alone, there is absolutely a greater focus on teaching in order to make disciples. Yes, the gospel must be communicated, but that is not the single focus of the church.

Conclusion

We see that the power of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to everything we attempt to do in obedience to this great commission, and the central message of all we do is to proclaim Christ beginning in our Jerusalem and ultimately to the uttermost parts of the world. Recognizing that the world does not know Jesus, we must tell them about His miraculous virgin birth, sinless life, exceptional suffering, death on a cross, burial, resurrection on the third day, ascension to the Father, and glorious Second Coming. They will not know if we do not teach the amazing message that the Creator God of the Universe has made it possible through Christ Jesus for sins to be forgiven. And with the mention of sins, we are reminded that the world may not even know what a sin is, and therefore once again, we see the need to teach. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be taught. Can you teach it? How well can you explain the narrative and the implications of the narrative? Do you know why Christ had to be born of a virgin? Do you know why He had to suffer? Who killed Him and why did He die? These questions and more are what the world needs answered for our message to be received, and we must teach them both before and after they are converted. We must explain why baptism is important and who baptism is for and what it pictures. We must continue to teach the gospel and the implications of the gospel in life experiences including marriage, parenting, coworker relationships, and all other aspects of life, as well. While the reception of eternal life in heaven is a glorious by-product of Christ’s work on the cross, Christ died so that the sins of the whole world could be forgiven. Or it could be said like this: Christ died so that I could be released from the guilt or penalty of my sin. Recognizing that God has forgiven my sins has epic and far-reaching implications into how I forgive others when they sin against me. A culture of forgiving one another must be created in godly families and throughout the body of Christ. Finally, after the new disciple is baptized, we must continue to teach him the Word of God in such a way that he will be able to reproduce disciples for the glory of God. This is God’s plan, and it has worked for 2,000 years; He has promised that it will continue to work until He comes again. Christ said “the gates of hell will not prevail against His church,” and His church must be uncompromisingly obedient to following the instructions first given to his apostles some 2,000 years ago.