



Can Christians Change the World?

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Would you, Christian, like to see the world changed? Would you like to see godliness and righteousness in homes, neighborhoods, our church buildings, our federal and state governments, our workplaces, and every sphere of life? If you are thinking biblically, how you could not answer in the affirmative? Now, answer, why you would like to see such change. Would it be for personal aggrandizement, or do you desire change for the glory of God and change that will endure for eternity? Let us begin by answering our questions with a consideration of the biblical Gospel.

What Is the Gospel?

First Corinthians 15:1-8 identifies the Gospel with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the central truth of the Gospel: it is central to conversion (15:1-2), the Gospel message itself (15:3-4), the believer's resurrection (15:12-13, 16, 19), the apostolic preaching (15:14-15), and the remission of sins (15:14-17). The resurrection of Christ guarantees the believer's resurrection, and is the foundation for the believer's

practice, in addition to the reason for living and suffering (15:20-34). Romans 1:4 states that Jesus Christ "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead," an essential fact of the Gospel. The grace of God is received through the Lord Jesus Christ, and empowers believers in the proclamation of the Gospel message (1:5-9). Second Timothy 2:8 also confirms the centrality of the resurrection to Gospel proclamation: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel." As Ephesians 1:3-14 declares, this Gospel of grace for those chosen and blessed of God is personal. Trust in the Lord Jesus results in the sealing of the Holy Spirit, who is the "earnest" (3:14) of more promises to come. The benefits that are brought to believers by the Lord Jesus Christ and by which the church is made partaker of the Gospel are primarily in the age to come, that is, the "pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:14).

The benefits of the Gospel, which are brought to believers, are so extensive that it would surely be a

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lack of gratitude to live the present life as the unregenerate do, who are never contented or peaceful. Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 5:17 states, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Accurately did slave preacher and pastor John Jasper say, "If you is, what you was, you ain't." Scripture does not teach that obedience in the Christian life is optional, because saving faith will manifest itself. The doctrines of grace are not adaptable to humanity's sin and lack of repentance, as if sanctification was not a necessary corollary of justification. If a professed Christian distinctly and deliberately declares to know God's will and is not obedient to it, Scripture will not pamper such presumption. The Gospel is not magnified nor is God glorified by telling the world they may be saved by simply accepting Christ as Savior, and their hearts may still remain in love with sin. To teach that the Gospel does not change lives is to distort the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.

Scripture affirms that the regenerative work of God makes the entire being of the believer new; not some things, not one's attitude merely, but "all things are become new." The change is not merely in the destiny of the soul, but it is the one in sin being made alive in Christ Jesus, and who is now becoming more like Christ. The changed life of the regenerate individual is at the foundation of Christianity and confirmed throughout the New Testament. The believer, who is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ by the empowering of the Holy

Spirit, will seek to obey the teachings and commandments of Scripture (John 14:15-24; Acts 1:8; 2 Pet 3:15-18).

Obedience to the Lord's teachings and commandments has personal and social implications. True regeneration is a cultural event. Scripture presents two means of influencing society with God's Word, each of which is necessary: holy lives and verbal proclamation. As God's Word influences society, there should be a marked difference in society as a whole, and it should be a difference that even the unbeliever will notice, for light will not go unnoticed by darkness (cf. Matt 5:13-16). Social benefits are often the result of holy lives and verbal proclamation of God's Word, but societal improvement is not the gospel the church is charged to proclaim. Social action without consideration (or minimization) of the biblical Gospel often prioritizes the conversion of social structures, as opposed to proclaiming personal salvation in Christ alone; this priority is justified because it supposedly attains its climax in the complete inauguration of the kingdom of God. God does have a purpose for all creation, but it awaits the redemption of the body for the saints according to the will of God (Rom 8:18-23; Phil 3:20-21). Before the foundation of the world, God chose those "to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth . . . to share in the glory of [the] Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore, the church is to "stand firm and hold to the teachings" of the Gospel and to do so "in every good deed and word" (2 Thess 2:13-17). When the church stands firm, God will be glorified and society will be better for it!

How Would Obedience to the Great Commission Change Our World?

There is a tendency on the part of Christians not to understand all components of the Great Commission (cf. Matt 28:18-20). No Christian can claim obedience to the Great Commission until he has "made disciples" through proclaiming the Gospel, "baptized" converts in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and "indoctrinated" converts in the

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whole counsel of God’s Word. This is not to say that every Christian must accomplish all components of the Great Commission in his own personal ministry. God has given various gifts, ministries, and offices among His people. However, it is certainly the will of God for each Christian to support actively and prayerfully that group of Christians which is wholly dedicated to this task. There is no biblical indication of a “streamlined” Commission that consists in merely preaching a “simple” Gospel and then allowing converts to decide for themselves into “the church of their choice.” Sometimes, of course, circumstances leave one helpless to do this (such as witnessing on an airplane when only a short amount of time is available), but it is no excuse for ignoring the full statement of the Great Commission or forgetting the ultimate goal as given by our Lord.

the utmost emphasis upon the feeding (teaching) of those who are already Christians! Indeed, it may be said that the indoctrination of converts in the whole counsel of God’s Word is the basic New Testament pattern for world evangelization. Apart from this emphasis, Christian evangelism will soon become ineffective and superficial.

It is important to understand that deep, tender, feelings of affection in the Christian life are not more important than doctrine. Indeed, the New Testament never emphasizes such feelings as greater than doctrine and truth. To be very blunt, the greatest impact of biblical love is upon obedience to all of God’s Word. In the Old Testament, love is inextricably related to covenant and obedience (Exod 20:6; Deut 7:6-8; 10:12; 11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:19-20; Josh 22:5; 1 Sam 18:1-3; etc.). In the New Testament, love is most frequently related to discipleship and obedience (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:9-10; 1 John 2:4-6; 5:1-3; 2 John 6a; etc.). The standard of biblical love is doctrine. As a Christian virtue, love is more important than faith and hope (1 Cor 13:13), but it is not more important than doctrine and truth. Indeed, true Christian love cannot increase apart from an atmosphere of

| Evangelize | Baptize | Teaching them all things |
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| “make disciples” with a truth-saturated message (1 Cor 15:1-8) | a symbolic ordinance that teaches basic doctrines | each baptized convert under the discipline and whole-Bible indoctrination of the local church by the Holy Spirit |

Not only is there a tendency on the part of Christians to be disobedient toward all components of the Great Commission, but also to ignore the truth that Christ and His apostles gave utmost emphasis upon indoctrination of converts in “the whole counsel of God’s Word.” For instance, in the New Testament, one reads that the apostles won converts, baptized them, and organized them into local churches for the purpose of doctrinal and practical edification and observance of all biblical commands. Although evangelism and communicating to a lost person the reality of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone are vitally important components of the total responsibility of the local church, the church must continually remind herself that the New Testament places

Christian truth. Of course, liberals have denied this important of doctrine and truth for years, and if Christians endure this false separation, it will constitute one of the greatest victories of Satan against the church in modern times. Therefore, it is essential that the church indoctrinate converts in the whole counsel of God’s Word as the basic New Testament pattern for world evangelization. Not only will Christian evangelism become ineffective and superficial without this emphasis, but having a Christian life that is glorifying and pleasing to the Lord will also suffer.

Understanding and applying the Bible is not an option. Doctrine without practice is dead, and practice without doctrine is blind. The problem with the

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and logical. For example, the Book of Romans first contains eleven chapters expounding doctrine, and only the last five discuss practice. Failure to instruct in sound doctrine is the reason for misconduct and the cultural impotence of Christians. Lack of power in the life of the church is the lack of sound doctrinal truth. The perseverance and success of the church is based upon acceptance of the Bible as the sole authority of Truth, and recognizing the supreme importance of the Bible alone for determining sound doctrine, as well as all the Bible's logical implications (which, of

course, emphasizes the need to think logically and systematically, as the basis of the church's practice).

professing church ("churchianity") is not primarily in its practice, but in its doctrine. Christians do not know, and many do not care to know, the doctrines of Scripture. Doctrine is viewed as intellectual, and many Christians are generally anti-intellectual. Doctrine is regarded as "ivory tower" philosophy, and most Christians view ivory towers with contempt. However, it is the "ivory tower" that is the control tower of a civilization. It is a fundamental, theoretical sin of the "practical" Christian to deny that every practice belongs to some doctrine.

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The relationship between doctrine and practice is the same as that between cause and effect. If a person believes correct doctrine, his practice will tend to be correct. The practice/lifestyle of many contemporary Christians is immoral because it is the practice of false doctrines. It is a serious doctrinal error of so-called "practical" church members, to think that they can ignore the "ivory towers" of the philosophers and theologians as irrelevant to their lives. Every action that "practical" church members adopt is governed by the thinking that has occurred in some ivory tower. The first duty of the Christian is to understand sound doctrine—sound theory—and thereby implement sound (biblical) practice. The order of doctrine first, then practice, is both biblical

We will see our world changed as more and more hearts are transformed. All too often the priority of the church is to reform society, as opposed to seeing it transformed by the power of the Gospel. The church will be catapulted into the future only as she is carefully governed and powerfully driven by the Word of God. Quite simply, the Word of God builds the church. It is crucial to teach the church that God's chosen method to bring new life is to use His Word. God's method for building the church determines the means of discipleship and evangelism. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the church by the Word of God (2 Kgs 22—23; Neh 8—9; Isa 55:10-11; Ezek 37:1-14; Matt 4:4; John 1:1, 4, 14; Acts 19:20; 20:32; Rom 1:16; 10:17; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:18, 21; 1 Pet 1:23, 25). The church grows quantitatively and qualitatively through the proclaiming of the Gospel and the systematic teaching of God's Word. If God's chosen method for building and sustaining His church is replaced with human thoughts and will, it will inevitably ensure the eternal futility of such work. May that not be said of your life and ministry!

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