

# Get The Church Ready!

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*Christ said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Is the gospel limited to preaching to the world?*

Are you supporting a work that is preaching the gospel? Some, having a narrow understanding of the gospel, feel that unless we are preaching to the unconverted, we are not preaching the gospel. They judge that any church that is not preaching to the world is "dead"—not accomplishing anything for God. Is their concept correct?

Jesus clearly spells out his commission to the church in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

If one stopped with verse 19, one would have a solid case for asserting that unless a church is preaching to the unconverted, one is not really preaching the gospel as Christ intended. Making disciples and baptizing certainly refer to conversions from the world into Christianity. But Christ also says, "teaching them to observe *all* things I have commanded you. . . ." Teaching the fullness of God's way of life cannot be done before baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

If that is not so, why did Christ inspire the writers of the New Testament to discuss refinements to basic truths and deeper knowledge and understanding with already converted people? Why all the admonitions to grow and to overcome our sins? Why does He say, "leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Hebrews 6:1)? Why does He later say in the same book, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25)? Why all the encouragement to hope in God and His promises? Why all the strong correction?

## **The Gospel—to the Converted!**

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome too" (Romans 1:15). Did you catch the significance of his statement in light of this subject? Paul, writing to an already established Christian congregation, wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel to them! Why would he do that? Were they not already converted? Yes, they were! Paul compliments them earlier: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:8). The congregation in Rome was remarkable, renowned for its faith. Can a congregation be recognized for world-renowned faith only upon conversion?

Though Paul had never been to Rome, these Roman Christians had been converted some time earlier after hearing the gospel through other ministers. They were growing, and Paul wanted to add to their growth by giving them more of the gospel, as he says in verses 11 and 12. "For I long to see you, that

I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Romans 1:11-12). Then, he adds his desire to preach the gospel to them.

Paul wanted to preach the gospel—more of it, in greater detail—to a congregation of converted people! He wanted to be an instrument to reveal more of its glories to them so they might continue to grow. Clearly, the preaching of the gospel by the ministry *continues in the church after conversion*.

Although the context is somewhat different, I Thessalonians 2:1-16 makes much the same point. Not just a means of conversion, the preaching of the gospel supplies continued growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul followed this procedure in Thessalonica:

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. (I Thessalonians 2:8-9)

Paul preached to the Thessalonians for a long time, stretching from their first exposure to the gospel through conversion until with further growth they became imitators of the churches of God in Judea (verse 14).

### **Christ's Example**

Perhaps the best preaching of all to look to is Jesus Christ's. With whom did He spend most of His time preaching and teaching the good news? Was it the public or His disciples? To whom did He give His most specific instruction and correction?

The answers are obvious. He told His disciples several times that the general public was either blind or that His disciples had been given help by God to understand (Matthew 13:13-16; 16:17). They lived with Him night and day for three and one-half years. It was to the heirs of salvation—what comprised His church at the time—that He gave the best and most of His good news.

The same should be true today, perhaps even more so than ever before. Several groups loudly proclaim themselves to be the "heirs of," or "in the spirit of," or the successors of Herbert W. Armstrong, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world. Yet Mr. Armstrong himself said that the preaching of the gospel to the world is done. He said this several times in sermons and Bible studies just before he died.

Ironically, though they claim to be following him, his "heirs" differ with him in this area! His commission to the present head of the largest body of the Church of God today was that he should "get the church ready," or words to that effect. That is, the main thrust of the church from the top down should shift to personal overcoming, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, becoming more submitted to God, working on refining character and attitudes, improving our marriages and relationships with children and brethren. In short, the church is perfecting, through a much closer relationship with God, every possible moral, spiritual and ethical application of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Mr. Armstrong did not forget that the Two Witnesses are yet to come. He merely meant that the preaching of the gospel to the world is done for the group God raised up through him. This does not

mean that it is wrong for a church to preach the gospel to the unconverted. God may yet move us to preach to the world in some way, but at the present time, He has opened no doors in that direction.

Christ's return is so near that the church's greatest efforts must be directed toward preparing a people for the events of the end time and for marriage with the Bridegroom. Emphasizing this very responsibility, the parables of Matthew 24 and 25 instruct us about our reactions in this time of the end. We would all be wise to study this section and take the warning and admonition to heart.