

THE PROMISE AND ITS PURPOSE (part-four of a seven-part study)

Most of us would agree that making disciples involves more than evangelism. The Great Commission mandate makes that abundantly clear. The making of a disciple begins with a conversion to Christ but that is only the beginning of the discipleship dynamic. The three participles used by our Lord in conjunction with their primary imperative help to establish that necessary balance.

Notice how the first participle “go” emphasizes evangelism. It speaks of outreach; eliminating the possibility of those early Christians, and us, for sequestering ourselves in an underground bunker of Christian sub-culture. It also establishes a stark contrast between Israel under the Mosaic Covenant and the Church under the New Covenant. Israel’s mandate for reaching the world with God’s truth consisted of living obediently within a theocratic nation that would be greatly blessed of God, encouraging other nations to “come and see” just how blessed they were (Deuteronomy 15:6; Psalm 67:1-2). This would, in turn, serve as a testimony to those surrounding nations, to experience for themselves, what it was like to live in a personal relationship with the true and living God.

However, the emphasis throughout the Church Age has been just the opposite in regard to being a witness for our Savior. Instead of “come and see,” the methodology is now “go and tell.” In the building of Christ’s Church, His followers cannot wait for the unbelieving world to come to them. We must take the initiative and reach out to those who are lost and in desperate need of salvation. This is why the apostle Paul creates a strong distinction in Ephesians 6:12 between the world of human beings who must be reached and the realm of demonic forces which must be resisted. When we become confused about who the real enemy is, our outreach will suffer, as we isolate ourselves from people whom we consider to be villains, when they are actually victims (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). This desire to “run and hide” rather than “go and tell” is what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 –

“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.”

This contrast between Israel and the Church is established by means of the Great Commission mandate, in order to prevent the above-mentioned isolationism. Jesus instructs His earliest disciples, and all of us, to make disciples by going to them rather than waiting for them to come to us. Whenever the Church is at its best spiritually, evangelistic outreach will always be an integral part of its ministry.