

Division & Multiplication

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual maturity and the role of teaching in the church while addressing conflicts among believers.

Duration: 43:28

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1

Topics: "Church Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel and the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. He mentions that the church has evangelistic services specifically dedicated to proclaiming the good news and giving people an opportunity to respond. The pastor also highlights the role of teaching in the church for spiritual maturity. He shares about Paul and Barnabas visiting the believers they had led to Christ, emphasizing the value of personal interaction and connection. The pastor concludes by emphasizing the significance of the words in the Bible, as they bring life to believers.

Transcript

Shall we turn to the book of Acts chapter 15, and tonight we want to begin with verse 33. Some people had come from Jerusalem to the Gentile church in Antioch, had created problems, disturbances, by pretending to be officially sent from the church in Jerusalem to notify the Gentiles that they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas took these fellows, marched them back to Jerusalem, they called the church council to determine the relationship that the Gentile believers should have to the law of Moses, and the church sent a letter back to the church in Antioch, the official church in Jerusalem, greeting them as brothers in Christ, and just encouraging them to keep themselves from meat that was offered to idols, and from fornication, from things that are strangled, and from blood.

And if you do this, you do well. So, with the letter, there were certain of the recognized leaders of the church in Jerusalem, who came back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, in order that they might affirm that this was the official decision of the church, and that the letter was a genuine missile from the church in Jerusalem, so that the Gentile believers would be comfortable in the realization that they don't have to abide by the Mosaic law, and they don't have to be circumcised in order to be saved. Cause great rejoicing among the Gentile believers, and among those that came from Jerusalem was a fellow by the name of Silas.

He was one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, and he had the gift of prophecy, and so he was there for a while with the church, ministering to them. And we read, and after they had tarried there for a space, that is, things are settled down, issues are resolved. And so, those that came from Jerusalem stayed there for a while, just ministering and enjoying Christian fellowship.

And so, after they had been there for a while, they were let go and returned back to the apostles in Jerusalem. And one of them though, who was named Silas, did stay in Antioch. And we are told that he was a prophet, and he was one of the chief members of the church in Jerusalem.

Notwithstanding, it pleased Silas, verse 34, to abide there still. So, Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. The church in Antioch was a powerful church.

It was a large church, and it was a church that enjoyed outstanding ministers. Paul, Barnabas, now Silas, joining with the team in ministry. And so, it was a church that was greatly strengthened.

It was one of the main early churches of church history, the church in Antioch. It is the church from which our one line of original text have come from. The majority text came from the church in Antioch.

Another prominent church was developed in Alexandria, Egypt. And another line of manuscripts came from the church in Alexandria. And of course, this is one of the big issues today, as far as original manuscripts are close to original.

We have no originals, but close to original. There are two really main lines of text, the Alexandrian and the main line that came from the church in Antioch. And I prefer the line of text, the majority text or the received text that comes from the church in Antioch, where Paul ministered for so long, along with Barnabas.

But they remained there for a period of time, preaching and teaching. There is a place in the church for preaching. The Greek word that is translated preaching is the same Greek word that is translated evangelist.

And it is the proclaiming of the good news. That's pretty much literally what the Greek word means, proclaiming the good news. And thus preaching is mainly for the unconverted.

It is proclaiming to the world the good news that your sins can be forgiven, because Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin. And it is the declaration of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. Here at Calvary, we have services that are devoted and designed for the express purpose of preaching the gospel, our evangelistic services, services where the good news of God's love is proclaimed, the provision for the forgiveness of sins that God has made through Jesus Christ.

And people are given an opportunity to respond to that message and to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. We have men on our staff who are gifted evangelists. And they are here on staff for that very purpose of preaching the gospel and exercising their gift of evangelism.

But preaching is mainly for the unconverted. Once a person has received the gospel, once a person has accepted Jesus Christ, then they need to be taught. And the teaching is a very important ministry for the church, in order that there might be spiritual maturity and growth.

And that comes through the teaching of the word. There are many churches that have such a heavy emphasis upon evangelism, that there is very little teaching of the word of God. And thus, the people are sort of kept in an infant state of Christianity.

They really do not mature in their walk with the Lord. They don't really grow up and become mature, but remain in sort of a state of spiritual infancy. In Hebrews chapter 6, the author of the book of Hebrews urges the people to leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ and to go on into maturity.

He said, we shouldn't be laying again the basic foundations of our faith, which are repentance from dead works, putting your faith in God, being baptized, and the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and of the coming day of judgment. These are basic foundational things that bring us to Jesus Christ. These things are what were preached to the people.

They need to know these things in order that they would repent of their sin and receive baptism and receive Jesus Christ. But beyond these basic fundamental truths, they need to mature in their relationship and in their walk with the Lord. They need to know how to walk in the Spirit.

They need to grow up and become spiritually mature. My first years of ministry were in a denomination that had as its heavy emphasis evangelism. And thus, most of my messages were evangelistic.

I found great personal frustration because there was little growth in the church numerically and spiritually. And it was very frustrating as a young pastor to preach your heart out a powerful evangelistic message. But really, you were preaching to the saints.

I would have prepared a message and would be all excited, thinking it would be impossible for a sinner to sit through this message without being convinced that he needs to accept Jesus Christ. And just really, you know, pumped with a message. And to go into church and while they are singing, look over the congregation and realize I knew them all by first name.

There's not a sinner in the house. And you've got this dynamic evangelistic message, but no sinners to preach. Now that is frustration.

And so, generally, I would add a few points to the message. And they were sharp points. They were intended to cut the believers, to make them feel guilty and condemned because of their failure to bring their unsaved friends to church with them.

If they were only the kind of Christians God wanted them to be, they wouldn't have come to church tonight just by themselves. They'd have had their sinful neighbors with them to hear this powerful message and perhaps get converted. And as I would lay the whip on my people, I would watch their heads go down in shame, exposing their back so that I could really put the whip on.

And I'm sure as they were bowing under conviction of these things that were being said, that in their heart they were saying, God, I am guilty. Lord, I know that I should be witnessing more. I know, Lord, that I should be bringing my neighbors to church.

I know, Lord, that I'm just failure. Lord, if I only knew how, if this pastor would only teach me something, I could do more, you know. But I wasn't bringing them into maturity.

I was going over just the same repentance from dead works, baptism and, you know, Jesus rose from the dead and he's gonna judge and so forth. I was going over the basic fundamentals, principles, but never taking them on beyond that point. Growing up and maturing, walking in the Spirit and developing in their Christian walk and life.

One of the great problems of the church today is the immaturity of the saints because of the lack of the teaching of the Word. Paul wrote to the but I had to speak to you as carnal, even as babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for up till now you're not able to handle the meat and even now you are still not able.

For you are still carnal, for when you have envying and strife and divisions are not these signs of carnality and spiritual immaturity? And so here were the Corinthian believers. They had been believing for some time, but they had not matured. They were still babes, Paul said, in Christ.

And this is one of the problems of the church that you have so many people who by now should be spiritually mature. They should be strong, but they're still babes in Christ, still carnal. And after 25 years, you have 25 year old babies kicking and screaming in the crib as they're crying for their bottles.

In Hebrews again we read, for when the time came when you ought to be teachers, you still need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. You have need of milk, for you cannot digest meat. Like babies, they need constant attention.

They go to church to be entertained. When we were in Turkey a few years ago, we had a guide who was a professed Muslim. And so we questioned him, because we observed him drinking.

And we said, how is it being a Muslim, you drink? That's strictly against the law of the Muslim faith. He said, oh, we're Muslims in name. It really doesn't affect the way we live.

And I thought, how true that is, of so many people who are Christians only in name, but it doesn't really affect the way they live. They still walk after the flesh. They are still carnal, carnally minded.

They haven't grown, they haven't developed, they haven't matured from the day that they stepped forward and followed in the sinner's prayer. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul said, but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. How much grace is that? If God spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how much more shall he not freely give us all things? So every one of us have received this grace that is according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore, the scripture says, when he ascended on high, he led the captives from their captivity and he gave gifts to men. This is when Jesus ascended from the grave. He led the captives from their captivity.

During the Old Testament period, their sins were covered but not put away. It was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could put away sin. They could cover but not put away.

It took the blood of Jesus Christ to put away our sins. And so those Old Testament saints who died, they died in the faith in the promises of God that he would send his Messiah anointed one into the world who would take away the sins of the world. And so looking ahead, they died in faith, but because the sacrifice of Christ was not yet made, they could not enter into the heavenly scene, but were being kept, comforted by Abraham, until Jesus should pay the price for the remission of sins.

When Jesus died, he descended into hell, not the place of punishment, but the place where the righteous dead were waiting, being comforted by Abraham. And the difference between the two is explained by Jesus in Luke chapter 16. You can look that up for yourself.

But when Jesus ascended, now the prophecy concerning Jesus in Isaiah 61 was that he would set at liberty those that were bound and open the prison doors. He would set the captives free. And so when he ascended, he led the captives from their captivity and he gave gifts unto men.

That is, he gave gifts to men that they might in turn exercise those gifts in the church. And these gifts that were given to men, some apostles, some the gift of prophets, some the gift of evangelists, and some the gifts of pastors and teachers. For the perfecting, or that word is maturing, of the saints for the work of the ministry, the building up of the body of Christ.

The purpose for the church to gather, the purpose of our being here tonight, is that we might be built up in Jesus Christ, built up in our faith, built up in our walk, and become more mature in our whole Christian experience. The maturing of the saints for the work of the ministry. Until we all come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fully matured man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

You see, it is God's purpose that through the teaching of the word, through the understanding of what the Christian walk in life is all about, through the receiving of the power of the Holy Spirit, we might be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That's God's intent and purpose for you, that you become like Jesus. I wonder, as we look at our lives, am I more like Jesus now than I was a year ago, than I was five years ago, than I was 10 years ago? I should be coming more like him every day.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, and we with open faces, as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being changed from glory to glory into the same image. What is he saying? We should be coming more like Jesus Christ every day. Now, if you are still on the same level that you were five years ago, then you are in that state of spiritual infancy.

There's not been any development, any growth, any maturing, and that should not be. We should all of us be growing more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Paul said that we would be no more like children, who are tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, and by the slight of men and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

I'm amazed at how gullible some Christians are, ready to embrace any new kind of fad that's going on, chasing around, trying to be astounded. I mean, it becomes almost a thing of Christian entertainment. After a time of teaching and preaching, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go again and visit the believers that they had led to Christ in their first missionary journey, that they might just sort of see how they were going, developing.

Now, I believe that Paul, no doubt, kept in touch with these churches that they did establish, kept in touch with letters. But the mail in those days was nothing like the mail today. It could take months to receive a letter.

So, it was hard to stay in close contact with those churches. And there is something about being there personally, being able to talk personally, being able to see each other face to face, being able to feel and to touch each other that is far richer than just words on a page. One of the things about words on a page,

they are important and they're good.

We've got the Bible and it's very important. The words that are here on the page, because they become life to us. But nothing replaces really that personal on hands kind of contact.

And so, Paul desires to go back and to minister personally to these believers that had come to the knowledge of Christ in their first missionary journey. There's a special warmth that really can't be communicated through a letter. And also, in a letter, you can't really express tone of voice.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you now. In order that I might change my voice, because I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you really hear the law? Now, Paul is saying, I wish I was there.

I want you to catch my tone of voice. I'm not really rebuking you. And from some of the letters, you could think, Oh man, he's really laying it out.

But you have to hear the tone of voice. And Paul said, I wish I could be there so you could know my tone of voice when I'm saying these things. I'm sort of grieved.

I'm hurt. I can't imagine. Do you really understand what it means to be under the law? And, and he was wanting them to be able, but it doesn't transcribe on paper.

So Paul wants to go and to personally visit these churches again. You can misunderstand by not hearing the tone of the voice, what is being written. It wasn't a harsh tone.

It wasn't a rebuking tone. It was a tender pleading tone. Paul is concerned for them, how they were faring.

He wanted to see them personally, touch them. And so Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them again. Now in the first missionary journey, John Mark started out with them.

He went with them through the island of Cyprus. But when they started to leave Cyprus and go over to the mainland, into this sort of foreign territory, John Mark decided to return back to Jerusalem. Whether or not he was homesick or whether he was fearful of going on, we don't know.

All we know is he defected from them. Now he no doubt had been a great asset to them. A young man, he had a lot of energy.

He could run errands. He could do a lot of things. But now as they're going into some really rough territory, Mark decides to leave.

And no doubt Paul was upset that Mark did leave. Now as they're thinking about going again, Barnabas wants to take John Mark. The reason being is that John Mark was his nephew.

And there's probably been some maturing with him. And Barnabas feels that he would be an asset to go with them again. But Paul felt that if he again got cold feet or homesick or whatever it was that caused him to leave the first time.

If he would leave the second time again, it would put them in a position of being sort of in a sense not able to do as much as they could have done stuck with them. So Paul is objecting. But Barnabas is determined

that John Mark go with him.

But just as determined is Paul who is determined John Mark is not going to go with us. Now you get two guys who have strong wills. Paul had a very strong will.

He would not have been able to have endured all of the things that he did endure in taking the gospel to the world at that time had he not had this strong stubborn will. It can be an asset. It can also be a detriment.

And with Paul there were times where the strong will was a real asset. And there was a there were times when it was a detriment. As we move ahead in our study in the next chapter we're going to see some of the detriment of the strong will that Paul had.

When God wanted to stop him the only way he could was to put him in bed so sick he couldn't move. And he said well it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us not to go any further you know into Asia. Reality he couldn't.

He was so sick. So that's one of the disadvantages of having the strong will. And yet it did have its advantages too.

But here are they both of them now strong willed men had to be to do the things they did. And they have this dispute going and it got so heavy. The contention between them was so great that Barnabas just took Mark and took off for Cyprus.

And so Paul took Silas with him and they headed off through Syria and Cilicia. Can Christians have differences of opinions? Oh yes. Can Christians get into real arguments? Oh yes.

Can Christians have contentions between them? Oh yes. There are issues upon which we as Christians do not always agree. We can have differences of opinions.

What are we to do in such a case? Well we're to walk in love. If it's impossible to come to some sort of a meeting of the minds and agreement then we must agree to disagree agreeably. In other words okay that's the way you feel about it.

Fine. I don't see it that way. I can still accept you as a brother.

I can still fellowship with you. We don't have to see it the same. But at the same token that should not affect our fellowship together.

A few years back there was a situation with the Calvary Chapel pastors that some of them felt that they wanted to seek after experiences and put experience above the word and above the teaching of the word. And so we had a meeting together and this one pastor that was really moving towards the experience oriented position was having some pretty bizarre things happening in his church. And so as we were meeting together Raul said hey what's going on over there? I hear this and that and the other and the fellow said well and Raul said where do you find that in the scriptures? And he said well God is above his word and God's not limited by his word.

So then Mike jumped in and then Greg jumped in and then Don McClure jumped in and then there were some guys that were sort of standing with this other guy and I mean it was really getting hot and heavy. Sort of like with Paul and Barth there's contention. And so I said to them you know there's place for

experiences and though I feel that it is wrong to make that the chief emphasis if that's the way you feel that the Lord is leading you then I would suggest that you change the name of your church.

But we can still maintain our fellowship together with the Lord. I mean I don't see any reason for breaking fellowship but if you would just change your name that's fine. So they changed their name and I then said to at the pastor's conference I said this is the direction these fellows want to go.

If that's the way you want to go I would say recommend that you go. Feel free and at that time there were probably a hundred or so of the Calvary chapels that decided to go this other direction and as far as I was concerned that's fine disagree agreeably. And I can see with Paul and Barnabas there were positive results from the contention so that I can look at the contention and see that probably God was involved in allowing this disagreement.

Why? Because God wanted two missionary teams instead of one missionary team. So Barnabas took John and they headed for Cyprus. Paul took Silas and they headed back to Derby and of course they ended clear on over in into Athens and so forth.

But you have now teams going in different directions that you have twice as many missionary teams as you had before. And so I can see the hand of God even in the dispute that came up the differences that developed. So Paul chose Silas they departed and the church committed them unto the grace of God.

Wonderful thing we have missionaries from our church here that are serving the Lord all over the world and as they go out we just commit them to the grace of God. God be with you, God bless you, we'll be praying for you and of course we have prayer letter each week or prayer listing the pastors the missionaries and where they are and it's exciting to see what God is doing through the people that have gone out from the church here as missionaries. And so we commend them to the grace of God, pray for them and just are excited to see the fruit that's coming from their lives.

Let's pray, Father help us to grow, to grow up, to develop and to mature. Lord we don't want to be still in a state of infancy but we want to become more like Jesus every day. And so help us Lord to grow and to mature in our Christian walk in our Christian life.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen. Shall we stand? Pastors are down here at the front to pray for you this evening if there are any special needs that you have tonight they'd be happy to pray for you and to pray with you. God answers prayer that's the real thrust behind prayer that's the real incentive to pray is that God answers prayer and God can meet your needs tonight.

And so we would encourage you before you go home spend some time in prayer come on forward these men are here to pray with you and to join with you in prayer for your needs that God will wonderfully take care of and supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

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