
Ministers of Reconciliation

*“... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).
“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).*

One does not get very far into the Great Commission before he is struck by two big ideas. First, he sees that the field of our evangelism is the world, “all the nations.” Second, he is immediately reminded anew that every Christian is a missionary, one who has been sent by Jesus on a mission. Jesus charged those who were listening to Him on that mount in Galilee to teach new converts “to observe all that” He had commanded them, which would include His command to “make disciples of all the nations.”

When these two big ideas are combined into an overarching, daily application, we cannot help but see that Jesus intended for every disciple of His to *live* as a missionary—or, in Paul’s words, as a minister of the “word of reconciliation. As one student at Harding many years ago put it, “Every heart with Christ is a missionary, and every heart without Him is a mission field.”

Two big mission fields, therefore, loom before those who are followers of the Christ: one that is far away and one that is nearby. The field where we are to serve has always been divided into these two categories. The people who comprise the faraway field are those in India, Africa, China, Latin America, and many other great nations of the world. The people who make up the field that is nearby are the ones who live in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in our cities, in our counties, in our states, and in our nation.

We have mistakenly referred to Christians who serve in the faraway fields as “our mis-

sionaries,” as if they were our *only* missionaries. They are indeed missionaries—perhaps our highest and most beautiful kind of missionaries. However, those who serve in the field around us are also our missionaries. Anyone who accepts Christ’s commission to teach His “word of reconciliation” is a missionary, regardless of where he lives or serves.

It has been well said, “A missionary is not someone who has crossed the sea; he is someone who has seen the cross.” We do not decide to become missionaries; we only decide to become Christians, followers of Christ. When we become Christians, we become missionaries at the same time. The idea of being a missionary is inclusive in the term “Christian.” Christ was and is the greatest missionary of all time, and any follower of His—any “CHRIST-ian”—has chosen to live his life the way Jesus chose to live His while upon this earth.

How, then, does a missionary live? How does a minister of the word of reconciliation conduct his daily life?

He is, first, a person who lives as a living dead person. One can accomplish almost anything if he is willing to die for it. No one can be a missionary unless he is willing to die so that others might be able to hear the gospel. Regarding Jesus’ death, Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” In this same context, he said, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore

all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). The first part of His condition is the negative: "He must deny himself." Yes, some things will have to be denied. The second part is the positive: "And take up his cross and follow Me." Crosses are taken up for the purpose of dying. They do only one thing to us: They kill us. Jesus was telling us that His disciples have to take up a cross of service and die on it if they are going to be His genuine disciples. Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost us everything.

The missionary is, second, a person who lives to go to others. Jesus clearly said, "Go therefore . . ." (Matthew 28:19). One simply cannot be a minister of the word of the cross without going to others with that word.

All of the great pictures of evangelism in the New Testament are pictures of the disciples as they were going to others. Jesus spent His earthly life going, and the early church shared the gospel with the people whom they met. It is true that at the very beginning of the church, on the Day of Pentecost, "the crowd came together" (Acts 2:6) and the apostles preached to them. God brought together a great multitude for the divine beginning of His special kingdom, the church; but this was an exception.

Later, the rule of action became that of *going*. Leaving Jerusalem, the disciples "scattered" and preached as they went (Acts 8:4). Luke said, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word . . ." (Acts 11:19). Peter was sent to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10); Paul and Barnabas were sent out on missionary journeys (see Acts 13:4). It became a common practice for the disciples to spread the gospel with their lips as well as with their lives. They went to those who were near them and carried the gospel to those who were far away when they traveled to their cities. Imbedded in the application of Christianity is the principle of going to those who need salvation.

The minister of reconciliation is, third, a person who lives to teaches others. Teaching is the divine means by which Christians are made. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19). We might say that there are two commissions in the Great Commission. The first part is the commission of conversion; the second part is the commission of consecration. Both emphasize teaching. We are to teach people in order to make disciples of them, and we are to teach disciples in order to make *mature* disciples of them.

Notice that benevolence is not in the Great Commission. One cannot be made a disciple through benevolence. We may get someone's attention and soften his heart through benevolence, but we cannot teach him the gospel through it.

Benevolence is our compassion, not our Great Commission. We engage in benevolence because of the kind of hearts we have. When we see someone in need, we try to help him. However, benevolence is not our means of teaching the gospel; proclaiming the gospel message in detail is. Teaching is the way God has chosen to bring someone into His kingdom. Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me" (John 6:45).

Unless Christians are willing to go to others and teach them the gospel, they will not be able to become Christians. One who does not know the gospel cannot obey it.

The minister of reconciliation is, fourth, a person who lives to give so that the gospel might be preached. The Great Commission does not state this truth, but it does imply it. Going to others and teaching them requires time, talent, and money. Paul surely expressed the attitude that every Christian should have when he told the Corinthians, "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls" (2 Corinthians 12:15a). True evangelism begins with *an attitude of dedication*, a spirit of availability to serve in any possible way to help others understand the gospel. Due to the nature of the cause, evangelism is continued with *an attitude of donation*, a spirit of accountability concerning our resources, as money is given so that others can do the work that we personally cannot do.

The missionary is, fifth, a person who lives to nurture new converts into maturity. Jesus said, "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . ." (Matthew 28:20a). The new disciple comes into the kingdom as a baby needing someone to tend to and care for him.

Every new Christian has four needs. (1) He requires acceptance. The prodigal son was received and accepted by his father and should have been received and accepted by his elder brother (Luke 15:28). (2) He must have a sense of belonging. He needs to know that he is part of the family. As acceptance takes place in our hearts, a sense of belonging develops in the new convert's heart. (3) He needs teaching. He has to be taught the great truths of Christianity and how to live them. (4) He must be given the realization that he is part of God's eternal purpose. He needs to be shown that he has something to do in the kingdom, that he is responsible before God to live as a missionary.

As residents of the US, we are living in one of the greatest mission fields in the world. Every Christian who lives here is a missionary, a minister of the word of reconciliation. We must not shirk our duty. If every Christian did his or her part and lived as a missionary, think of the difference that we would make in America!

Eddie Cloer



We can say it like this: If each Christian would really be a Christian, if each church of Christ would really be a church of Christ, if each missionary would really live as a missionary, then, no doubt, the earth would be "filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

"Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).