

Column

“Should God entrust a new Christian into your church’s care” is a question which has been making its rounds in Christian circles of late. The question was first posed by Christian writer Mark Eldredge and has at its source the second half of our Lord’s Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19:20. Here, Jesus not only tells his followers to make disciples but to teach them “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded.”

Bringing the wandering ones to Jesus is the urgent task of the Church in every age. Unfortunately, this is where it often ends. The follow-up of which Jesus spoke is missing. Teaching beyond the bare basics has always been needed, but perhaps it is more critical now than ever. Why?

Not the least because we live in what has been called a post-Christian culture. Those coming into the Church today have more in common with the pagans who joined the ranks of believers in the Corinth of Paul’s day as opposed to those who affiliated in the 1950s and 1960s. In this latter period, general Christian belief was the norm. No longer.

For example, in a sermon delivered in 1962 during a crusade in Chicago, Billy Graham called upon his hearers to return to their spiritual roots. “It’s either back to the Bible or back to the jungle,” he thundered as he held up his well-sprung copy of God’s Word. In today’s culture, those words would ring hollow as many, especially younger folks, have no memory of a time when knowledge of the Bible was a part of cultural literacy. As in the Corinth of Paul’s day, the streets are littered with moral decadence and competing worldviews, most at odds with Christian faith and practice.

Because of the times in which we live, the teaching task of the church is paramount.

The ‘god of this world’ (2 Corinthians 4:4) – the devil -- remains on the job day and night. Jesus’ people need to be equally busy and

vigilant. In today's enemy occupied territory, there needs to be outposts of the Kingdom in every community, places where people are instructed and grounded in the faith, places where God can entrust new converts.

What about you? How grounded and prepared are you? For example, if someone at your workplace or gym asked: "Why should I pay attention to your Bible? Hasn't it been altered over the years? What about those books church authorities left out?"

What could you tell your enquirer?

Or: "Why would I want to be a Christian? Hasn't Christianity opposed science, sanctioned slavery, fomented wars and fostered hatred and bigotry?"

Again, what could you tell this person?

One final example. How would you respond to the person who said that Islam, Christianity and the other great religions of the world all teach pretty much the same thing? Why should I sign-on to any of them? Why can I not choose the bits and pieces I like and just be spiritual?"

What could you say? These and other tough questions are out there on the street. Again, are followers of Jesus – both new and life-long – being given the tools they require to answer them?

I think most Christian leaders would agree that more needs to be done. Fulfilling the second half of our Lord's Great Commission must be a priority in our day.

What about your local church? Is it providing the tools needed to address the questions many are asking in a post-Christian culture, or is just a happy, hang-out place for nice people? Should God entrust anyone, let alone, a young believer into its care?

ALMIGHTY God, our Heavenly Father, who hast committed to thy Holy Church the care and nurture of thy children; Enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn; that, rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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