

The Church: Harnessing the Vision and Mission

What is your vision (aim) and mission (way to achieve this) for your church? Would this be, “To be a large, growing and happy community of believers, where everyone feels loved and secure in the knowledge of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour”? Sounds good, right? Or is this just a bit common, predictable and, dare we say, “lukewarm” and even unscriptural?

Let’s see what the Bible says about this, both as an instruction and as an example, starting with the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT): “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The first thing we notice is that Jesus did not say we are to make converts, or even to plant churches, implicit though these objectives may be in the greater scheme of things. On the contrary, Jesus stressed that we must do the following three things:

1. make disciples of all the nations;
2. baptize these new disciples;
3. teach them to obey His commands.

To make disciples implies a far greater level of commitment to training and equipping than to just win over believers; that is converts who have made an altar-call commitment and who then (just) take their place in the pews.

Baptism in water has always been the outward sign of a truly

repentant and committed heart, washed clean by the blood of Jesus and determined to lead a new life with Jesus as both Saviour and Lord of every aspect of our lives. All new believers need to undergo this and to understand the significance of it.

Jesus instructed His disciples not to leave Jerusalem, i.e., not to commence their ministry until they had been baptised with the Holy Spirit. Do we still diligently teach both of these baptisms to all new believers, or just focus on getting them integrated into the social life and activities of the church?

Jesus, in His last and most earnest instruction to His disciples, told them to “teach them to obey His commands”—not just to tell them about Him but to “obey” all His commands. Many sermons, and Christian books, seem more intent on telling everyone how “becoming a Christian” enables one to live a far happier and more prosperous life.

These last instructions from Matthew 28 included no promises at all, other than that He will be with us always to help us to do these very things. His disciples, and hence all of us today, were expected to heed these instructions simply out of love for and trust in Jesus, just as it says in John 14:15: “If you love me, obey my commandments”, and in John 15:10: “When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.”

So, how did this work out in the early church, how we are doing today and what can we do about it? Act 5:12-14: “The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women.”

The members of this church were all full of the Holy Spirit, and everyone inside and outside the church were well aware of this. The hallmarks of this early church were:

- their meetings were marked by miraculous signs and wonders;
- all the believers met regularly—they were fully committed;
- the believers were all held in high regard, so high that outsiders were afraid to join them;
- and yet despite all this, more and more people (“crowds”) joined them.

They did not need to focus on programs to gain new believers and their vision was not to become a large or international church, but to make disciples—to properly teach, train and equip—all those who came to join them; “crowds of both men and women.”

In contrast, in the letter to the church at Laodicea, we read in Revelations 3:15-16: “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!” This is clearly at the total opposite end of the scale to Matthew 25:21: “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ and even to the church on Philadelphia, who were commended for (at least) obeying His command to persevere.

This challenges me to think: Where do I currently stand on this scale of “well done” at one end to “lukewarm” at the other end? Will I be commended and invited to reign with Christ or be spat out of His mouth or somewhere in between, and if so, to which end of the spectrum will I be closer? And if I am the leader of a church, what am I doing to ensure that my leadership team and I are doing our very best to ensure that our church fulfils the Great Commission of making disciples of all those who come to our church, baptizing these

new disciples and teaching them to obey Jesus' commands, as instructed in Ephesians 4:11-12: "...to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church (i.e. everyone in it), the body of Christ."

So, is it time to ask ourselves; are we more concerned with pleasing and appeasing man than with obeying our Lord, with personal ambitions to have the biggest and most popular churches, or to dedicating ourselves to both being and to making disciples of Jesus? {eoa}

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