What is wrong with the American Church today? Why is it that over the last several decades, the Church in America has failed to grow? How can it be that the American Church, which has more financial resources than any other country in the world, is unable to effectively propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The ironic answer to these questions is that, though they seem complex when first approached, their answers are quite simplistic when understanding is sought at the root of the problem rather than evaluating the multitude of distorted and corrupted branches of the proverbial Church.

Is it fair to say (and I believe that it is) that the only way the Church can effectively grow, both in maturity and in number, is to follow the biblical mandate for discipleship? The Lord’s commanded commission is clear and succinct: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you…” (Mt. 28.19-20a).

If you look carefully at the Great Commission of making disciples, you will observe that all of its components are external works that are to be carried out by the believer. The Bible as a whole, however, clearly defines true discipleship as a spiritual reality which takes place within a human life. That is, there is no effective doing of the Gospel apart from an actualized being in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This principle of being in Christ as a necessary condition for effective outward ministry is wonderfully expressed by Jesus as he speaks to his disciples in John 15. Jesus likens the disciples to the branches who have life only in the context of connection with the vine - Christ himself. There are striking dichotomous consequences for those disciples who stay connected so as to bear fruit and those who fail to be fruit-producers. For the fruit-bearer, there is the wonderful promise of perpetual pruning (or more literally, cleansing) so as to produce even more fruit. For those branches (disciples) that fail to produce fruit, there is the promised warning of being severed from the vine, and verse six concludes their fate as being “thrown in the fire and burned,” which, in New Testament language, can only speak of eternal separation in hell.

After defining the potential eternal destinations of the disciples, Jesus lays down the imperative foundational principle for true discipleship: “Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (verse 4). Here John introduces the Greek word, meno, which can be translated remain, abide, stay, live, or dwell. These are the characteristics of a fruit-bearing disciple: one who remains, abides, stays, lives and dwells in Jesus Christ.

Adherence to this command of remaining in Christ is the fulcrum which defines mere Christianity and on which the balance of bearing fruit lays. To this point, Jesus has essentially declared that “to truly make disciples and carry out the Great Commission, in order to do anything positive and beneficial for the Kingdom of God, you must meno in me. Apart from this, you can produce nothing and persistent non-producers will one day be separated from the lifeline.”

It is at this point in the narrative that Jesus introduces us to the wonderful reality of the Father’s love: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain (meno) in my love” (verse nine). This love (agape) is divine and emanates from the Father through the God-head (Jesus and the Holy Spirit) and resides on (in?) us. How marvelous!

John would later declare that, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4.16). With the command to remain, abide, stay, live and dwell in his agape love, we learn that it is agape that is both the object and means of our abiding. Jesus is saying, “Remain in my agape love, which I have passed down to you from the Father, and if you remain in this divine love, you are truly remaining in me, for I am agape.” Therefore, we are able to safely say that, apart from dwelling in Christ’s agape, we can bear no fruit and the attempts of discipleship are doomed to failure.
At this point you may be asking, “How is it that I am able to effectively abide in Christ’s agape love?” It is true that man is totally void of anything innate which would allow him to produce something of spiritual value. That is why for every command in Scripture, Jesus has provided the resource which enables the would-be disciple to spiritually “tap in” to the divine nature of God: “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philip. 2.13). Jesus states that the provision for remaining in his love is by obeying his commands, “If you obey my commands, you will remain (meno) in my love.” It is through the means of the Word of God that we encounter Christ himself and thus his agape love. If a disciple declares that he is abiding in Christ and yet fails to encounter Christ through his Word, then that disciple is either deceived or a liar and a rebel.

If abidance in the agape of Christ is contingent for fruit-bearing, then this agape must be expressed to others. Jesus continues the downward transmission of agape from the Father, to the Son, to the disciple and, finally, from the disciple to others: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (verses 12-13). The pinnacle of love, Jesus states, is the disciple who lays down his life for others.

What does it mean to lay down your life for another? With a quick reading, you may conclude that it speaks of martyrdom, but I would like to suggest that it speaks of far more than that. The Greek word translated life is the word psuche, which can be translated soul, self, life, person or being. Jesus spoke of his life in terms, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life (psuche) as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20.28). The entirety of Jesus’ life and ministry was a service to mankind. Jesus laid down his psuche daily for us so that when he reached the cross, he would be the pure, spotless and sinless sacrificial Lamb of God. Daily, he pursued intimacy with the Father in solitary places and it was in these times that Christ laid down his psuche and received the revelation and agape love which allowed him to faithfully carry out his mission. In the same way, we must present ourselves to Christ daily so that our lives can be laid down and lost in Christ. Jesus stated in Luke 17.33 that “Whoever tries to keep his life (psuche) will lose it, and whoever loses his life (psuche) will preserve it.”

We must remember, however, that even the laying down of our lives must be motivated and carried out within the confines of Christ’s agape love. The feeble attempt to lay down your life on your own initiative, apart from abiding intimacy with Christ, is as viable as a branch attempting to produce fruit apart from the vine: “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (verse 4). Peter, out of his own human zeal made the daring declaration: “Lord, why can’t I follow you? I will lay down my life (psuche) for you.” Then Jesus answered, ‘Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times’” (Jn.13.37-38). We only have the power to lay down our lives through the response of Christ’s agape revealed through his Holy Spirit.

The Greatest Love a person can have for another, is to lay down his/her life (soul, self) in such a way that he/she is consumed with the Spirit enabling the agape love of Christ to flow from him/her like a spiritual pump. The Church in America is failing for a lack of true adherence to the spiritual vine of Jesus Christ. Despite its abundant resources, it is failing to produce significant spiritual fruit because this fruit cannot be purchased, but only received through an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Let us be revived and awakened to the understanding that fallen mankind and the nation of America must have a genuine encounter with Christ. Let us come to the realization that soul-based outreach and human love will never change the heart of a man, much less a nation.

Today is the day to present yourself to the Lord as Isaiah did and exclaim, “Here I am Lord, send me” (Is.6.8b). The fields are ripe for harvest as people throughout America are in desperate need for the living God. Present yourself to Christ today and choose to abide in him so that the Greater Love can pour out of you to a lost world.

May the agape richly bless you as you dwell in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Pastor Ty Gulstrom

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Do You Really Believe?

Pastor E.J. Buckardt
Pastoral Care
World Ministries International

Do you really believe? Do you really have faith? Do you really trust the promises of Scriptures? Do you really die to self? Do you really?

Do you really crucify your flesh daily? Do you really desire to do His will and not your will? Do you really spend time with the Lord daily? Do you really live for the Lord? Do you really want to serve the Lord? Are you really “on fire” for the Lord Jesus Christ? I could continue the questions, but I believe you get the point.

My goal is to urge you to examine your faith as Paul exhorts in II Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...” It is not the responsibility of your pastor, nor your spouse, nor your father or mother to prove your faith. You alone are responsible for your faith. You will stand alone to answer before the Lord on judgment day.

Dr. Jonathan Hansen, my pastor and apostolic head of World Ministries International, has a series titled, “The Sin God Hates Most is Doubt and Unbelief”. It is a message every believer should have in his cassette/CD library. If you do not have this message in your home telephone our office today at (360) 629-5248 and order your own copy of this tremendous series. It is a message you should listen to from time to time, especially when your faith seems to be weak and shaken. And believe me, we all
have a time when our faith is weak, tested, tried, and shaken.

The times when our faith is weak and shaken are not the sin. The sin is when we allow those times to cause us not to believe, to rely on our emotions and feelings. Faith is not based on feelings and emotions. Trusting our feelings and emotions above the Word of God causes the sin of doubt and unbelief. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit “...nothing doubting.” Acts 11:12. We are to ask “…nothing waiving.” James 1:6.

Faith is more than head knowledge of Jesus, His promises and judgments. Even Satan knows who Jesus is and knows of His promises and judgments. The unclean spirits in the Synagogue said to Jesus in Mark 1:23-24 “...Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.”

There needs to be more than head knowledge of Jesus for God looks at the heart (I Samuel 16:7). Deuteronomy 6:5-6 says, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy god with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I say unto thee this day, shall be in thine heart.” Matthew 22:37 “…Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” Matthew 6:21 “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” And you must believe with all your heart. Acts 8:37 “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest…” There must be heart knowledge just as the song goes “Where is Jesus? Jesus is in my heart.”

May I add that, not only is head and heart knowledge necessary, but there must also be a fire-in-the-belly: that drive to seek the Lord and to do His will at all times. We need to be “his ministers a flame of fire” Hebrews 1:7. I believe it is the fire-in-the-belly which causes our faith to be unshaken. The mind can play tricks and cause doubt and unbelief. The heart is more reliable when it comes to faith.

Now if we combine the mind and heart together with the fire-in-the-belly, we develop a faith the enemy cannot shake or overcome. God imputes righteousness for this kind of faith. Read Romans 4:20-22.

What does the Lord promise if we have faith? Matthew 21:21 “Verily I say unto you, If you have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.” Wow!! What a powerful Scripture! Now, there needs to be a good reason for us to pray for a mountain to be moved and dumped into the sea. God certainly will not do so just to build up one’s ego and pride and prove how great a man of God one is. But if it were necessary, our God is large enough to answer such a prayer. If you read Zechariah 14:4 “…and half of the mountain shall be moved to the north, and half of it toward the south,” you will see that yes, our God can and will, when necessary, move mountains. But Jesus makes it clear throughout scripture that it is not just asking, but asking according to His will. He does not operate according to our will but according to His will.

We need to really believe God can and will do as His Word says. Consider verse 22 of Matthew 21, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” When you pray do you really believe? When you pray for loved ones to be healed, do you believe Jesus is going to heal them? Or do you just wish or desire it to happen? There is a BIG difference between believing and wishing.

John 14 is a great faith chapter. Many quote verse 12-14, and especially verse 14 “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” But many prayers are not answered. We must also read verse 15 and following: “If ye love me, keep my commandments…”. There are always conditions for receiving answers to prayers. The prayers must line up with the Word and Will of God.

An example is Malachi 3:10. Do you really believe if you tithe to the Lord, He will totally meet your financial needs? The Lord says, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” And verse 12 “And all nations shall call you blessed…” Does your first fruits (tithes) come first, or does your giving come only after all expenses and worldly desires are met, and if a tenth (tithe) is left over it goes to the Lord? Be honest with yourself. Are you a first fruit giver? If not, I ask you, do you really believe the Word of God? Do you trust Jesus with your tithe? Do you trust your total life to Jesus?

Once again, do you really believe, not only with your mind, but with your total being? Have the faith Paul describes in II Corinthians 4:4-6,8-10,13 “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, hath shined in our hearts... We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.”

Do you really believe Jesus will be with you through your troubles? Do you really know Jesus will not forsake you through your persecution?

Ask yourself these questions: What occupies your thoughts daily? Are they overwhelmed by your circumstances, your health, your finances or your children? What burdens your heart? What makes you angry? What causes your heart to hurt? What causes you to cry? Are your thoughts on the things of the Lord? Matthew 6:19-21 “Lay not up for yourself treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Where are you storing up your treasures? Are they in the salvation of your family, friends and neighbors? Or are they in possessions like your house, your IRA, your 401K, your hobby, etc? Really, please examine your lifestyle! When you do you will also be examining your faith. For the Scripture is true, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21).

Pastor E.J. Buckardt
Dear Saint, September 11, 2001 was no accident! Neither were the natural disasters of hurricane Katrina and Rita and the floods that hit New Orleans! God allowed these incidents as well as He allowed the December 26, 2004 Tsunami Crisis that hit twelve nations and killed by some estimates, over 250,000 people while displacing millions of others. The Asian Stock Market Crash was prophesied as well as the fall of Zaire and President Mobutu. The Kobe, Japan earthquake was no surprise to God neither was the Indonesian blood bath. All of this can be explained in “The Cup of Iniquity Principle.” In fact, New Orleans will be rebuilt and be destroyed again; the next time, however, it will not be only through a flood alone. There are reasons why God lifts his hand of protection off of a person, family, business, city, state or nation. You can read about them in my upcoming book, “The Science of Judgment.” Yes, there are reasons why God allows evil to happen; but, praise the Lord, Jesus will return at the battle of Armageddon to stop the insanity that has swept through the world due to man’s reign. There will be peace, happiness, healing and protection for all.

This is an apostolic ministry that is doing real warfare, not just talking about it. Our television and radio broadcasts, along with our newsletters, tapes and CDs, are not intended to tickle your ears, or put you into a spiritual slumber; Instead, they will often challenge your carnal nature, and are designed to bring uncompromised truth. These teachings are based solely on the anointed, inspired Word of God. They should increase your conviction and motivation to join in this great battle.

Please pass this article on to other people whom you feel would support me with their prayers, and will become one of my Tape or Video of the Month Partners. Through this partnership, they too can be strengthened by receiving monthly anointed, Word-based articles and radio or television programs that will equip them to better serve our Lord in the coming days of trials and testing. Together we can “sound the alarm” and save many people in nations that will listen to the warning while there is still time and freedom to do so before Jesus returns to rule and reign! PLEASE JOIN ME TODAY AND LET US SOUND THE ALARM! PTL!!!