

I Will Build My Church

Lesson 7

Matthew 16:18-19

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Principle 10: Connecting With Our Culture (Acts 8:4, 11:9, 11:17, 15:28)

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

Acts 11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

Acts 11:17 If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.

For the first few years the church existed, only Jewish people were evangelized, mostly through the ministry of the Apostles. If that trend had continued, we would not be in the church today!

What changed? Watch the transition: God used internal circumstances (conflict over ministry to the widows) to teach the church that they needed to share ministry. Then He used external circumstances (persecution) to teach the church that they needed to evangelize everywhere. In doing so, it was necessary for them to reach beyond current church culture to impact the world around them.

The church began to modify their method in order to reach the gentiles. If they had not done so, they would never have been able to reach anyone but Jewish people. This “cultural change” within the church had nothing to do with changing the content of the gospel, but everything to do with changing their presentation of the gospel.

There was more opposition to this change (from a Jewish Jerusalem Church to a Gentile Roman Church) than any other, but as the New Testament saints began to target their efforts into reaching the majority of their culture, God gave them an incredible harvest!

The Biblical Concept of Targeting

No single congregation can reach everyone due to geography, language, music, custom, and even personal preference! (That is why we are part of a worldwide fellowship.) The type of fish we catch will depend largely on the bait we use! Whether they are made consciously or unconsciously, our congregation’s choices today determine who we will reach tomorrow.

A church (or even a radio station!) that continuously tries to appeal to everyone’s preference will wind up offending everybody and reaching nobody. To be successful, we must determine who lives in our area and how we can best reach them, and then intentionally go after them; that is targeting!

The Bible determines our message, but our target determines how we communicate that message.

Targeting is a Biblical principle. Jesus targeted His ministry to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*Matthew 15:24*), and instructed His disciples to do the same (*Matthew 10:5-6*). Peter targeted his ministry to the Jews, while Paul targeted his ministry to the Gentiles (*Galatians 2:7*). We even have four gospels because each one of them was written with a specific target in mind; Matthew wrote to the Jews, Mark to the Romans, Luke to the Greeks, and John to the Church. God Himself invented the concept of targeting!

No missionary to a foreign country would try to reach people without first understanding their culture and “language” and communicating with them on that basis. It is just as crucial to understand the people of (your area).

We don't have to agree with our culture, but we do have to understand it in order to reach it.

Jesus' Standard Approach: "Start Where People Are" He talked to the Pharisees:

- About the law
- He talked to farmers about seed
- He talked to fishermen about fish
- He talked to the rich young ruler about money
- He talked to the woman at the well about water

Paul's Standard Approach: "Become All Things To All Men"

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

- The fundamental question at the Church Council in Acts 15 was this: "Does a Gentile have to adopt Jewish customs to become a Christian?" The answer was a resounding "NO!"
- The fundamental question for the church today is this: "Does a Sinner have to adopt all our church customs to become a Christian?" And again, the answer is a resounding "NO!"

We must continually ask ourselves: "Who are we trying to impress?" Our primary goal is "SERVICE."

- Our primary goal is not "SERVE US."

All too often we have "church for the church," when our goal should be to have "church for the unchurched."

Paul taught the NT church to adjust their worship services when unbelievers were present in order to reach them (1 Corinthians 14)

This is not “caving in to culture;” it is just being polite! In fact, we always cater to culture, but we must make sure it is city culture and not just church culture.

Do you expect our church services to run according to your preference and our ministries to operate according to your convenience, or are you more concerned about our visitors’ preferences and their convenience?

The New Testament church found out that some things are essential (THEIR MESSAGE), but that other things are non-essential or even detrimental (THEIR METHODS).

- It all depends on who you want to reach!
- Why we do what we do!

***2 Corinthians 5:14** For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*

- In essential beliefs; we have **unity**.

Ephesians 4:4-6

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

- In non-essential beliefs; we have **liberty**.

***Romans 14:1, 4, 12, 22** Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters ... Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls ... So then each of us will give an account of himself to God ... So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.*

- In all our beliefs; we show **charity**.

1 Corinthians 13:2 *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*