

WHAT PAUL MIGHT WRITE TO THE CHURCH AT OKC?

Paul's letter to the church of Jesus Christ at Oklahoma City The Admonitions- Ephesians 4:17-24

Since I became a Christian when I was 17, I have looked at the church I had joined and compared it to the church in the New Testament and it has bothered me that what I see in the church and what I see in the New Testament is not the same. Since I became a Pastor, it has bothered even more.

I have been bothered by the way we go about discipleship

- Non-relational and unloving
- I have been bothered by the way we teach people how to change their character; how to deal with their sin; how to solve their personal problems; how to deal with their addictions.

What I hear in the church and what I see in what Paul wrote are not the same. What I hear in the church is an idea of discipleship that works in business, athletics, education, and the armed service. But it is not an idea that I see in what Jesus said or what Paul said.

In athletics, an athlete can gradually become a better athlete by discipline, hard work, and repetition. Bad habits normally do not change immediately and good coaches do not expect them to change. As a coach, I would often encourage my players when they made a mistake by saying. Keep working. You are getting better. It is understood in athletics that failure is necessary to improve.

Discipleship in athletics that works is discipleship by works!

And the same can be said for business, education, and the armed service. It bothers me that the church has adopted this approach to discipleship that is different then what Jesus or Paul used.

I frequently use these analogies to make people aware how different discipleship was to Jesus and Paul from discipleship in other realms of life.

A man comes to Jesus and when he comes to Jesus he is committing adultery with another man's wife. So, when I meet with him for discipleship I ask him how he is doing with that sin. He says I am doing better. I say, what do you mean? He says, I was sleeping with her once a week and now we are only sleeping together once a month.

A man comes to Jesus and when he comes to Jesus he is a thief. So, when I meet with him for discipleship I ask him how he is doing with that sin. He says I am doing better. I say, what do you mean? He says, I was stealing once a week and now I am only stealing once a month.

A man comes to Jesus and when he comes to Jesus he is an angry man that is always going off on his wife and children. So, when I meet with him for discipleship I ask him how he is doing with that sin. He says I am doing better. I say, what do you mean? He says, I was getting angry every day and going off on my family and now I am only going off on them once a week.

A man comes to Jesus and when he comes to Jesus he is a pathological liar. So, when I meet with him for discipleship I ask him how he is doing with that sin. He says I am doing better. I say, what do you mean? He says, I was lying every day and now I am only lying once a month.

A man comes to Jesus and when he comes to Jesus he is a serial killer, a pedophile, a homosexual, a drug addict, an alcoholic, a slanderer, a gossip, a porn addict, etc. I think you get the picture.

Paul would never say in any of these scenarios...

[“Hey that’s great! You are really improving! Change takes time and a lot of hard work! Before there can be change there will be many failures. Just keep reading your bible, praying, and going to church and at some point, you will stop doing these things completely and start doing the right thing all the time.”](#)

Paul would not cut his disciples some slack in any of these scenarios by saying...

[“That’s good. We all struggle with failure. Keep working at it, keep showing up at church, reading your bible, and praying and you will grow to a point that you stop doing these things and start doing the right thing all the time. You might even try some fasting.”](#)

Paul never indicated that his disciples would gradually repent of their sin issues after many failures and that change would come by hard work.

But this idea for discipleship is generally accepted in the church! It is heretical!

What would Paul say if someone came to him and made a confession like one of these? We know what he would say from what he said in Ephesians 4:17-24.

[Ephesians 4:17-24](#)

[17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,](#)

[18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;](#)

[19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.](#)

[20 But you have not so learned Christ,](#)

21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:
22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt
according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true
righteousness and holiness.
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Paul did not say grow into the new man after many failures. Paul said put off the former conduct of the old man and put on the conduct of the new man.

As we saw last week from Colossians 3:1-17, putting off the conduct of the old man and putting on the conduct of the new man is made by faith in Jesus. When I discover something about my character or conduct that needs to change, I must believe that my old man was crucified with Jesus and that I am a new man because I been raised with Christ.

Paul said the new man is created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Jesus has finished that work. It is not just how God sees me, it is who I am.

When we are tempted to sin or when we discover something in our conduct that is like the old man, our responsibility is believe in what Jesus has accomplished for us and in us.

God responds to people that have faith in Him by giving them power to perform His will.

Discipleship in athletics that works is discipleship by my works.
Discipleship in the righteousness of Jesus is discipleship by faith in Jesus's work.

Let's say you are the angry man that is always going off on your wife and children. What do you do?

To change your behavior....

- You learn about your new man by learning about Jesus. (Romans 13:14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24)
You get to know yourself by getting to know Jesus.
- You believe you are a new man in Jesus. (Romans 6:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10; Col. 3:1-4; 1 John 3:2-3)
Believe the gospel. Walk by faith and not by sight! God gives you power to make the right choice.
- You put off the old man's behavior and put on the new man's behavior. (Romans 13:12-14; Eph. 4:20-24; Eph. 6:11; Col. 3:9-10)
Exercise your will to make the right choice by faith in the gospel of Jesus. If you do not have the power to make the right choice, it is because of unbelief in the gospel of Jesus.

Paul expected his disciples to immediately change their behavior when they learned the behavior of the new man in Christ but it was by faith in Jesus and not by works.

The most important decision you can make after you receive Jesus is wake up every day, remind yourself who Jesus is, and remind yourself who you are in Jesus.

Paul called faith in these truths walking in the Spirit.

Gal. 5:16

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

What about your fleshly desires to sin? Will they ever go away?

Some may. The best way to get rid of an appetite is to starve it.

But many fleshly desires will never go away.

Gal. 5:16-18

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

NKJV

You cannot tame fleshly desires by works. You can only tame them by walking in the Spirit.

Many people teach that receiving Jesus is a one-time event. The truth is receiving Jesus should be a daily event.

You only need to be baptized in water one time. But every day remember what that baptism means and walk in that truth.

When you discover something about your conduct that is wrong, be transparent about your failures to your church. But being transparent will not change you. Being transparent enables others to encourage you to walk in faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are three things that will keep you from changing your conduct.

- Ignorance
- Unbelief in the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Affections for your old man

You will not embrace your new man unless you are willing to trash your old man.

Will you change your approach to Christian discipleship?

Will you by faith in Jesus put off the old man and put on the new man?

Will you lead others to put off the old man and put on the new man?

