

Precepts Before Application
Luke 24:44-49

I have a good friend who gave his heart to Christ in salvation and then within a very short period of time decided to join together with another man who often went on short mission trips to other countries, especially the out islands in the Pacific, to minister and share the gospel with the indigenous people of those lands.

Though I fully supported my friend in his desires for the salvation of those lost souls, I was also aware that as a new Christian my friend himself knew very little about the Person of Christ and of the Plans and the purposes of God in the salvation of men's souls.

My friend went on those trips several times anyway. And while I don't know how well he did as he attempted to minister to those people, his efforts so soon after he himself was saved have given me cause for some concern.

Knowing the weaknesses within my own soul, especially during those early days of my own salvation experience, I recognize some of the difficulties that can take place when we put enthusiasm and effort before knowledge and understanding, when we put "application before precepts", when with great desire we want to tell other people about Jesus and His salvation, but we know very little about the Person and work of Christ ourselves.

Looking back, I do fear that I might have done that myself in some of those beginning days of my relationship with Christ. As I think back on many of those early days as I served in a ministry to youth at French Camp Academy, I often did not do so well. Yes, I had a heart filled with desire, energy and effort, but so very little wisdom.

The simple truth is folks, we can't tell other people about someone that we know little about ourselves. And excitement and enthusiasm within our new-found faith is not enough to assure that we will get our witness and our application right as we minister to others.

Let's pause for a moment and again read the passage that we've been studying over the past few weeks. And then let's talk about the need we have

to know more about our Lord and His plans before we begin our efforts to apply His truths.

Here in Luke chapter 24 we read,

⁴⁴ Then He (Jesus) said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, "Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ And you are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹ Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

As I read these words, and as I consider the practices that are common within the modern-day Christian Church, a question came to my mind . . . "which must come first within the hearts and minds of evangelical believers, "understanding of the precepts of God" or "the application of those precepts"? And what are the possible dangers when we get those two out of their proper order?"

As I observe today's evangelical Christian Church, I find that it is often with great fervor that we who preach the gospel, say to those who have just bowed their knee to receive Christ, "now get up and go on out there and tell others about Jesus so that many more can be saved."

And that sort of "application" is a very excellent charge to issue to every believer. They really should go forth with great passion, with unyielding diligence and with strength of commitment.

And we know that that is the right thing to do because the Lord Jesus Himself issued the very same charge as He was preparing to leave His disciples and go back into heaven. Listen to those words given in Matthew 28:18-20. He said ¹⁸ . . . "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

These words of Jesus have come to be known as the “Great Commission”, and they are intended to be your and my “marching orders”, to go forth and preach the gospel and to be witnesses of Christ to anyone and everyone who will listen.

And again, that is exactly what every saved person among us should do!

But with that being said, may I ask . . . “does God intend for each person to immediately get up from their knees, having just received the precious gift of salvation, and without one moment’s hesitation, begin expounding upon the truths of God”?

I do fear that that is exactly what many believe must be done.

But may I ask us to consider a word of caution about this charge and about those efforts. And may I do that by directing our attention back to these words of the Lord Jesus that He gave to us in today’s text.

Here, we find a very subtle, but very real variation from the understanding that most people have about the “Great Commission”.

Yes, you and I are to faithfully go forth and preach the gospel to anyone and everyone who will listen. But before we go rushing out to deliver Jesus’ “good news” to this dying world, we really, really ought to know what we are going to say once we get out there in front of those people.

But some would argue, “what about God’s promise in Luke 12:11-12 that tells us that

11 . . . when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:11-12)

And I agree, these words are absolutely true and they are trustworthy. But are these words instructing us that there is no need for us to be prepared for the things that we will say?

May I caution us strongly that that is not the inference at all! We need only to read these words of the Lord Jesus that we have before us today, and also

many, many others just like them, and we will gain a far different understanding. Note these words again, verse 44 . . .

⁴⁴ Then He (Jesus) said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, "Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ And you are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

And then, shortly after saying these words to His disciples, Jesus also gave His disciples the commission to go on out and preach the gospel to all nations.

But consider . . . were these men brand new believers having little or no knowledge of the truths of God?

Not at all! Not at all! For the past three and a half years, they had been sitting under the daily teaching of the greatest teacher that mankind would ever know, the Lord Jesus. And they not only listened and heard His words, they also walked with Him observing His application of those words.

And here in this passage, we are also told that Jesus "opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures."

So then, I believe that it would be safe to say that these men, probably had an excellent knowledge concerning the things of God, certainly enough to be trustworthy witnesses for Him.

But also, as we have learned from the words of 1 Corinthians 2, such knowledge alone is never enough. It also takes the Holy Spirit of God abiding within us before we can truly discern the real meanings of the truths we have learned. That is why Jesus added the words in verse 49,

⁴⁹ Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

These words, the “promise of My Father” is God's Holy Spirit whom Jesus would send forth to live and abide within all people who receive Him as Savior and Lord. And these men were to wait until the Spirit was poured out upon them.

May I pause for a moment and ask each of us, “Do we not see a pattern being developed here?”

God is clearly revealing to us that He does not simply draw us to him in salvation and then, mysteriously “implant” Holy knowledge within our minds and then tell us to immediately go out into the world and He will give us all the revelation we will need to share with the people that we meet.

I do agree that He can do that. But is that the plan that He is revealing to us here in His word?

Not at all! Not at all! The plan that He is clearly revealing to us here is that we are to “come to Him and learn of Him”. And He pledges His Holy Spirit to abide within us to help us in that learning.

With His Spirit's presence within us, we will begin to understand and comprehend the truths of scripture in ways that we have never been able to do before.

And here, while Jesus was still with His disciples, He showed them the way that this great plan of God was to take place. Here, He opened their minds and the understanding of their hearts to all that these scriptures reveal, enabling these men to go forward and preach the gospel as He intended.

I have to say that I am so excited for these men at this very special moment in their lives. For three and a half years they were learning truths and precepts and methods of application of the gospel, but they barely understood any of it.

But here, all of a sudden, everything began to become clear and understandable. Their ears were opened to hear and their eyes were opened to see and suddenly wonderful and precious understanding came into their minds. How exciting that must have been for them! Listen again!

⁴⁴ Then He (Jesus) said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."
(Luke 24:44)

Wow! What an exciting moment! All that they had been learning suddenly became understandable to them.

And thankfully, Jesus was not finished with their understanding. He had much, much more for them to learn.

He would be leaving them soon. In just a few days, He would ascend back into heaven and would reign at the right hand of His Father forevermore.

But as He would leave them, He would not abandon them to their own wits and devices. Not at all! No, the next part of God's great plan was just beginning. And it would be carried on forward without even one moment's hesitation.

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus in John 16:7-14. There He said,

⁷ . . . I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.(John 16:7-14)

This is what God intended for these disciples, and this is what He intends for you and me.

He has given us His words of truth, from the beginning words in Genesis through the final words of Revelation. And we are told repeatedly in these scriptures that we are to search them diligently, learning from them, committing them to memory, chewing on them, digesting them, and speaking them back out to ourselves, to our families and to others we meet along the way. Listen!

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

And in Deuteronomy 6:6-9

⁶ "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Simply put, God has given us His precious truth and you and I have an obligation to rightly handle it, to read it, to store its truths within our hearts, to pray through it, to apply it in our daily lives, and then to speak it back out, first to our families, then on out to anyone and everyone that we encounter along our daily path of life.

And that answers the question that I first put before us as we began this study. The question, "are we able to get up immediately from our knees after first receiving Christ as our Savior, and then, without further preparation, begin to expound upon the scriptures so that others can be saved?"

Again yes, we can trust that God's Holy Spirit will give us exactly what we need to say if we are unexpectedly called before the magistrates and authorities. And in those moments, He can give us something to say that we had never known before.

But these words clearly demonstrate to us that it is more likely God's plan that His Spirit will bring back to our minds things that He has already taught us on earlier occasions as we have read and studied and as we have listened to His word being given.

Folks God's plan calls for us to be blessed ourselves as we learn of the Lord Jesus, His ways, His holiness, His righteousness. And then, as we go about our day, those things that we have learned will be present within our behavior. And others will then hear and see our testimony and be blessed.

And yes, at times, mysterious truths will flow out of our mouths. But for the most part, the witness that God calls us to show will simply come forth from all that we have been learning from our diligent study of His scriptures.

And miraculously, as others see and hear our witness they will want what we have, the presence of God's precious Holy Spirit. And they will turn and be saved. And isn't that a wonderful plan! And it works perfectly!

Before we close, may I give us the caution once again about the dangers of getting "application before precepts", and there are many of those dangers. I see whole denominations of people going off in wrong directions, struggling in their faith and in their efforts, simply because they have not stopped to learn the precious truths that God has given within His word.

Folks, the simple truth is, we can't tell other people about someone that we know little or nothing about ourselves. And excitement and enthusiasm about new-found faith is not enough to assure that we will get our witness and our application right before God.

Misguided enthusiasm has led many people and those who agree with them astray.

Am I saying that a new Christian should not eagerly share their new-found faith? Not at all! I am simply saying that the more a believer immerses themselves in the truths of God, the better they will be at applying those truths.

May I share one quick example from the scriptures and then we will close. This from Acts 18:24-26. Listen!

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:24-26)

This man Apollos was not at all unlearned. From these words, we see that he was excellent in most every way and he gave an excellent message. But his message was incomplete. It did not give the full message of the gospel. It spoke only of repentance, but left out much about the grace of Christ and the salvation that His grace imparts through faith in His shed blood. Thankfully, Aquila and Priscilla were able to help him complete his message.

So then, yes be an enthusiastic witness for the Lord, but also, be diligent in your learning of His precepts.

Listen to those words from Matthew chapter 11 as we close. Jesus said,
²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:20)

Pray with me!