

How Does Expository Teaching Make Disciples?

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This book is dedicated to my wife who helped me write it, and all those who want to make disciples.

Through expository teaching we are able to act out the Bible and so become more like Jesus Christ.

The problem

In January of 2017 I moved with my wife to South Korea to teach at an International Christian School. We lived in a small coastal town and the choice of church membership was only down to two churches mainly because they had an English service. As we visited these churches I was once again confronted with a problem I had seen and experienced first-hand in all four of the local churches I have held membership in. Essentially the problem was that at the heart of the Christianity both these churches embodied was one that lacked disciple making. This observation seems to be shared among some of the great church leaders such as John Wesley who says that the reason Christian communities have done so little good in the world is because they are producing so few real Christians. Fast forward many years and Hull observes the same problem when he says that a, “non discipleship Christianity dominates much of the thinking of the contemporary church.” It is because of this discipleship crisis that we see so few Christians resembling Christ: divorce rates are high, pornography is rampant, church splits are common, comfort is sought more than selfless living, God’s word is devalued, to name a few. The reality however should be something very different, because “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ” (Bonhoeffer) and no one wants a Christianity without Christ because that would be insanity.

Following on from this problem I began to investigate what the bible says about making disciples. It was obvious to me that the most widely used passage that mentions disciple making is known as the Great Commission: Matthew 28:16-20. While there are other scriptures that could be used to help us understand disciple making, this is arguably the best one. MacArthur confirms this in his commentary where he states, "This passage is the climax and focal point not only of this gospel but of the entire New Testament. It is not an exaggeration to say, that in its broad sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture." In this important section of Matthew's gospel, Jesus clearly mandates two methods for how we are to accomplish the task of disciple making. He says firstly, "baptizing them...and secondly, "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). While reading various commentaries on this text I discovered Hendriksen and Kistemaker who argue that this command to teach is central to making disciples, because it "precedes and follows baptizing."

As I continued to think about the lack of discipleship in the Christianity I see around me, along with this idea that teaching is central to making disciples, I decided to research why this should be the case. Before I can state how the teaching of Matthew 28:20 makes disciples, I need to explain what Jesus

means by, “make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (vv. 19-20). However before I can do this I must clarify that even though the command to “make disciples” (v. 19) applies to both believers and non-believers, *I will focus only on believers in this essay.*

What did Jesus mean by, “Make disciples”?

According to Dever, a disciple of Jesus is one who follows in Jesus’ steps, doing what Jesus taught and living how Jesus lived. Morris also states that in the Gospel of Matthew, a disciple is both a learner and a follower. Morris states that “A disciple takes Jesus as his teacher and learns from him”, and also follows Jesus.

Here we have what two scholars have to say about disciples, but how does the New Testament describe what a disciple is? In all four gospels we see that a common word used to describe the followers of Jesus is the word disciple or disciples. Some examples are: Matthew 5:1, Mark 10:23, Luke 18:1 and John 20:2. What we see is that these people followed Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark we see Jesus’ words to Simon and his brother Andrew, “follow me” (1:17). In the Gospel of Matthew we see people learning from Jesus as Matthew shows Jesus saying, “learn from me” (11:29). And in the Gospel of John we see people imitating Jesus and becoming like him in the

process, as John states Jesus saying, “love one another, even as I have loved you” (13:34). In conclusion, it is clear from the New Testament and other writers that a disciple is someone who follows and learns from Jesus, becoming like him as they do this.

This understanding of what a biblical disciple is, directly informs the discussion about what it means to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:20, NIV), because making disciples essentially means enabling people to follow and learn from Jesus, becoming like him as they do this. What I find interesting is that scholars talk about three words, which, as I will show, essentially mean the same thing. They are the words: make disciple, discipleship and discipling. Morris, in his commentary on Matthew defines Jesus’ words, “make disciples” as the work of making people who learn and follow Jesus, becoming like him as they do so. While Morris uses and defines this phrase, Dever does not. He talks about the word discipling. He says that discipling is “helping others follow Jesus.” If this is what Dever says, what does Hull say about the term discipleship? He says that discipleship is, “The process of becoming like Jesus.” What we see from all three of these definitions is that the terms: make disciples, discipling and discipleship all essentially mean the same thing. Therefore, it is not important which of these terms we use. However for the sake of clarity I have chosen to use

the phrase 'make disciples' because it is the term Matthew uses in the central text of this research.

Following on from this, it is important to consider how the New Testament defines the term 'make disciples'? In Paul's letters to the Corinthians we see that he constantly has in mind the goal of enabling them to be more like Jesus. For example, when addressing the division over leadership in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Paul helps them to move onto maturity by saying, "Is Christ divided?" In doing this he was appealing to them to be one as Christ's body is one. Another example is from 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul shows what is happening to them through what they go through. He says that they are being, "transformed into his image." This is a clear verse that shows that Paul had in his mind Christ-likeness for the people he was making disciples of. We also see this in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He calls them to be humble as Jesus is humble and in doing this he is leading them to learn from Jesus and to follow Jesus, becoming like him as they do. He says, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mind set as Christ Jesus" (2:5).

What did Jesus mean by, "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"?

Central to my research topic is a term widely used in the local church among many pastors. The term and practice of expository teaching has been around for centuries. While investigating this topic, I discovered a definition for expository preaching that I argue can be used to infer a definition for expository teaching. For this to happen however, it is imperative that I firstly discuss the relationship between preaching and teaching.

In their book *Preaching that Changes Lives*, Fabarez and Macarthur argue that while there may be superficial or stylistic differences between the activities of teaching and preaching, the biblical distinctions are inconsequential. They argue that the Greek word, 'Didasko', which is commonly translated as 'teaching' as in Matthew 28:20 and the Greek word 'Kerysso' which is commonly translated as 'preaching', as in 2 Timothy 4:2 describe the same form of communicating God's word. This form is much more than a dry message, but it is a life changing message communicated in power. Bosch says the same thing while discussing the apparent distinction between the command in Matthew 28:20 to "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" and the command by Jesus found in Luke, John and Acts to speak his words with power, calling people to faith and repentance, as Acts 1:8 states, "You will receive power the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be

my witnesses. Bosch says that while there may appear to be a difference between the word “teaching” in Matthew 28:20 and the word “preaching” in Acts, the truth is that the word “teaching” in Matthew includes more than just speaking to the intellect, but is also a call to follow God. In saying these things, all three of these scholars argue that the word “teaching” in Matthew and the word “preaching” found in other places in the New Testament describes the same activity.

Now that we have established the relationship between preaching and teaching I can discuss the definition for expository teaching. Firstly, the word expository in the phrase, expository teaching, essentially means that the content of the teaching is God’s word expounded. Stott essentially argues that the word expository is significant because, “To expound scripture is to bring out of the text, what is there and expose it to view.” This is why it makes more sense to talk about expository teaching, not just teaching.

Secondly, in his book *Biblical Preaching* Robinson says that expository preaching is “Communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher applies it to the hearers.”

In this definition we see two main characteristics. The first is, speaking God's word and the second is, applying God's word to the hearers. I like Robinson's definition because it contains two of the central qualities of biblical communication: speaking and application. Lawson, however, goes further to suggest that it's not just speaking in of itself, but speaking the "intended meaning of a text" (Lawson) while Hughes says of application that we must "Show how the text of Scripture is to be applied in the believer's life." In this definition we see that expository teaching is, "A message from God to people", as Lloyd Jones says.

The last question that must be asked is, does the New Testament agree with this definition? Let's briefly consider three examples. The first is Jesus' teachings to two believers on the road to Emmaus. While walking to Emmaus with two disciples, Jesus, "explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Lk. 24:27, NIV). This is followed later on in Luke 24:32 with the description made by these disciples that while Jesus spoke to them their "hearts burned within" (NIV) Jesus' teachings here must have been more than just the communication of ideas. He must have applied the scriptures to invoke this kind of a response from his listeners. One commentator says, "Jesus' clearly did not just quote Scripture to them, but explained the Scriptures to them which

brought about conviction and deep understanding of the entire Old Testament” (Williams 2014).

The second example is that of Peter’s sermon in Acts 10:34-48. In this section of Acts we see Peter proclaiming the message of the gospel to Cornelius and his household, all of whom were Gentiles. In his message he explains that after Christ was baptized by John and “anointed ...with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38, NIV), Jesus “Went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38, NIV). Peter continues by explaining that after these events Jesus was killed on a cross, “But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen” by many people (Acts 10:40, NIV). Following Peter’s explanation of these biblical ideas, Peter moves onto applying them as he calls Cornelius and the other Gentiles to believe in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. He says, “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43, NIV).

The third example is that of Paul’s sermon in Acts 13:16-41. In this text we see Paul speaking in a synagogue using the Old Testament to show that in fact, Jesus is the Messiah who died and rose again. Paul adds into his message that this message is for them and that, “through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” (Acts 13:38, NIV). In both examples from

Acts we see the definition of expository teaching that I am contending for which includes the speaking of God's word and applying it.

After defining these terms I can now suggest one way in which the teaching of Matthew 28:20, which is expository teaching, makes disciples. My reason is that those who hear expository teaching will act out God's words and so become more like Christ, accomplishing the task of making disciples.

How do we know that expository teaching makes disciples?

- *NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WHO BECOME LIKE CHRIST THROUGH EXPOSITORY TEACHING*

In Luke 19:1-10 we read about the effects that Jesus has on Zacchaeus the tax collector. Jesus enters Jericho and spends some time with Zacchaeus, a corrupt tax collector or sinner, as those who knew him describe him to be. We do not know exactly what happens during their time together. However, I believe that since the main activity that Christ undertook to do before dying on the cross was to preach the good news of the

Kingdom (Luke 4:43), Jesus probably spent a great deal of time speaking to Zacchaeus about the truth. This interaction would most certainly have included the application of these truths to Zacchaeus' life which is what Jesus commonly practiced. For example we see in John 13:34 Jesus teaching his followers, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." At some point in their interaction, Zacchaeus "stood up and said... I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (v. 8) In response to this, Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9). This account clearly shows that expository teaching caused Zacchaeus to act on the words of Jesus and therefore become like him. In other words, Zacchaeus acts on Christ's commands and so becomes like Jesus. Transformation in the life of Zacchaeus is obvious when considering what it means that Zacchaeus was a, "tax collector" (v. 1). MacArthur states that tax collectors were, "hated by their own people, not only as extortioners but as traitors. In Israel they were ranked with the lowest of human society—sinners, prostitutes, and Gentiles." This description makes sense when we read verse 7 where some townsfolk called Zacchaeus a, "sinner." Consider this corrupt man, who after spending this time with Jesus, chose to give away half of his possessions to the poor and pay back anyone who he had cheated – four times what he had taken. This truly is significant and was only

possible because he came into contact with Jesus, the word of God who applied his teachings to Zacchaeus.

Another record is found in a message delivered by Peter on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment with Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:1-4), Luke recounts a sermon delivered by Peter to a large group of people (Acts 2:14-41). Peter performs two main activities in this message. Firstly he speaks from the scriptures. Peter uses Joel's prophecy found in Joel 2:28-32 describing the coming of the Spirit that happened on that day. Following this he talks about Jesus's death and resurrection, climaxing with the claim that, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (v. 36). When the listeners hear this explanation of God's word they are "cut to the heart" (v. 37) and cried out, "Brother, what shall we do?" (v. 37). To which Peter applied the teachings about Jesus by commanding them to, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you" (v. 38). Peter continues and says to them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (v. 40). His account clearly shows that teaching which is expository in nature caused these listeners to act on the word of God and therefore become like Christ. Peter's sermon clearly displays how I define expository teaching to be because he explained biblical principles and then applied them by calling his listeners to repent and be baptized. We are told that, "those who

accepted his message were baptized” (v. 41). Those who accepted this expository teaching acted on it and so became more like Christ. We know this because they were baptized and before the disciples would have baptized them they would have known that these men had faith and faith means that they were clothed with the righteousness of Jesus as Paul states, “having been justified by faith” (Romans 5:1).

- *MODERN WRITES WHO ARGUE THAT EXPOSITORY TEACHING MAKES DISCIPLES*

There are a number of modern writers who argue that we become like Christ as we act out God’s words which are proclaimed through biblical teaching.

In his article *Making Disciples from the Pulpit*, Alexander argues that “preaching is actually one of the main ways we make and encourage followers of Jesus.” Preaching makes disciples and encourages disciples since through it God’s words are taught and used to call people to repent and believe and through repentance and faith we become like Jesus. Alexander says that the preaching of God’s word is the medium needed for disciple making because it, “gets across the authority of the gospel.” As the authority of God’s word is proclaimed without the opportunity for debate or excuses the

rebelliousness within us is met head on allowing God's word to change us. This is how expository teaching is able to make disciples because our rebellion is not given the room to reject his words as we are sitting and listening instead of debating. While I do agree with Alexander on this point as I have experienced it personally while sitting under expository preaching, it is possible for a stubborn person to sit under God's word expounded and not respond.

Dallas Willard, in his book *Renovation of the Heart*, argues, along similar lines as Alexander, as he states that Jesus, "comes in and rearranges" our lives by transforming us from the deepest part of our being and that this change spills out into the rest of our lives including society where we go as agents of change to change society not through rules imposed from the outside but by seeing others changed from the inside. How do we become like Jesus from the inside out? Willard is aware that, "pure will – with gritted teeth – will not be enough." The first step is to identify the, "habits of will, thoughts, feelings, social relations, bodily inclinations, and soul responses that prevent us from" being transformed in the image of Christ. The second step is to, "retrain my thinking through study of and meditation on the teachings of Scripture about God, His world and my life. Especially helpful are the words and act of Jesus in the Gospels." Willard claims the centrality of the word of God

for this into the image of Christ. change. He says that we can listen, study, meditate and memorize scripture and through doing this we join with the Holy Spirit in his word of transforming us.

The last source I would like to make note of is the book *Preaching that Changes lives* by Fabarez and MacArthur. In chapter one they argue convincingly that through Biblical teaching and preaching, God's word is spoken and changes the lives of those who hear it, making them like Christ. They say that God's intention in teaching and preaching is to change us, it is for us to see our audience "transformed." In addition to this, they claim that, biblical teaching and preaching is powerful because it is filled with God's life changing word. In commenting on the power of biblical teaching and preaching they say that, "we must take Sangster's counsel" and "recall the effects of powerful preaching on your own life." They say that, "We must never underestimate the... power of Biblical preaching. By it God transforms His people." These writers state clearly that preaching God's word changes us because it calls us to act.

A few last words

At the start of this I spoke about the lack of discipleship taking place in many of the local churches I had attended. This

experience is noted by others, including Hull, who says that a, “non discipleship Christianity dominates much of the thinking of the contemporary church.” Thankfully the Bible provides us with a solution to this problem as we read the words of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”. Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples through baptizing and teaching all kinds of people to obey his commands. I noted that the activity of teaching is central to making disciples and I argued that the form of teaching is expository in nature. Understanding the definitions of expository teaching and disciple making, I suggested one hypothetical reason for the centrality of expository teaching in making disciples which is that, those who hear expository teaching will act out God’s words and so become more like Christ accomplishing the task of making disciples.