A Conscious Decision

The focus of most discipleship programs is on the “what.” This is typically a program to cover church doctrine, small group involvement, the importance of giving and attendance. The motivation for this is assumed to be gratitude for forgiveness and the hope of a home in heaven. Seen much like a retirement program, this motivation is not always able to overcome the stresses and temptations of life. Church attendance, let alone getting involved in a ministry, is given less value than sports, family events, and other distractions. While there is a valid need and concern for teaching, this comes after discipleship according to Jesus in the Matthew version of His command:

Baptize the disciple

Disciple: Someone Convicted of who Jesus is

If they have not come to full belief and acceptance of ***who*** Jesus is, then the cross has little if any affect. After all, only God in the flesh could mount that cross and produce the desired outcomes.

The ***Why*** of Discipleship

Jesus is the ***WHY*** of discipleship! To close the back door, go back to basics and make sure everyone is converted, no matter how long they claim a relationship with Jesus.

This is the design of ***Teaching the Church to GO****…*

Contact us today for more information.

Discipleship Formula

(Acts)2:38

**=**

[Discipleship]

Restoring the NT Pattern for making Disciples

**Teaching4Jesus**

Ministries

The Formula

I do not find many people who are good at or fond of math on any level beyond basic 1 + 1. Thus, the proposal of turning a biblical passage into a mathematical formula seems quite odd. However, as I thought of how best to propose the significance of ***the two key elements of forgiveness and reception of the Spirit*** found in Acts 2:38 and thus, fulfilling Jesus’ command to make disciples, it seemed beneficial to unpack this verse, proposing it as the ***biblical formula*** for making disciples. To understand how this works, it is imperative that we examine the context of Peter’s sermon that resulted in 3,000 conversions (Acts 2: 41).

The Context

While contemporary evangelism has drifted into the Reformed/Evangelical camp, focusing on human sinfulness and need for salvation, Peter’s focus was squarely on Jesus. One cannot read the text of the sermon and avoid this conclusion. His summary passage in 2:36 focuses on Jesus’ person and nature.

“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both **Lord** and **Messiah**—***this Jesus*** whom you crucified.”

Nowhere in the sermon does Peter focus on the human need for salvation. That was not the Gospel taught them by Jesus. Paul confirms this same focus in Romans 1:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, and 2 Timothy 2:8. Before we concentrate on the ***Acts 2:38 Formula for Discipleship***, let's unpack the Gospel, comparing Peter’s sermon to Paul definition of the Gospel in Romans 1.

Restoration Appeal

The vision of restoring New Testament Christianity was founded on three biblical principles:

**Truth 🙞 Unity 🙜 Evangelism**

The biblical basis countered the dependance on the creedal statements formulated by the various groups that grew out of the 16th century Reformation. Campbell, Stone, and other Restoration leaders took seriously the mantra *sola Scriptura* (Scripture only), studying it to find, as Paul told Timothy, “Wisdom that leads to salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).

While Luther and Calvin countered much of the Catholic traditions, they did continue the teachings of Augustine whose Greek influence focused on the human condition. From Luther on, two principles were foundational to their message.

1. The depravity of humanity from the fall
2. Forgiveness as the core message of the Gospel

As is clear from the biblical teachings in Peter and Paul’s ministries, Jesus is the heart of the message. To restore the original, intended plan of God, it is essential that the truth about Jesus become the core message. From this, unity will result and excitement over who Jesus is and that we are in Him, sharing His divine nature will motivate us to become *Ambassadors for Chris* (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The Formula Applied

Most church leaders would agree that the back door of the church is wide open. That is, the rate of loss is often as high or higher than the rate of growth. This is a widespread problem in churches. Is there an identifiable reason for this? **Teaching4Jesus Ministries** is convinced that the primary weakness lies with the conversion (or lack of) experienced by many who call themselves Christians. As Dallas Willard has confirmed, we have “massive, non-disciple Christianity” (Willard, Dallas. “Foreword.” The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited, Revised Edition, Zondervan, 2016, pp. 15–16).

I contend that the problem is our definition of disciple. It is often stated simply as a *follower of Jesus.* While in essence this is true, it limits understanding to mere knowledge with little to no emphasis on commitment. Here is my definition of a disciple:

**A disciple is someone who has committed themself to Kingdom principles in full devotion to King Jesus.**

This definition is about commitment. It is about covenant faithfulness. It is about a life controlled by the Spirit of King Jesus. It is produced by the message that God invaded His perfect but cursed world when He shared flesh and blood with us to reclaim by recreation those who are now under the slavery of death that is controlled by the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15). Our Gospel presentation should focus on the person and nature of Jesus, producing cross-carrying disciples who will then commit to His body (the church), serving as Royal Ambassadors for King Jesus.

The Focus

The following table compares the key elements of Peter’s Pentecost sermon to Paul’s description of the Gospel in Romans 1.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acts 2:14-36** | **Romans 1:2-4** |
| Spoken through the prophet Joel  David says of Him | Promised beforehand through His prophets |
| Jesus the Nazarene | Son, who was born |
| Descendant on his throne | descendant of David |
| Delivered over | Resurrection from the dead |
| raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death | declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection |
| Lord and Messiah | Messiah our Lord |

The Gospel focuses on King Jesus. The focus is on His intervention for and interaction with humanity. This is the message that produced 3,000 conversions. This is the story that prompted continual devotion to the “Apostles’ teachings, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This is the Gospel of King Jesus.

**NOTE:** 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Timothy 2 focus on elements of the Gospel as in Acts and Romans, limiting them to key points needed for the purpose of their writings. Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthians was to identify “which” Christ by stating it was the one with a death and resurrection *according to Scripture* (Hebrew writings; OT). He told Timothy, *remember* Jesus, “risen from the dead, a descendant of David.”

Remission of Sins

Jesus was asked, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” As they anticipated, the correct answer is, “Yes, only God!” Jesus’ declaration of the right to forgive is confirmed by Peter and Paul under the designation of *Lord.* The baptism Peter is introducing as the correct response to Jesus’ Lordship connects the believer to Jesus’ cross as Paul will teach the Romans (Romans 6). Peter does not need to explain the theology. That’s not required for someone to be a baptized disciple. Rather, the hearer must conclude that Jesus is ***Lord and Messiah***. They must ***make a*** ***conscious decision*** to submit to His authority, allowing them to be transferred from a dark world (Peter calls it a *perverse* generation; Acts 2:40) into the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). This process of redemption (Colossians 1:14) means you are no longer your own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Redemption and Forgiveness

Redemption is introduced in the Old Testament when YHWH is described as the one who redeemed Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 13:15; 15:15). This was a change of ownership from slavery under Pharaoh to service for YHWH (Exodus 8:1, 20). As with the tabernacle, the priest was required to pass by the altar and laver before being able to serve. In other words, they had to be *clean enough to serve.* Paul paints this same picture in Titus 2:14, using the model of redemption for purification of a people “zealous for good deeds.” Thus, baptism and forgiveness prepare us for ***service to King Jesus.*** Once clean (forgiven), we are fit to be “in Christ.” Additionally, the disciple is now ready to be taught all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42).

Gift of the Holy Spirit

An evangelistic sermon is not typically the place to teach theology. Peter knew that Jesus’ Apostles would be teaching them, and, as 2:42 tells us, the new disciples of King Jesus (descendant of David) would devote themselves to their instruction. Believing that there was a consistency (we call it orthodoxy; Paul called it tradition [1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6]), Peter would teach them that they would become participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This follows John’s teachings of the Spirit convicting the world of righteousness because Jesus is leaving to be with His Father and is no longer visible in our world (16:8, 10). Let me bring this down to the most basic description:

The Spirit is Jesus *without* a body!

Because the Spirit is not limited to a physical location and is able to penetrate our heart and mind, we can share (Peter uses the word *koinonia*) Jesus’ nature. Why? Because we have been forgiven (cleaned up) and now the Spirit can gift us for service. “As each one has received a gift (*charisma*), employ it in ***serving*** one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Peter says the same thing Paul told Titus – the spiritual gifts are for service. Paul details the relation between God, Jesus, and the Spirit, indicating the Spirit gives the gifts, Jesus is Lord over the giftedness (the church), and God is the one who uses the gifts (effects) for the benefit of His plan (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Thus, the gift of the Holy Spirit puts God’s plan into action under the authority of King Jesus in those transferred (redeemed) into the *kingdom of the* ***Beloved Son*** (Colossians 1:13-14).