



August 25, 2024
“Content of Belief”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Camp starts August 29th

330 N. Somers Rd. (Mail: PO Box 10626) Kalispell, MT 59904~ (406) 755-1776

Visit the website ~ www.myaletheia.com

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Emails: pastor@myaletheia.com, stacey.sundt@myaletheia.com

For the Kids: What you believe is more important than how much you believe it.

The very first far-reaching, intentional missionary journey begins... Why?

Why don't Christians just leave everyone alone?

The cancel culture.

- 1) Do we avoid evangelism because we are embarrassed?
- 2) Do we evangelize because we're legalistic?
- 3) Do we simply see the field as the enemy?

The reason we evangelize is that Jesus commanded us...

We are ordered by our Lord, to “make disciples of all.”

Make:

Disciples:

of All:

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Set no limitations on whom you target. Why does a person think that abortion is okay? (I John 4:18, Romans 10:13–15).

Loving the unlovely is difficult but that's why we're going to do it through His power and in His authority.

How? 1) We "baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Psalm 3:8, Acts 4:12).

How? 2) By "teaching them to follow all that I commanded you."

It is for the church to disciple people and the church does that by having each and every member of the church actively playing their part in the process.

ACTS 13:6-12 ~

Sergius Paulus was proconsul of Cyprus and had family living in Pisidian Antioch His Roman cognomen Paulus, or Paul was the same as Saul's.

The Jew Bar-Jesus was a magus or transliterated from Arabic, an Elymas. Elymas was actively opposing our guys.

In verse 9, Saul is first called by his Roman cognomen Paul. Paul wasn't necessarily angry with the false prophet personally, but with the opposition to God's Message (Ephesians 6:12).

Notice that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to Elymas through Paul.

Sergius Paulus believed because he saw something crazy, but his belief became Salvific by believing in the Resurrected Jesus, Whom Paul and Barnabas preached.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____

Last week we saw how the Holy Spirit through the church leaders at Antioch and then through the whole church there, sent Barnabas and Saul along with John Mark on the very first missionary journey. A far-reaching trek with the goal of expanding the universal church, the very Kingdom of God on earth.

I had asked why they did that and, by extension, why we still have Christians actively involved in sharing the Gospel today, which comes at great personal cost, and at a cost to the church. It's such a part of the Christian ethos that we have preachers and missionaries that we probably don't think about it much, but it is an odd thing that a group of people, like Christians, would be compelled to spread their message to others when there is so much resistance to that message.

I mean we all like to encourage others to join in the things that we think are cool, but unless there is a personal reward of some kind, we are not going to do that if we get some opposition. In that case, it's like, "fine, whatever, I was just trying to be helpful or nice."

So why don't Christians just leave everyone alone? That goes both inside and outside the church – believe me. It's a question that many people, especially young

people, have been asking with greater and greater intensity and nastiness. The common refrain is, “keep your religion to yourself, your Christian ethics out of society, your outdated morality off of my body.”

The cancel culture first and foremost wants to silence, or cancel, any voice with which they disagree especially when it comes to issues of societal ethics and the subsequent morality of the culture as promoted by a Biblical, Judeo-Christian, worldview.

Why not leave everyone alone? It's a serious question as to why we Christians try to change the various belief systems that non-Christians hold and simultaneously try to hold Christians accountable to the Biblical belief system. Why don't we simply leave everyone alone as they demand?

I suppose the answer fighting to burst out of most Christians when they hear this question is because we don't want to see people go to the bad place. Maybe we put it positively by saying that we want them to find the same joy and peace that we have found and ultimately end up in the good place.

In working through that I have brought up far more questions and potential side issues than you might realize. Like... 1) We encourage others to join what we think is cool – perhaps there isn't as much personal evangelism because many Christians don't think that Christianity is cool. 2) Some Christians and others, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, do evangelize because they do believe legalistically that there is a reward for them. 3) When the American Christian community started getting extreme blowback from people wanting to be immoral, we mostly did back off of personal evangelism and instead we chose to see them as the enemy rather than the field and then fought them politically. It's probably okay, I mean the Jews did exactly the same thing 2,000 years ago.

You can think through all of that on your own and come to your own conclusions, but the question for today remains... Why share the Gospel with others?

Fundamentally, foundationally, and principally, the reason is that Jesus commanded us to share what we have received from Him with others. Specifically, we are ordered by Christ, our Lord, to “make disciples of all.” That's the command. The single command given

by Jesus, as what we call, the Great Commission, coming at the very end of Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 28:16–20, 16But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated to them. 17And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

It is a command based upon His Command to Love. If we Love Jesus, we obey Him (His words, not mine). And if we Love others as He commands us then we share the with them the greatest possible news the world has ever known. We freely and even sacrificially offer them the one bit of information that can Save them for all eternity.

When we examine Christ's command and our commission, it's obvious that "make" is an activity. It's a verb to manufacture, produce, or to build something

and in this case, it is “disciples.” Disciple is from the same root as discipline. It is to guide, steer, train, or mentor, another to grow in a particular way – here, it is in “the way that they should go” – it is in the way that Jesus directs.

The “all” word might be the most troublesome. It is literally all people from every nation, race, tribe, tongue, whatever. It isn’t make disciples out of all the people you enjoy, or approve of, or fit your comfort zone; it is all people... Period.

The meat and bones of making disciples of all, is first to set no limitations on whom we target. Jesus said, of “all nations,” meaning of all ethnicities, cultures, races, creeds, colors, and yes, of all political affiliations. No exclusions.

Why does a person think that abortion is a good thing? Only because they want control over their life even if it costs the life of someone else – even if it costs the life of their own son or daughter. That extreme desire for control can only come from fear. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear” (I John 4:18). God is telling us that the solution to abortion is His love embraced.

How can a person embrace Christ's love? "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," and by definition, filled with His love. But how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in Him whom they have not heard of? And how are they to hear of Him without a preacher? How can there be a preacher unless they are sent by the church? (Romans 10:13–15).

Still, loving the unlovely is very difficult and maybe too difficult, but that is why the Great Commission comes as a component of the Command to Love. Let's look at it from another angle... Before the phrase "make disciples of all," we have the word "therefore," and as you know, whenever we see a "therefore," we need to ask ourselves, "what is it there for?"

At the end of Matthew 28, the Resurrected Jesus explained that now, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." He then said, "Go, therefore," meaning that because "all" and again, "all," is "all," without exception, because "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." That's the key to, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." We're going to do it through His power and in

His authority because He is with us. That part (sort of #3) is amplified and made explicit at the end of the passage.

That's the command and the reason for the command as well as the power and authority behind the command. You might say, "I thought that there was more to it than just making disciples." Nope, that's it, but Jesus being so gracious and good to us expounded on how we are to "make disciples."

So next, we have, #1 "baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." That literally means that the process of making disciples includes including them in the church. We indoctrinate them into the fold and accept them as members of the Family of God.

I mentioned the other day that Baptism is the organized Christian community recognizing through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that a particular person has passed out of death into Life spiritually. It is an acting out physically what God has already declared metaphysically. It is harmonizing on earth with what is already true in Heaven.

As such it is far more than a simple ritual, ceremony, or observance, but on the other hand, it is definitely not something that is Salvific in nature – it cannot possibly be a work done by men that moves God to act. Quite the reverse.

What it is then is a supernatural recognition by Christians through the power of the Holy Spirit to welcome into the Body of Christ another person who is also covered by the Blood of Jesus. It is Christians accepting a Christian.

I kept using plurals and also plainly stated that it was a physical enactment of a metaphysical reality by an “organized Christian community.” Many Christians have participated in Baptisms that were conducted by a friend or two in a lake or stream. Other Christians have participated in Baptisms in a church setting where it was all about the person allowing themselves to be Baptized.

Both of those are wrong. I’m not saying that those Baptisms are invalid, just that they miss the point of Baptism entirely. Again, the act itself is not Salvific because if it was it would mean that either the minister, or the institution/church/denomination behind him, or

the person being baptized, or some combination of the three would be doing something to enact Salvation.

The Bible is crystal clear on relatively few things, but this is one of them. There is nothing that any human being, group of human beings, or institution, can do to accomplish the Salvation of even a single soul.

“Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Psalm 3:8). That’s what God has to say about it. It is entirely His doing meaning that it is none of our doing.

Salvation is the result of a person believing in the completed work of Jesus the Christ, the Word of God made flesh, not their own work. “There is no other Name in which to be Saved” (Acts 4:12). Not the minister’s name, not the church’s name, not the individual in question’s name – Jesus’ Name alone.

When, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a person believes Salvifically in Jesus they are “Born again,” born from above, born of the Spirit, and are then Children of the Living God. Then the Holy Spirit enables an “organized Christian community” to validate that reality physically through Baptism.

Why an “organized Christian community”? It’s a descriptive phrase for a local church. It isn’t merely a loose confederation of Christians, but a group of Christians with leaders who are recognized by the Group and who are cognizant of their calling and their responsibility.

I bring that concept of the church up now because the other explanation that Jesus gave us on how to “make disciples of all” is that we would #2 “teach them all” that Jesus commanded the original Apostles.

Let’s look carefully at the context. The original Apostles minus Judas who was no more met with the Resurrected Jesus where He told them to gather. They worshipped Him even though some of the 11 still had doubts, were still confused, about what was going on... So, Jesus explained the plan going forward.

He said that “It is finished.” His sacrificial, propitiatory, substitutionary, death, his hasty burial, and His bodily Resurrection, proved what He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”

Because Jesus had earned and been awarded “All authority in heaven and on earth” He had marching

orders for His 11 remaining guys. That's the context. Jesus, now with all authority over everything both physical and beyond, "therefore" commanded His 11 guys to "Go forth and make disciples of all the nations."

How? #3, By being one with Christ. #1, by Baptizing them into the Body of Christ, and #2 by teaching them all of the things that Jesus had taught the 11. The Great Commission of Christ, as it is called was specifically to those 11 guys and to them only. Except that the second how of the three hows was that they would teach the new disciples "all" that Jesus taught them, which includes this teaching right here.

So, the context of the Command expands to all new disciples, generation after generation, until Christ returns with different instructions. Here's the difficult bit for us individualistic Americans. Was Jesus speaking to individual people or was He speaking to the 11 and beyond as a group?

Technically, both, but with a definite emphasis of the group aspect. In fact, the individual aspect comes only as one is a part of the group. We know this is true for many reasons, but the simplest is that the Baptism

commanded as part of how you make disciples is an initiation into the group.

Far too many Christians today think that Baptism is about them relating individually with Jesus in a public or semipublic setting. For them, the only reason other Christians are involved in their Baptism is as spectators and celebrants. It's like, "I'm getting Baptized, and I want people to celebrate me and my accomplishment – I want people to applaud my commitment to Jesus."

If the congregation of observers was to applaud it would be to applaud Jesus' commitment to you and through His power, your commitment to the congregation. We Christians are Baptized into the church by the church and so Jesus' command here is to the church, not to individuals acting on their own.

Why do you think that the Bible makes such a big deal out of Peter reporting his actions with Cornelius to the church in Jerusalem? Why does God's Word make such a big deal out of the Holy Spirit enabled decision of the church in Antioch of sending out Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark?

We individuals are to obey Christ's command to make disciples by being in-step with Him, by Baptizing them into the church and by teaching them all that He taught the Apostles. You cannot disciple another person individually and even if you could it wouldn't be right.

It is for the church to disciple people and the church does that by having each and every member of the church actively playing their part in the process. We each have different gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ on earth – we cannot do a proper job unless every one of us participates in our personal gifting within the fabric of the whole.

There is absolutely no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity and there is absolutely no such thing as benchwarmer Christianity. You cannot do it alone and you must not force everyone to pick up your slack. Be individually engaged in obeying Jesus as part of the team He has assigned you to.

That's another thing while we're on it... Whom do you think picks the local church body that you belong to? If you pick, then you can unpick anytime you want... I'll just let you think about that one.

I bring all this up for two reasons, First, it's a good review and second, it is the ultimate answer to the question I asked at the start. We bother other people with the Truth because Almighty God has ordered us to. That is actually a little more profound than it sounds.

Let's say that I want to flesh that out a bit further and I say the reason that Jesus wants me to preach is because He loves the people and if I am in Him and He in me then I must also love the people. Sounds reasonable but from that I can get the idea that the reason I preach is because I love the people.

See the shift? See how I take it from an all-God thing and make it about me? A person to whom I was preaching could ask me why I love them, and I could respond that God loves you and since God has filled my heart with His love, I love you too. That's nice, but again, it elevates me.

When we keep it straight that the reason we make disciples is because Jesus commanded it, then the effort remains between Him and our audience. We are merely conduits between the two and as such it is clear that it isn't about us.

Acts 13:6–12, 6When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, stared at him, 10and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not stop making crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

Notice that not only did the church send the group out, it was in fact, a group. We know the group included Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark, but very likely a few others as well.

The southern route between Salamis and Paphos was roughly 120 miles. It took at least a week, and we can be confident that each place our band of missionaries stopped they preached the Gospel.

They arrived in Paphos and at some point, a report of their strange new message reached the Roman governor of the island, and he wanted to hear what our guys had to say. In those days, it was exciting to hear a new idea, see a new invention, or listen to a fresh speech. That was a form of entertainment as well as education.

As always Luke used the correct Roman title for this man Sergius Paulus. We know from historical and archeological evidence that he was proconsul of Cyprus at that time and that he had family living in Pisidian Antioch (that will be relevant later). His Roman cognomen Paulus, or Paul as we say it, was the same as Saul's, meaning that they had some kind of extended familial connection or other interwoven ancestry.

We can't be sure what it was, but the governor would have had an interest in Saul, beyond hearing about his new religious philosophy. Additionally, Barnabas as an

educated man from a well-to-do family with deep roots on the Island, would have also had a deeper connection with the governor.

It's possible that they had met previously or that the governor had met others in Barnabas' family, which could have included his cousin John Mark, or his own extended family.

The governor was likely eager to hear what these interesting men had to say, and so it's easy to imagine how Bar-Jesus, slash, Elymas, would have felt. He quickly recognized that the enthusiastic interest of his meal ticket was piqued by these other upstart Jewish dudes.

Elymas instantly saw them as a threat to his influence on the governor and therefore as a threat to his future in the governor's orbit of power. Our intrepid Christians friends have a Jewish enemy in their midst – what's new?

The Jew Elymas was a magus, which is the singular of magi. He was like those magi who gave gifts to the infant Jesus 50 years earlier. A magus was part science guy, part astronomist/astrologist (they were

basically the same back then), he was part mystical magician, and part philosopher... Hence the translated term for the magi is often “the wise men.”

The Greek term Magus literally means great man and was the technical term for priests and wise men of the Medes, Persians and Babylonians. Magi were the great, or powerful, or wise, men from the East.

His name was Bar-Jesus, but the name Luke used as a translation was Elymas. That name was a translation of his position, occupation, or role, not of his actual name. Elymas is a Greek rendering of the Arabic title for a wise man or sage. It means magus or wise man or as in the NASB translation, “magician.”

In verse 8, it says “for so his name is translated,” which is an accurate translation of the text, but misleads us when we don’t understand the meaning of Elymas. What Luke means by “name” is what the guy was normally called, which in this case, was not his actual name, but his title Magus, or Elymas. Bar-Jesus, is literally translated as “Son of Jesus,” which is a Hellenized or Greek way of saying “Son of Joshua.”

From a Christian perspective he was a “false prophet,” distorting the Truth of God and misleading everyone who listened to him.

So Sergius Paulus who would later go on to be a very influential Roman Senator was intelligent and he sought to hear what these Jewish Christians had to say. He summoned them because he was intently interested in their new Message.

As Barnabas and Saul were beginning to lay out the Gospel for the governor, jealous, self-serving, Elymas was actively opposing them. He was no doubt interrupting, contradicting, sighing, shaking his head in disagreement, murmuring, and outright refuting what the guys were trying to explain.

In verse 9, our former persecutor of the church, is for the very last time referred to as Saul, and for the very first time called Paul. Again, Paul, or Paulus, was his Roman cognomen indicating his Roman citizenship.

Paul was quite obviously exasperated with the active interference with a person receiving the Truth of God that they were eager to hear. This is an important

distinction. Paul didn't go over a thump Elymas. Paul wasn't necessarily angry with the false prophet.

For that to have been the case, it would have meant that Paul was upset at being opposed – he wasn't. Paul was upset that Elymas was interfering with the governor's ability to understand Christ's Gospel of Truth.

What I mean is that there are all kinds of people, including other Christians, who oppose God's Message in one way or another. It will seem as though they are directly opposing you and that's exactly what the enemy wants you to think.

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). If you take the bait, you've got a competition between you and those opposing God's work. You've made it about you.

Instead, realize that the real conflict is spiritual, and it is therefore between Good and evil, between the Holy Spirit and the forces of darkness. Stay focused on the

task at hand. Preach the Truth without getting flustered while simultaneously remaining in-tune with the Holy Spirit.

Notice that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to Elymas through Paul. He was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” which is a way of saying that Paul was in concert with the Spirit – he was allowing himself to be led by God as he turned and addressed Elymas directly.

I read the article that went with this slide. None of the 12 suggestions was pronouncing instant physical judgement from God on the heckler. Doing what Paul did is not something that you want to do without the power of the Holy Spirit directing you in that way, but if the Holy Spirit is directing you do not stifle or quash His direction and be prepared to be amazed at what He does.

In this case, Paul calmly revealed the Truth about Elymas, that he was “full of all deceit and fraud.” That he was a “son of the devil.” And that he was an “enemy of all righteousness.” Paul then asked Elymas a very simple question... “Will you not stop making crooked the straight ways of the Lord?”

We can assume that by what happens next Elymas wasn't falling on his knees in repentance at this point and so under the direction of the Holy Spirit Paul went on to declare the decision of God in the matter. "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." Paul didn't curse the dude, he simply recognized what God had decided.

That "Now, behold," business is serious because it means right this moment. You have to either be a fool or filled with the Holy Spirit to make such a declaration. Well, the proof is in the pudding. Elymas was instantly blinded, not by any natural or physical cause, but by God.

Luke was careful to show that there was no natural explanation for what happened and then in a note of irony he tells us that this spiritually "blind guide," was now physically blind as well, and so he needed someone to lead him. Hopefully, for Elymas, whoever led him away was a better guide than he was had been.

Not only was the governor now able to hear the fullness of the Gospel without interruption, he had seen

firsthand the power of God behind the Message, and he believed.

It's very important to see that while the supernatural blinding of the magus was critical to the governor's belief it was of no significance whatsoever to the content of his belief.

We have all kinds of crazy things going on in the worldwide church. People are drawn to the supernatural, they seek miracles, they want to see God work in the physical realm, but such things can only ever strengthen belief – they can never tell you what to believe.

The “what to believe” part always comes in the Word of God, the Message, the teaching and preaching of the Gospel. Sergius Paulus believed because he saw something crazy, but his belief became Salvific by believing in the Resurrected Jesus, Whom Paul and Barnabas presented and explained to him.

The content of your belief – what you believe is vital to correct, true, or right, belief and since Salvation is entirely about right belief in Jesus it seems important to learn from someone qualified to teach that content.