

## It's a Matter of Perspective

A few weeks ago, in my office, someone recounted the old Indian parable about the blind men describing an elephant. We may remember that one grabbed the tail and decided that an elephant was like a rope. Another took hold of a leg and thought the elephant was like a tree and the third placed his hands on the side of the elephant and described it as a wall. Obviously, none of them were accurate but their picture and description was based on their individual perspective.

There are times when our perspective may be as limited as those blind men when they encountered an elephant. We identify those things which we observe based on our current situation and the available knowledge. We are, to some degree, like those blind men when we consider the Covid 19 situation.

I have lost count of the various conspiracy theories that I have read or heard about this virus. Then we could add the many Bible verses that are added to the chorus of those trying to explain or to make the events caused by the rapid spread of this virus fit into some frame-work that will align with our understanding. Again, how does it fit into our perspective? This morning we will approach not only the virus but life in general with the understanding that our perspective makes a lot of difference. We must ask ourselves if our perspective is aligned with the revealed word of God as found in the Bible? That's enough about the virus for this morning. After all, we are considering perspective.

One of the hardest things I had to learn as I made the move from a technical focused to a management focus career path was the expression that goes: "Perspective is reality." As an engineer, with a scientific mindset, reality was and is reality. Perspective is how you view reality. It may be skewed by parallax or looking at reality from an angle that distorts your perspective. The problem is that for those looking at the situation from that skewed angle, the vision is interrupted as reality and we react accordingly.

This brings us to the idea of being Christians. What does it mean to be a Christian? Does this mean that we have our names listed on a roll in a certain congregation? Does it mean that we attend a church or participate in church related activities? Sometimes we use the word disciple rather than Christian. So, what does the word disciple mean?

According to Merriam-Webster, disciple means: 1) one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. For example: a) Christianity one of Christ's followers according the Gospel accounts; b) a convinced adherent of a school or individual as a disciple of Freud.

From this definition, we see that a disciple is someone who not only accepts but assist in spreading the doctrines of another individual or group. By this definition, some of us may need to re-evaluate our standing as a disciple of Christ. For some, being a Christian or a Disciple has become a social club rather than a mission to spread the doctrine. Notice, we are already seeing how perspective comes to play in something so simple as calling ourselves Christian.

For clarity, when I use the word Disciple or Christian, I mean the same thing. In Acts the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, we learn (from the Bible) they are the same term.

**And he (Barnabas) left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26 NASB)**

To be a Christian or Disciple, we need to understand this person Jesus the Christ. We need to know Him well enough to share with the world who He is and what is significant about Him. We need to share the reality of Jesus and not a distorted or skewed view.

There are two crucial things to understand. First, He came to pay a debt that we owed. We have plowed this field multiple times. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23) and that sin has separated us from God (Romans 6:23). While we are all familiar with these verses and the idea that Jesus paid that debt, there are many that live as though they fail to grasp the significance of what Jesus did on a personal level. Paul wrote to Titus and frames the role of Jesus in salvation.

**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing (Or discipling) us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior (Or *the great God and our Savior*), Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14 NASB)**

From our perspective, we may fail to see our sins being of significance to merit the death penalty or the blood of Jesus. We accept sin and death on a global level but it hasn't registered on us personally. Again, it's a matter of perspective.

The second thing we need to understand is that we are to make our life as nearly like Jesus as possible. No, we are not to wear robes and sandals and walk around without having a home. Rather, we are to emulate His teachings. It's not knowing about Him but truly knowing Him and living like Him. It is allowing the phrase "What would Jesus do?" to become a guiding principle of our life rather than a trite cliché.

John, in his first letter, speaks of walking in the same manner as Jesus.

**The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1 John 2:4-6 NASB)**

When we read that the love of God has been perfected in Jesus, we need to pause and look at the word perfected. The Greek word used here is τελειόω *teleioó* (tel-i-o'-o) which means: to complete, i.e. (literal) accomplish, or (figurative) consummate (in character): — consecrate, finish, fulfill, make) perfect.

Being a disciple of Jesus requires that we allow the love that Jesus showed to be so much a part of our life that others see His love before they see us. We allow His love to consume who we are.

Allowing our likeness of God to be seen is a perspective that Jesus mentioned in the sermon on the mount.

**"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in**

**the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16 NASB)**

If we remember how John started his gospel account of Jesus, we know that John called Jesus the true light: **There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:9 NASB)** When we read these two passages, it would seem that Jesus is calling us to be the light just as He is the light.

For us to be the light, we must change our perspective of who we are. We are no longer individuals who attend a church and associate with others who share similar beliefs. We are now fully a disciple, a follower, and believer of Jesus the Christ.

The call to imitate Jesus is found in several places throughout the New Testament. Paul calls for those in Corinth to imitate him as he was imitating Christ. **Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NASB)**

Then, in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ephesians, we are called once more to imitate God to the point that we abandon ungodly living.

**Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.**

**But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:1-5 NASB)**

Likewise, Peter calls for us to follow the example of Jesus when he writes: **For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; (1Peter 2:21-22 NASB)**

The idea of living flat-out for Jesus was a reality for Paul. In his letter to the Galatians, he tells us that it is no longer him (Paul) living it is Christ.

**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20 NASB)**

This passage tells us that imitating Jesus is not a façade or an act. It is the core of who we become. The well-known writer and preacher, Rick Warren, says it in this manner:

***“Christlikeness is not produced by imitation, but by inhabitation.”*** We must live in Christ and allow Christ to live in us. It is an inseparable arrangement.

Paul writes that we have put on Christ in our baptism in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Galatians.

**For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28 NASB)**

My favorite Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis picks up on the idea of clothing ourselves in Christ or putting on Christ. In his book “Mere Christianity”, he expresses it in this manner: ***“Putting on Christ’...is not one among many jobs a Christian has to do; and it is not a sort of special exercise for the top class. It is the whole of Christianity. Christianity offers nothing else at all.”***

Our view of Christianity is our perspective. It is our reality and we need to place our reality against those inspired writers of the Bible to see if our perspective is true when measured by God's word.