

THE COMPELLING POWER OF LOVE

by Jerry Bridges

PICTURE in your mind a time line of your life—from birth to death. Put on that line only one point—the day you trusted Christ as your Savior. That point divides your life into two segments—you as an unbeliever and you as a believer.

Now think of *one* word that summarizes the message you needed to hear as an unbeliever. I suggest that word would be *Gospel*. The Gospel that is the power of God for salvation. As unbelievers, the one message we needed to hear and respond to was the Gospel. (Rom. 1:16)

What about the second segment of our lives—as believers? Is there one word that, more than any other, summarizes the message we need to hear as believers? Probably several words might come to mind, but I suspect they could all be captured under the word *discipleship*. After all, Jesus did commission us to “*go and make disciples of all nations.*”

Under discipleship I would include the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life such as a daily quiet time, Bible study, prayer, attendance at church, fellowship with other believers—every activity that helps us grow spiritually. I would also include worship of God and obedience to Him. Finally, we should include service or ministry—evangelism, discipling others, and using our spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. That’s a full plate, but the one word, *discipleship*, captures them all.

That is the typical way we view the Christian life—the Gospel for the unbeliever, and the challenges of discipleship for the believer. **I have come to realize, however, that way of looking at the Christian life is inadequate.** It doesn’t produce joyful, whole-hearted believers who know what it means to live by God’s grace every day of their lives. Instead it tends to produce dutiful, but somewhat guilt-laden disciples, who know they fail to live up to

all the challenges of their calling. Or worse, it produces modern day Pharisees who are self-righteous *because* they are disciplined.

If our typical, “Gospel for the unbeliever and discipleship for the believer” paradigm is inadequate, what is the better way? I believe the most important message we need to hear as

believers is *the Gospel*. This doesn’t mean we don’t need challenge and instruction in the various expressions of discipleship. *It means we need to practice discipleship in the atmosphere of the Gospel.*

Someone has said, “*Discipline without desire is drudgery.*” What is

it that puts desire into the discipline of discipleship? What is it that will motivate us to joyously follow Christ? It is the Gospel; the Good News that all our sins are forgiven through the death of Christ, and that His perfect righteousness has been [and is being] credited to us.

The Apostle Paul teaches us this in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 when he says that “*Christ’s love compels us...to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us.*” The love of Christ was the compelling motivation for Paul. It forced him to live, not for himself, but for Christ. This should also be our motivation. *It is the Gospel that keeps the love of Christ before us.* To the degree that we live daily in the atmosphere of the Gospel, to that degree will we be compelled by Christ’s love.

If we are going to be motivated by Christ’s love as Paul was, then we must put away the thinking that the Gospel is primarily for unbelievers. We must learn to live everyday in the atmosphere of the Gospel, and in the joy and motivation *that* brings. Then we will go forth to be even more committed disciples of Him “*who loves us and freed us from our sins...*” — Revelation 1:5.



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