

How can our church promote the biblical process of discipleship and more specifically encourage Parents to educate their children in the Baptist Way?

In the third chapter of John, Nicodemus approaches Jesus in the night seeking answers from Him as a Rabbi. Jesus tries to open his eyes to the Gospel and has a hard time getting Nicodemus to understand the Spiritual parts of his lesson. At one point, Jesus is astounded that a “master of Israel” had so little understanding. The core of Jesus’ lesson to Nicodemus is the foundation of our Baptist doctrine, “Ye must be born again.” Nicodemus was a student of Scripture, but ignorant to the truth until Jesus opened his eyes. The Bible doesn’t record Nicodemus’ testimony of salvation. In the 7th chapter of John, Nicodemus makes a gentle defense of Jesus, and in the 19th chapter he brings spices for His burial. We all assume hopefully that this is evidence of Nicodemus’ conversion, but the question remains, “Was Nicodemus a disciple of Christ?”

The biblical definition of a “disciple” is a learner/follower. If all you do is learn, you’re a student. Without the learning, you’re just a follower. To be a true disciple you have to know who you’re following and what they are teaching. Jesus had many followers and many students. Sadly, He had fewer disciples. As we see in the 6th chapter of John, a difficult sermon turned the multitude away. But, His true disciples knew there was nowhere else to go to find the words of eternal life.

We are all proud to be Baptist and thankful to be members of a church that practices the truth of Salvation and protects the Gospel of “Salvation by Grace” and a “know so” born again experience. With that in mind, let’s consider for a moment the Lord’s illustration. You must be born again. If Salvation is a new birth, Birth is a beginning not an end. Salvation and baptism for church membership are the first steps in the Life of a Child of God. They are not meant to be the goal or the finish line.

Jesus taught His disciples every day as they traveled together. He explored the many facets of life and gave instruction to prepare them to carry not only His Gospel but also His Church into the far corners of the world. In the 5th & 6th chapters of Hebrews, the apostle Paul expressed his frustration with those Christians who could not go beyond the milk of the word and would not build upon the foundation of Christ that had been laid upon their hearts. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:5-9, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Jesus, Paul & Moses would have us all to understand that it is our duty and command to keep the Word of God close to our heart. We must learn it. We must understand it. And we absolutely must teach it to our Children. A parent's responsibility to "train up a child" in the way of the Lord is taught thoroughly in the Old and New Testament. The most important thing in anyone's life is to be saved and prepared for Heaven. But, God never intended for us to get saved and stop going to church. The Bible is deep and full of the Wisdom of God. There are many simple truths contained within that a child can understand. And, yet, there are mysteries in God's Word that can't be fully understood with a lifetime of study. Every church member should strive diligently to learn more of the Bible every day. And, every parent should be ready to answer the questions of the Bible asked by their children.

There are some things that are foundational parts of learning. We would all be disappointed in our school systems if children were graduating from high school illiterate and without a basic understanding of mathematics and science. How could you get through junior high without at least understanding the Times Tables and knowing the state Capitals? I think we would all be ashamed to find out how many of our adult church members could list the 12 apostles, tell all 10 Commandments, recite the 23rd Psalm or even repeat the Lord's Prayer. Our children spend at least 35 hours a week focused on reading, math & science. We send our children off to college or technical school so they can learn everything they need to get a good job and be successful. After we start our careers, we discover how much more there is to learn about our professions. None of us are surprised by the need to learn and prepare ourselves for success in our modern world. However, many of our church families are content to receive about an hour's worth of instruction from the scripture once or twice a month.

Sunday is the Lord's Day and the worship hour belongs to Him. The majority of the world never darkens the door of a church unless it's for a wedding or a funeral. It's easy to just be thankful that you can get people to show up for preaching. But, do we think that Jesus would want us to be satisfied with a minimal effort and the very least we can do? There are usually visitors in a preaching service and the Gospel needs to go out to the Lost. Through the Holy Spirit of God and with the best efforts of the preacher, a message can be preached that will reach the lost for Salvation and give instruction to the Church. But, we all need to understand that you simply can't get everything you need to be the best Christian you can be in a 30 minute sermon.

Nicodemus wasn't the only one that had questions about the Lord's teachings. As he snuck off to Jesus in the night to seek more knowledge, no doubt many children go home from church & school with questions about what the Bible says and what to do to please the Lord. Are our parents ready to answer those questions themselves or do they simply respond, "Go ask the preacher?"

The process of discipleship is simply to be ever-learning. We are meant to spend our lives in the Word of God. Salvation is supposed to be the beginning. Our church members should not spend their entire lives nourished with the milk of the Word, but they are to grow and understand

more. Certainly, we're not all meant to be teachers, but we should all be able to explain what we believe and why we believe it. Every parent should be able to conduct a home Bible study and provide instruction to their children about the Holy Bible and its teaching.

We know how important the Gospel is. We all agree that Baptist doctrine is right and beneficial for our children and families. There are many different ideas and methods, besides home study, that our churches use to teach those willing to learn. Sunday night services are a great bonus to weekend worship. If more people would support and attend these services, our churches would receive more instruction and most likely would grow closer in fellowship because of the additional time spent together. Wednesday night prayer meetings and Bible studies are another good opportunity to receive instruction and fellowship together for blessings. There's no reason to re-invent the wheel. It is clear that these additional services are beneficial to the health and growth of a church. The most difficult part is getting support for these services, and keeping up attendance. If we can get our members there, we can come up with many different ways to engage & instruct our church families.

It is the opinion of this committee, however, that the grandest method of all is the simplest solution. It sits squarely right next to our worship services every Sunday morning. Sunday school is an incredible opportunity for our parents and our children to receive focused and thorough instruction about our faith and doctrine. It is obviously difficult to get a great number of people to show back up to church on Sunday night once the recliner has gotten its grip on them. It is even more difficult to get them to take a break in the middle of their busy week to attend a Wednesday service. However, all you have to do to get to Sunday school is wake up an hour earlier. This seems like a simple solution, and yet so many of our churches struggle every week to get their membership to get there before the preacher takes the podium.

Yes, we must be born again. But, we can't stay babies forever. Let us go beyond the milk of the Word. Let us build upon the Foundation of Christ glorious houses of Faith. Within these houses of Faith, let us hold fast to the truth and doctrine of our Baptist forefathers. Let us pass that doctrine down to our children in the pure state that we received it. To do this, we must emphasize to all our churches and children the importance of discipleship and encourage our membership to put in the necessary time and energy to do so. God bless our churches and God bless the good Sunday school teachers that make sure our children know that Noah is the one that built the ark and Jonah is the one who was swallowed by the whale.

Respectfully submitted,

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