

Go I nto All the World

By Steve and Carol Ryerson

We frequently hear from home school families about problems in churches with programs or people who don't understand their efforts to disciple their own children. These people call us, desperately looking for a church that is age-integrated, or at the very least, one that will not antagonize them as they seek to train their children according to Scripture.

More and more, we are also hearing about age-integrated churches and sometimes "home school" churches which are taking very seriously God's command for parents to train up their own children. They keep families together, and the fellowship is with like-minded families because families with that point of view deliberately seek that kind of local structure. They teach what the Scripture says about how families should live and function.

Clearly, the process of parents' discipling their own children is very important. We believe that each local assembly should take seriously its own structure and how that structure either helps or hinders the process of family-based discipleship.

Having said that however, we also see that it is easy for a church to become a social group unto itself, only living out the portions of Scripture that suit them. They rear their own families so that their children will grow up, marry other like-minded young people, and in turn rear their families in the same way. In that model, the Kingdom grows because families are successful in having children and teaching those children to live the same way as they mature and establish their own households.

We must be careful, though, not to confuse the structure with the purpose. We have found nowhere in Scripture where families are split up when they assemble to worship. It is Scriptural to keep the family together. The family structure and the local assembly structure become intricately intertwined, each supporting the other.

But what is the purpose of God's Church?

Matthew 28:18-20 ~ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15-20 ~ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Luke 24:45-49 ~ Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from

the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Luke continues in the book of Acts as he quotes Jesus:

Acts 1:8 ~ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. [emphasis added in each of these four selections]

When we examine the above passages, we see a common element from our Lord's command: Go evangelize and disciple the lost. A look in a concordance reveals that in the original Greek, the word teach means to disciple and the word preach means to evangelize. Jesus was telling his disciples to go find people and make more disciples, increasing the Kingdom.

In the Mark passage, Jesus told them that signs would follow those who believe. Notice here, that Jesus did NOT tell his disciples to seek signs. He did say, though, that when his disciples are doing what they are supposed to do, signs will follow them. God will confirm the message they were giving with His signs.

Acts 4:29-31, 33 ~ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness....And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

This is one of many passages that speak of miracles accompanying the spreading of the gospel.

Luke records that the disciples were to wait for the power to go and teach. After they received the Spirit (described in Acts 2), they were then told to go into the farthest points of the earth with the Good News.

What do we conclude from these passages?

Simply this: the purpose of God's Church on this earth is to go out, spread the Good News of Jesus, and then make disciples of those who believe.

Luke 19:19 ~ For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

In this passage, Luke records that Jesus' purpose was to seek and to save that which was lost. The going ~ evangelizing ~ is the seeking. Making disciples ~ teaching believers how to walk with God, living a life that is obedient to Him ~ is the saving

There is nowhere in Scripture where we are told to just stay in our own little group, never interacting with the lost world around us. In fact, that has already been tried. (Remember Solomon said there is no new thing under the sun. ~ Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Many in the church in the early part of Acts had all things common. They were having a wonderful time in God's presence together. But were they fulfilling what God had told them to do? Were they going out to seek and save? Many obviously were not. The command was to begin in Jerusalem, but then to move out to the entire world. God has a way of getting His will done.

Acts 8:3-4 ~ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. [Emphasis added]

God used a man by the name of Saul to knock them out of their comfort zone. We're told that this zealous young Pharisee wreaked havoc on the Church, persecuting Christians and having them put in prison.

An interesting thing happened as a result. Verse 4 of Acts 8 begins with the word 'therefore.' That means the action following this word came as a result of what preceded it. We see that Saul's persecution brought evangelization. That's right. It took persecution for the Church to obey Jesus. When they were forced to flee for their lives, they finally went 'every where,' 'preaching the word' as they went.

Sometimes life can get a little too comfortable for us. We live in our own little comfort zone and want to stay there. This living-for-God thing becomes very nice and easy. We have it all down pat. But what about that command to make disciples of all nations? What about those down the street as well as those on the other side of the world? Are we doing what God told us to do?

You protest, "But I need to shelter my children from the wickedness in the world so that they won't adopt the world's ways. I must save my family first."

We agree that our families have priority and must be protected. We must not go out and save the world at the cost of the children God loaned to us for a season. However, does rearing a godly family preclude obeying God? Do we try to justify ourselves by saying that 'my world' right now is my family? Our children learn by our example. How can we expect them to have a burden for the lost if we don't teach and demonstrate it in our own lives? When will your world be bigger if it does not begin growing now?

What will it take for us to obey the Lord? (In fact, is He really your Lord if you are not obeying Him? See Romans 8:9) Will it take persecution, as with the early Church? Will it take a catastrophe in your family ~ illness, fire, divorce, etc?

You can work together as a family, under the direction of your church leadership, in whatever manner God directs you. We personally know wonderful examples of families who were in the depths of sin; yet when one person reached out to them, they came to the Lord. They saw how He wanted them to live and became wonderful saints of God, training their children according to Scripture. This is God's plan for the Church age.

"But what about the influence of those people on my children? Shouldn't I be sheltering them from that?" you ask.

Of course you must continue to shield your children from some things. For a time we taught a basic Bible class to a group from a local homeless shelter. The appearance and language of these people were a little shocking at times...definitely not a place for the immature. We could not have had our children there with us.

Unless you live out in the middle of nowhere and never take your children away from your home, there is no way you can totally keep your children from seeing sin in the world. Explain to them, in an age-appropriate way, that these are people who do not know God. They speak, dress, and go places that are not pleasing to Him. They are unhappy because of not knowing Him. We must show these people the way to God so that they can have the same joy, peace, and fulfillment we have in Him. Your small children will accept that. As your children get older and receive His Spirit themselves, they will understand the joy He gives.

You, along with your children, will stand back and marvel as they see the change that the Lord brings in lives ~ the lives of people you have touched. Your children will give thanks to God for what

He is doing.

This process will become an integral part of your God becoming your children's God. Outward conformity alone to the standards you have taught is not sufficient. At some point, your children must decide on their own to give themselves to Him.

Don't confuse the structure with the purpose. Rejoicing that we have the structure right and never getting to the purpose is tragic.

Romans 8:14 ~ For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Seek God's leading for what He would have you to do. Then obey, bringing the lost to Him. Many wonderful blessings await you as you step out in faith and obey.