

It's time to build! It's time to build!....It's time to build! I can keep on repeating this sentence, but if I keep on saying "It's time to build," without ever giving directions or saying what the building's purpose is, you won't have any idea what I'm talking about. A building reflects its function. A young family may want to build their own home with many rooms to grow and play. A city may want a larger high school as the population increases. An excited congregation may want to build a church structure so they can move out of a strip mall and take up permanent residence in their community. Clear directions and goals are the first steps in a successful construction project. It's time to build! It's time to build the Christian church. Jesus gives us clear instructions. He tells us to make disciples out of all nations. He tells us how to do that by instructing us to baptize and to teach. We understand the challenges of going to every nation, it's hard enough just going door to door. It may seem like the second part of Jesus' instruction is easier. Teach them. Once you do all the leg-work and the people are in the door, once you have baptized, all you have to do is teach. But that's not what Jesus said. He says "teach them to keep everything I have commanded you!" Everything! We make disciples by teaching everything in God's Word. What a daunting task!

By telling us how to make disciples, Jesus tells us what disciples are. Disciples are baptized and they have learned everything God says. When say we are Christians, you and I are saying that we are disciples of Jesus. Once we have been baptized, our building directions are clear. Teach everything and *learn* everything.

When we follow these instructions we build and strengthen the church on the inside. While it is certainly a blessing to have pastors and teachers willing and able to teach, the responsibility for teaching God's Word lies on you too! Teaching all of God's word can't take place only on Sunday morning. It's something that is taught and applied in everyday life. In a sinful world which opposes God's Word at every opportunity, is a few hours a week enough to counterbalance the rest of the week's influences? Making disciples of all nations isn't just the mission of a few in the church, but of every Christian everywhere.

Teaching everything in the Bible is a huge task, there are 66 books! Yet there isn't 66 separate messages or teachings. In fact when you tell others the message of the Bible you can say there are two. The Law and the Gospel. When Jesus commands us to teach everything, we must make sure both of these teachings are present!

The first one, the Law, is any part of scripture that tells you what to do. The 10 commandments do that, being told to love your neighbor as yourself does that, as does any section that tells you how to act and how to do the right thing. However, on its own the law won't help us at all. With only the law, Christianity would be like any other religion. A religion that tells you that being a good person is your only option. Only having the law leads people to think that they can earn their way to heaven, or it's something to be ignored: If you want to have fun, ignore the law. When people realize that the law is impossible to keep, it makes them give up on ever making God happy with them. But the law is a great part of God's Word! The law works as a curb, it keeps us on the right path. It works as a guide by showing us how God wants us to live. The law works as a mirror, it shows us our sin when we see God's demands. It points us to the other message of the Bible. The Gospel.

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus has paid for all of our sins! We have free and complete forgiveness! We are going to heaven! If we only teach the gospel, no one will be ready to hear it. Without the law, no one would see that they need forgiveness, no one would know about their need for a savior. That's why it is so important to teach everything! The law prepares the heart for repentance, and the Gospel is the Good News we need to hear. When we teach the Word of God, we teach everything! We must also take care not to confuse the two teachings and their purposes. When your friend comes to you and asks for forgiveness, telling her how much she has sinned is a misuse of the law. When a boyfriend brags about how he cheats on his girlfriend, telling him that it's all ok because God won't punish him for his sins, isn't the proper use of the Gospel.

Teaching everything means teaching the hard things as well as the easy. Teaching someone about showing love to each other may not be that challenging, but correcting and rebuking someone with the law is not a pleasant task. We also might like to keep to the basics. The parable of the sower of seeds, the account of David and Goliath are easy enough. But we need to teach the difficult parts of the Bible as well. Why did God destroy the entire world with the flood and only save a few people and animals? Or, have you ever explained the book of Revelation to anyone?

If we are going to be prepared to teach everything in God's Word, it's a good start to learn everything. It's an easy argument to make that the Bible is absolutely the most important book that ever will exist. It is the only book that is the Word of God. As we learn God's Word, we will continue to be reminded of our sins. We will see God's law and see our failures. We will see in the sinful lives of others, our own sins played out before us. Learning God's Word means we will learn more about ourselves than we ever can in the school of life. But do we always treat the Bible with that much respect? How many books have you read all the way through? Have you read some of your favorite books multiple times? Have you done that with the Bible? Perhaps you've read through the Bible a hundred times, do you do what it says? There is a great temptation to think that we can "graduate" from some kind of Bible school. I hate to tell you this, but when you are confirmed, or finish a Bible 101-301 course, you don't walk away knowing all the Bible has to say. Being confirmed or finishing an instruction course can't be the end of our learning of God's Word, whether we were confirmed one month ago or 55 years ago.

I remember when I was a kid, one of my pastors saying even after four years of college and four years of seminary education, where he spent almost all of his classes focused on learning the Bible, that compared to men like Moses, Paul, or Luther he only had a kindergartner's level of understanding of scripture. I have to remind myself of that when I miss a day of Bible reading, I miss out on a lot. When we learn God's Word, it's a good thing for us and it prepares us to teach and make disciples. When it's time to build, it's time to learn!

The fact is, we will never know all of God's Word perfectly, but that isn't discouraging. As we continue to read more and more of God's Word we will see more connections and gain wisdom and understanding. Because reading God's Word means you will learn more about God. It will be a joyful experience. You will gain more understanding of just how much God loves you and how his love shown to everyone in the pages of scripture and to you. You will see your savior Jesus as you joyfully learn more about him. There is always something to gain from learning the Bible.

It is clear that you care greatly about Biblical knowledge and faithfulness to the word. You have made it a priority to have a pastor, and you have taken it upon yourselves to have a vicar as well, to assist in the training in a future pastor. This congregation has made sure there is a Sunday School program and confirmation class. You have asked for several opportunities for adult Bible Study. You support these ministries with your time and offerings, take advantage of these wonderful opportunities to learn!

As we learn God's Word, we will continue to see our loving God, our Savior, our Jesus. In today's short text alone, we have an amazing promise. Jesus our savior, even while he is in heaven preparing a mansion for you, is with us today. He is with us as we make disciples of all nations. He is with us as we baptize our children. He is with us as we teach everything he has given to us to teach. He is with us as we learn more and more of his Word until we meet him face to face. Amen.

1. How is the church built?
2. What are disciples?
3. Whose responsibility is it to teach?
4. What are the messages of God's Word?
5. Who is taught?
6. Do we ever graduate from the school of God's Word?

7. When do we fail?
8. Who is here to help you?
9. Why is seeing our Savior all through God's Word a comfort?