

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 5 ~ (Commands #22-25)

22. Pray for those who spread the word—*Matthew 9:37-38*.

For whom did Jesus tell his disciples to pray?

Who are the non-Christians in your life? What can you do to help them see their need for Christ?

What barriers stand in the way of people you know listening to the gospel?

23. Be as shrewd as serpents—*Matthew 10:16*. (Also see *Romans 16:19*)

Jesus said his apostles should be like two very different animals: _____ and _____
What does the Bible say are the characteristics of these animals?

Why did Jesus give this command? If Jesus were here talking to us today, do you think he would emphasize this command or downplay it?

Why did Jesus say his followers must be shrewd? That doesn't sound like Jesus.

24. Fear God. Do not fear man— *Matthew 10:28*, also *Luke 12:4-5*.

What is the “soul” as mentioned here? (*Psalm 35:9-10*, *Psalm 6:3*)

How does the possibility of persecution make you feel? Realistically, in America today, could you be actually persecuted for your Christian views? How?

Do (or should) we serve God because we are afraid of him?

25. Listen to God's voice—*Matthew 11:15*, *13:9*, *13:43*, *Mark 4:23*, *Luke 14:35*, *1 Kings 19:11-13*

Jesus often gave this simple command after telling a _____.

What did Jesus mean by this simple command?

Would this command be likely to broaden his audience or make it smaller?

How might the command be expressed today?

How can we be sure to hear God as well as understanding what we hear?

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 5 ~ (Commands #22-25) ~ Leader's Guide

22. Pray for those who spread the word

Matthew 9:37-38 – Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

For whom did Jesus tell his disciples to pray?

He said to pray for workers who spread the Good News. The previous verse says, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” These crowds were people from the towns and villages that had heard Jesus’ preaching and seen his miraculous healing. They were excited but a long way from being real followers and believers in Christ. Jesus referred to them as a field ripe for harvest and told his disciples to pray for workers to teach his message to those following him.

Indeed, the next thing Jesus did (Matthew ch 10) was to send out his 12 disciples to drive out evil spirits, heal disease and sickness, and preach the message that the kingdom of heaven is near.

Who are the non-Christians in your life? What can you do to help them see their need for Christ?

What barriers stand in the way of people you know listening to the gospel?

Some people, of course, are members of non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, or various native American belief systems. But the majority of Americans are just nothing—not out-and-out agnostics or atheists but just uncaring, Christ doesn’t matter, I can’t be bothered. Almost 90% of American homes have a Bible but in many it’s never opened. About 25% say they read the Bible regularly, but do they really? So what would make a typical “don’t care” person sit up and take notice? Why is it that so many people just can’t be bothered with Christ or religion? (Also, see #23)

23. Be as shrewd as serpents

Matthew 10:16 – I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; be wary and wise (shrewd, prudent) as serpents, and be innocent (harmless, guileless, and without falsity, also simple) as doves. [Amplified Bible]

Jesus said his apostles should be like two very different animals: serpent and dove. What does the Bible say are the characteristics of these animals? (See above)

Why did Jesus give this command? If Jesus were here talking to us today, do you think he would emphasize this command or downplay it?

The opposition of the Pharisees to Jesus' good news would be like ravaging wolves. The disciples' only hope would be to look to their shepherd, Jesus, for protection. We may face similar hostility today, certainly in any Muslim country, but also here in America. Isn't it ironic that Bibles are allowed, even encouraged in prisons but not in schools? Perhaps if we had Bibles in schools, there would be fewer people in prison. But it's that "politically correct" attitude that Christian Bibles are bad that makes it difficult to spread the Good News and requires us to be as shrewd as serpents.

What are the pressures we might experience? Threats that we're breaking the law. Public ridicule. Rejection by friends and even family. Possibly physical harm, especially in other countries or enclaves.

Why did Jesus say his followers must be shrewd? That doesn't sound like Jesus.

In Biblical times, the word "shrewd" did not have the same derogatory sense of meaning that it seems to have today. It was a more positive term meaning cautious, wise, and prudent. Also, a serpent tends to adapt to its surroundings taking on the temperature of the surface it is lying on and "sniffing" the air with its tongue. Think of what this means in interacting with people you don't know.

24. Fear God. Do not fear man

Matthew 10:28 – Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Luke 12:4-5 – I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

What is the "soul" as mentioned here?

Psalms 35:9-10 – Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, Lord? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them."

The "soul" as used here and in much of the Bible means your very self as a living, conscious, personal being. It's all of you, your "whole being."

How does the possibility of persecution make you feel? Realistically, in America today, could you be actually persecuted for your Christian views? How?

We discussed this above in #23: ridicule, threat that you are breaking politically correct laws, rejection by friends and family.

Do (or should) we serve God because we are afraid of him?

We should serve God because we love him. We can praise God, worship him, and hold him in awe, but “walking in his ways” (Deut 5:33, 8:6, 10:12, 11:22, 26:17, 28:9, 30:16) is the best way to show that we love him.

25. Listen to God’s voice

Matthew 11:15 – He who has ears, let him hear. (Repeated nearly verbatim in Matthew 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:23, and Luke 14:35)

Jesus often gave this simple command after telling a parable.

What did Jesus mean by this simple command?

In Matthew 13:14, Jesus states this as a negative – This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, ‘When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.’ [NLT]

The sense of this prophecy (which is not actually in Isaiah) is with respect to the coming of the Messiah, that the Jews, although hearing the sermons preached by him, with or without parables, heard the sound of his voice, but did not understand his words internally, spiritually, or experientially. Also, while they clearly saw his miracles, facts which could not be denied, they did not translate either what he said or what he did as evidence or proof of his Messiahship.

So this command, “He who has ears, let him hear,” told listeners that the parables often had hidden or deeper meanings. It challenged listeners to dig beneath the surface and to inquire further (of yourself and of others) to understand the full truth.

Would this command be likely to broaden his audience or make it smaller?

This could cut both ways. Some people might be intrigued and challenged and want to tell others about these wonderful parables and messages. On the other hand, some people might feel disrespected by Jesus’ remarks and annoyed that he implied that they didn’t understand, and tune him out. Do you think either of these is happening today? In which group are you?

How might the command be expressed today?

How can we be sure to hear God as well as understanding what we hear?

There is a second aspect to Jesus' command which is found in the OT. 1 Kings 19:11-13 – ¹¹ The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.* ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

* the JPS, KJV, ASV, ERV and several other Bibles translate this as "a still small voice."

In this instance, the scripture does not focus on the meaning of what we hear (or read), but whether we hear something at all. Chances are, God will not speak to you from a burning bush, a hurricane wind, or an earthquake, but in a very quiet place, perhaps when you least expect it.

How can you be sure you don't miss this?

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