

How We Make Disciples: Reviewing the Three C's Series

Jesus Transforming Conduct

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Jesus Transforming Conduct

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Annoying Habits

1. I used to act in a way that annoyed Mandi. Well, several ways if I'm honest, but I'm only talking about a specific one: cracking knuckles. I wasn't trying to annoy, bother, upset or push my wife's buttons, of course. Cracking my knuckles was just a behavior I had gotten used to.
2. However, when I learned how much my well-developed ability to pop my hand joints (all eighteen of them) loudly disturbed Mandi, I started the challenging process of changing my behavior. My actions didn't transform instantly or overnight. Even when I had the desire to stop cracking my knuckles, the behavior snuck up on me. Sometimes, I didn't even recognize I was doing it until Mandi looked at me with "the look". I was so accustomed to act the way I did that I had muscle memory that operated apart from my conscious awareness.
3. Over time, progress was made, and I don't crack my knuckles in Mandi's presence anymore—at least not very often. I might slip up from time to time, but my behavior has changed. She'll have to be the final judge on how well I'm doing. Changing our behavior is a process, not always a smooth one, but a process that leads to results all the same. Changing conduct is the third and final central component to the Christian life.

B. In a summary statement about Christianity, James, the brother of Jesus and pastor in Jerusalem, says, "²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world." (Jas. 1:27). True religion from God's perspective involves morality and action: actions that include caring for those with the greatest need, who are in difficult situations, and those who have the least ability to care for themselves. In a few words, those who are most vulnerable, especially those who belong to the church (Gal. 6:10).

C. God-honoring actions are the third primary element of the Christian life and the third C in our mission statement. While Jesus spoke about and emphasized the first two C's of convictions and character more often, conduct is still very important to Him, as will become evident as we look at a few examples of Jesus making disciples by transforming other people's conduct. As Jesus builds God's kingdom on earth and He impacts those around Him, He invests His energy into transforming how people think, who they are, and what's important to them, as well as the behaviors they regularly participate in. Each of these three elements is critical for disciple making and spiritual growth.

II. Transforming Conduct in the Expose Stage

A. As we observe Jesus interacting with people who don't believe in Him, we see a particular focus in His message. At CAC, we call this stage of the sanctification process the Expose stage. We can ask the question, "What did Jesus want people to know, understand, and do regarding their actions prior to a commitment of submitting to Jesus and His way of life?" It is very interesting

to learn from Jesus with this question in view. In answering this question, there are two main points Jesus makes concerning the conduct of those who don't accept Jesus for who He claims to be. Each of these two points can be captured in one word: repentance.

- B. First, Jesus informed people that their actions are important because their actions reveal their spiritual condition. While teaching at the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus was interacting with a crowd, some of whom believed in Him and others, such as the scribes and Pharisees, who didn't believe in Him and were hostile to Jesus. This group within the crowd was trying to find an accusation against Jesus so that they could use the justice system to kill Him:

³⁹ They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. ⁴⁰ But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. ⁴¹ You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷ He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God." (Jn. 8:39-47)

- C. One of the main ideas that Jesus wants those who don't accept Him to understand is that a person's actions matter. They are significant. Actions lead to real consequences. The reason an individual's conduct is important is because it demonstrates the reality of their spiritual condition before God ("If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham" v. 39). In this statement, Jesus is telling these Jews, who think they are on God's good side because of their religious and ethnic background, that they are mistaken about their true spiritual condition. Abraham is viewed as a person who is favored by God, and these people think they are favored as well because of their association with Abraham. Jesus, however, points out to them that their actions demonstrate they are not real children of Abraham. Their actions demonstrate their true spiritual condition, regardless of what they think or claim is true about themselves. This is why their actions are significant.
- D. Further, Jesus explains that a person's actions are an expression of their nature (inner character): "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*" (v. 44). Jesus connects specific behaviors to the nature or character of the individual. Our actions reveal who we are on the inside. A person's nature is either made up of the character of God or it is not. This is what reveals a person's spiritual condition. Jesus went on to highlight the pattern or model for each type of nature and its corresponding actions. Jesus and God the Father are the models for those who are spiritually right with God, while the devil is the model for those who are opposed to

God. Jesus tells these Jews that their actions have more in common with the devil than with Abraham, thus revealing their true spiritual condition. Then, by implication, Jesus asks people the question, “What do your actions reveal about which kingdom you are connected to?” By evaluating a person’s actions, you can accurately assess their true spiritual condition which is why regular and repeated actions are so important to God.

- E. Lying, not recognizing or accepting truth, desiring that which God says is wrong, wanting to do harm to others (including murder), and having a low and critical opinion of Jesus are all actions that indicate a person is not of God but rather is living in the sphere in which the devil is pleased and is in charge. A positive response to Jesus and His teachings is a major indicator that a person is a part of God’s kingdom, and he is in a good spiritual condition. Jesus wants people who are separated from Him to understand their actions matter. Jesus went so far to say that obedience to His commandments is only possible by those who love Him (Jn. 14:21, 15, Jn. 15:10). Those who don’t love Jesus will disobey what He says (Jn. 14:24).
- F. The second major truth Jesus wants people at the Expose stage of spiritual development to understand, which He repeats many times, is that a person’s actions will be the basis of God’s judgment against them. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the fact that it is our actions that result in the judgment of God. Jesus proclaimed this warning everywhere He went, it seems. God’s justice requires people getting what their actions deserve:

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Mt. 16:27)

- G. This statement is repeated perhaps hundreds of times throughout Scripture about the judgment of God. Jesus, the person who will judge all humanity on behalf of God, says, He “will then repay every man according to His deeds.” Jesus is the One who determines a person’s level of punishment. A person’s deeds are the reason for God’s justified condemnation of people. Even every careless word will impact this judgment (Mt. 12:36). When God takes into account every wrong we’ve ever done, no one will be able to stand innocently before God (Ps. 130:3). Jesus was hated because He testified that people’s actions are evil (Jn. 7:7).
- H. Jesus wanted those who reject Him to understand the impact their actions have on their eternal destiny. Actions produce guilt and therefore, God’s punishment. No one goes to hell because they didn’t believe in Jesus. People are punished by God for the actions they perform, not the rejection of God’s treatment for spiritual healing. It is the spiritual disease that is the basis of punishment. Those who do what God says is wrong will face the consequences of doing so. Jesus offered this second main point as a warning to others about what lies ahead with the desire that people would repent and change their behaviors by reaching out to God asking for His help to assist them in changing their conduct. The message of judgment coming from Jesus is one of compassion and truth. It is not a scare tactic, it is a truth tactic.
- I. Jesus’ disciple making strategy helped people understand the role actions play in revealing a person’s spiritual condition and the consequences of such a condition. Actions aren’t trivial; they distinguish between true and false Christianity, between those who are approved by God and those who are not, and between those who are safe and those who are in danger. A

person's regular conduct demonstrates where they stand with God. If there is a mismatch between what a person thinks or claims and their actions, their actions always tell the truth. Resistance to and rejection of Jesus' words demonstrate hostility toward Jesus. While it might be easy for people to think they are not a child of the devil because they would never want to actively seek out the murder of Jesus, we need to pay careful attention to the other things Jesus says here. A lack of love for Jesus (v. 42) puts people in the same spiritual category as those who wanted to kill Jesus—someone who is not part of His kingdom. This doesn't mean those who don't love Jesus are morally equal to those who want to attack Jesus, but they are broadly in the same spiritual condition.

III. Transforming Conduct in the Educate Stage

- A. As we move from those who aren't following Jesus to those who have committed their lives to obeying the teachings of Jesus, what did Jesus have to say to His own disciples about their actions? As Jesus is helping those who acknowledge His true identity to understand the importance of their actions, He offers a key principle that will greatly affect their progress in the Christian life:

²⁰ And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³ All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mk. 7:20-23)

- B. Although a simple concept, the implications of what Jesus is saying are very challenging for the disciples, given their Jewish background. They have grown up in a religious culture that emphasized rituals and rules as the primary way to please God. Jesus' statement here dramatically shifts the disciples' understanding of what it means to live effectively for God. From the disciples' perspective, to be right with God is to make sure to follow all the rules and perform the right actions at the right time.
- C. Jesus, however, points out that no action will be right without first having an internal heart change that then transforms the actions ("all these evil things proceed from within" v. 23). To truly transform our actions, a person must first address the source of their actions, which is on the inside. For Jesus, there is no separation between character and conduct: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed..." (v. 21) actions. Jesus understands the internal transformation to only be possible with God. Good actions are only able to be produced with God's help (Jn. 3:21).¹
- D. This means the Christian life is not merely about behavior modification. To truly transform behavior, individuals must be changed in their desires, motivations, goals, and priorities. Jesus doesn't want disciples to simply force certain behaviors on themselves by an act of will. He wants conduct that flows from godly character so that obedient actions come naturally from who we are on the inside. The Christian life shouldn't be merely made up of willfully doing what we don't want to do. While there are times and seasons this happens, as a person matures, this

¹ Without God's involvement, even what we consider to be good deeds are deeply tainted by our sinfulness (Isa. 64:6).

should become less and less the case. Mature disciples obey the commands of God, and they aren't burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3). It is possible to delight in doing what God wants us to do (Ps. 119:35, 47, 143).

- E. The impact of a person's actions includes, "that is what defiles the man" (v. 20) and "defile the man" (v. 23). Jesus repeated the same point for a reason. From God's perspective, that which displeases God is what is on the inside, and what is on the inside is revealed in their actions on the outside. Even after a person has been forgiven by God, actions matter. Just because a disciples' actions won't result in being punished by God, it doesn't mean their wrongful actions are no longer significant. Disciples can "reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-9) if they allow their sinful desires to enter or rule their life. Disobedient actions matter, both before a person is forgiven and after they are forgiven, as well.
- F. In providing this list of specific evil actions, Jesus gives us an idea of the types of actions that are immoral, harmful, and out of bounds from God's perspective. This list includes sexual behaviors prior to marriage with a person who is not a spouse ("fornications"), illegitimately taking the resources and possessions of others ("thefts"), hostility and physical violence toward others ("murders"), inappropriate sexual encounters after a person is married with someone who is not their spouse ("adulteries"), the excessive desire to acquire more wealth ("deeds of coveting"), actions contrary to what is morally good ("wickedness"), acts that intentionally mislead others ("deceit"), and indulgence in sensual pleasure that disregards moral standards ("sensuality"). All these specific categories of actions are wrong according to Jesus.
- G. The disciple making strategy of Jesus at the Educate stage was to help His disciples understand how God-glorifying actions are defined and produced. Jesus wants those who follow Him to have a clear understanding of actions that God approves of and disapproves of. It is easy for people to get confused on this, which is why Jesus was firm about the specific behaviors that were part of people's lives who are connected to Him and those who are not. Once disciples know how to identify right and wrong actions from God's perspective, He also wanted them to know how to produce the right actions in their own lives.

IV. Transforming Conduct in the Equip Stage

- A. As His disciples move from the Educate stage to the Equip stage, Jesus switches His focus regarding actions. The natural progression in the Christian life shifts from trying to understand what actions are good or bad and how to produce what is good to sustaining the performance of right conduct—especially when it is difficult. At this stage of soul growth, Jesus continually encouraged the disciples to keep doing what they know is right. Jesus used two strategies to do this.
- B. First, Jesus repeatedly and frequently motivated faithfulness by emphasizing rewards and the benefits of doing what is right. It is somewhat surprising to note the frequency of how often Jesus emphasized heavenly rewards. Once you see this theme, you will find it everywhere. Jesus highlighted how even the smallest acts of faithfulness are rewarded by God:

³⁸ John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able

soon afterward to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.” (Mk. 9:38-41)

- C. In this context, John seems to be jealous of someone else who is doing similar ministry to what the disciples are doing. This other individual was not part of the smaller group that was directly following Jesus. By Jesus’ response to John, we get an indication of John’s motive. Jesus is, in essence, telling John not to worry about what other people are doing. There is no need to be jealous of others. Why? Because, “truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward” (v. 41). Whatever a person does for the kingdom of God is an issue between the individual and God—no one else. Any act of service will be rewarded appropriately. What other people are doing is irrelevant to what John will receive from God.
- D. To emphasize His point, Jesus uses a small and insignificant example of an act of service for the kingdom (“whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ” v. 41). Note the motivation: service is being offered because the individual on the receiving end is a disciple. If even such a small act and small sacrifice of giving someone a drink is rewarded, certainly larger acts of service will also be rewarded. Therefore, there is no ground or justification for being jealous since God sees and rewards every act of obedience to Him. It doesn’t matter what other people are doing, as every action I perform will be rewarded. There is no need to be jealous. God has enough resources to reward each person according to their service of Him.
- E. Second, Jesus pointed His disciples to the consequences of obedience versus disobedience. One example of Jesus emphasizing the consequences for faithful actions comes right after Jesus washed the disciples’ feet in the upper room. Jesus moved from the table, took on the lowliest servant’s job, and washed the disciples’ dirty feet. Peter resisted at first because he recognized Jesus shouldn’t be the one to do such a task. After Jesus finished, He told the disciples He set an example for them. They should live a life of service toward one another. Then, He motivated the right actions by saying, ¹⁷ “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” (Jn. 13:17). Jesus regularly mentioned the consequences of right actions as well as those of wrong actions. He did this to encourage and motivate right actions.
- F. Jesus’ disciple making strategy that impacted the actions of those who were following Him was presenting the consequences of faithfulness and disobedience repeatedly, including a strong emphasis on heavenly rewards. Jesus knew that helping people know what right actions are and how to produce them is not enough. As human beings, we also need motivation and encouragement to do the right behaviors.

V. Transforming Conduct in the Engage Stage

- A. Once the disciples had what they needed to carry out the right actions involved in the Christian life personally, Jesus also prepared them to act faithfully in caring for others. In this stage of the Christian life, the Engage stage, Jesus influenced His disciples’ behavior by equipping them for the realities of kingdom work. Serving Jesus faithfully is difficult. Jesus said those who serve Him will be hated and possibly even killed.

- B. To encourage right actions in this stage, Jesus told His disciples what to expect and explained the path that was before them. He did this so they wouldn't be surprised when obstacles to right action arose. Here is a portion of the instructions Jesus gave to the apostles, right before sending them out at the beginning of their own service of God:

²⁴ A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more *will they malign* the members of his household! ²⁶“Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in *your* ear, proclaim upon the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Mt. 10:24-31)

- C. In these instructions, Jesus provides encouragement, preparation, and correct expectations. Jesus sets the expectation for the Christian life by pointing to His own example. If Jesus was accused of being a partner of Satan, those who follow Him should expect the same kind of treatment, especially considering that Jesus is far superior to us morally. If He, who never did a single thing wrong, was accused of immoral actions, how much more will we, who actually commit wrongs, be accused! Jesus makes this point in the following words: “A disciple is not above his teacher” (v. 24). Despite this, Jesus wants His disciples to live without fear because all the wrongs they suffer will be brought before God in the end.
- D. Jesus goes on to tell the disciples, “do not fear those who kill the body” (v. 28). Being murdered for following Him is a real possibility—it happened to Him, our model! However, Jesus puts this extreme difficulty in its proper perspective by saying disobeying God is much worse than being killed. He also encourages the disciples with how valuable they are, how much God cares for them, and the depth of God's knowledge about their circumstances. Once again, Jesus is facilitating faithful actions in difficult circumstances.
- E. As Jesus is preparing His disciples for what lies ahead in their service to Him, He does not sugar coat anything. He doesn't hide the fact that a difficult path lies before them. He doesn't tell them no harm will come to them or their lives will be at ease. In all this, Jesus' disciple making strategy in the Engage stage is to encourage right actions by preparing the disciples for what is ahead so that they will not be surprised or discouraged by it. He told them what to expect so they could act accordingly.

VI. Conclusion

- A. At each stage of spiritual development in the Christian life, Jesus used different disciple making strategies to promote right conduct. He helped people see that their actions are connected to their spiritual condition, taught them to identify right actions from God's perspective, motivated right actions, and shaped accurate expectations for a life of obedience. In each of these ways, Jesus focused on the third C- conduct.

- B. Jesus provides a good summary statement, which includes a few of the themes of His disciple making strategies when it comes to conduct: “¹ Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 6:1). This is extremely wise advice.

VII. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Do you consider daily actions to be connected to following Jesus? Are Jesus and religion largely irrelevant to normal life? Why or why not?
- B. How did Jesus model right actions in a difficult situation according to Jn. 18:19-23? How does this connect to Jesus’ instructions in Mt. 5:38-42?
- C. Using Scripture, if possible, create a list of right actions that are promoted by Jesus and the Bible.
- D. How did Jesus encourage changed behavior by addressing the source of behavior when addressing the issue of self-ambition in Mk. 10:42-45?
- E. Share an experience from your past in which you successfully changed a particular behavior. What was the behavior? How were you able to change it?