
Words of Truth

Does Matthew 28:19 Directly Apply Today?

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Learning the truth from the Scriptures requires honesty (Luke 8:15) and the ability to reason (Acts 17:2). One has to be very careful to rightly divide the word of truth (II Timothy 2:14-18). Sadly, many are not capable of properly handling the word of God and that leads to the destruction of that person's soul (II Peter 3:15-17).

For the most part, amongst so-called "churches of Christ", there is an understanding that not all verses in the Bible apply directly to us today. Most will acknowledge that the Old Testament Law of Moses does not apply to us today. That is accurate (Romans 7:1-6, Galatians 5:4, Ephesians 2:11-17, Colossians 2:12-14, and Hebrews 9:15-10:22). Most will also acknowledge that though the Law of Moses is past, it is still profitable for studying. That also is an accurate conclusion (Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 10:1-12, and II Timothy 3:15-17). Most in so-called "churches of Christ" will also acknowledge that miraculous spiritual gifts are also a thing of the past. That too is true (I Corinthians 12:3-13:13). All of these accurate conclusions use the same reasoning skills that we will use in our study of Matthew 28:19 today.

When studying when or if something in the Scriptures applies today there are several key principles one has to employ in Scriptural reasoning. When looking at the Law of Moses you see it was given to a specific people (Malachi 4:4). You see it was limited in time (Jeremiah 31:31-34). You can clearly see it coming to an end (Matthew 11:13 and Luke 16:16). Thus, besides the fact that the Scriptures say the Law of Moses is past, you can reason it out and know it never directly applied to anyone alive today.

When understanding that miraculous spiritual gifts ceased you look at whom they were promised to and for what purpose (Mark 16:15-20). We reason that those miraculous spiritual gifts were given by the Spirit, through the laying on of Apostles' hands, to all Christians (Acts 19:1-7). You know there are no Apostles today. You see the purpose was to confirm the word. You know the purpose and means are both a thing of the past. Thus, you know the Scriptures that refer to miraculous spiritual gifts do not directly apply to us today. What do you think you would conclude if you reasoned the same way about Matthew 28:19?

Reasoning Through Matthew 28:19

We know the Old Law is done and that miraculous spiritual gifts are concluded because of whom they were given to and what purpose they served. We see both the reason and people are a thing of the past. Ask yourself this question, to who was Matthew 28:19 commanded? For what reason was it commanded? Let's see: "*Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 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” (Matthew 28:16-20).

Are you one of the eleven? Was Matthew 28:19 fulfilled? The answer to the first question is obvious. You are not an Apostle. The answer to the second question is here: *“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister”* (Colossians 1:23).

Does This Mean Evangelism Is Not To Be Done Today?

Like the Old Law, the command of Matthew 28:19 was fulfilled. That does not mean it is a useless Scripture. There are things to learn from the context. What to teach, who to teach, baptism, etc. are all still applicable. The teaching command is just not directly applicable today. Yes, we are still supposed to teach the lost. This is not because of Matthew 28:19, though there are things to learn from that Scripture and the context, but because of other Scriptures.

The word of God teaches us, not just the Apostles, to teach His word to the lost. We see that preaching and teaching was not solely the work of Apostles (Acts 8:1-13, Acts 15:35-36, and II Timothy 4:1-5). We know that the work of teaching is supposed to continue beyond the scope of the work and lives of the Apostles. Consider this instruction for example: *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (II Timothy 2:2). We know that the Gospel must be taught and preached for people to be saved (Romans 1:16 and Titus 1:3). Thus, evangelism is not a work of the past. In this, even though Matthew 28:19 does not directly apply to us, we can honestly make indirect applications.

Even When There Is Not A Direct Application

When studying the Scriptures we have to be honest about what does and does not directly apply to us. Even when we find that a Scripture or context doesn't directly apply today, we still have to step back and see if we can learn a principle to live by. For example, none of us are Apostles. We do not have their authority (i.e. Acts 2:42 and II Corinthians 5:19-20). Yet, we are still instructed to learn from the approved examples of Jesus, the Apostles, prophets, etc. (I Corinthians 4:16, I Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, Philippians 4:9, I Thessalonians 1:5-8, Hebrews 6:12, James 5:10, and I Peter 2:21-22). While we do not have the same roles as Jesus, the Apostles, or the prophets, we do learn from their lives and teachings. We pass those on to others. Thus, you look at what they were commanded in Matthew 28:19 and see how they did so in Acts 5:42 and other Scriptures. You then make reasonable conclusions, based on what is expected of us today, and apply what you can from their examples.

Conclusion

Churches of Christ have long carried traditional phrases and teachings based on ignorance of the Scriptures. Traditionalism that is rooted in men is wrong (Mark 7:1-9)! Let's rightly divide the word of truth on Matthew 28:19 and other Scriptures. Don't fear honest conclusions. Heaven is the goal, not holding to marching cries of men!