

Title Teaching to Observe
Speaker Tim Stoltzfus
Speaker's Residence Harrison, AR
Date Thursday, April 7, 2011
Venue Ridgeview Mennonite Church, Intercourse, PA
Program Beachy Amish Mennonite Ministers' Meeting 2011
Transcriber Cory A. Anderson (www.beachyam.org)
About this document: *This transcript may be distributed freely. The sermon was transcribed during the live presentation and then later edited for clarity. The material presented is not necessarily endorsed by the above organization(s) or transcriber(s). The content of this transcript is not guaranteed, though every effort was made for accuracy and clarity.*

Praise the Lord. Let's continue in Matthew 28: I invite you to turn there again. The assignment we want to look at is teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. In verse 28; [read verse]. The first message I really appreciated that Brother Ed shared with us. We heard about the instructions to go and teach. There are two teachings here, and it is important to take note of both of them. When the New Testament was written in that language, some of the original intent or meaning was lost through translation; we understand that. There are two words translated *teach*: teach--and then make disciples. In other words, when I taught school, it was always rewarding to drill facts into students' heads, and ask them an event, and they can tell you when it happened. But those rewards paled in comparison to the joy that flooded my heart when students decided to follow Jesus. As we study the teachings of Jesus, we find it is not head knowledge but practice. His goal was discipleship. As you go through the gospels, you will find the most repeated command of Jesus was "Follow Me." Follow me. Follow me. Sixteen times this command is repeated and I have not found any command given more frequently by Jesus. You know what the game, Follow the Leader looks like. Simple illustrations impress things more deeply on my mind, and the people on the front row have a lot of nerve to sit in the front, and maybe we should bring them up and play Follow the Leader, to teach discipleship. Rest assured; I won't do that. Now imagine, we play Follow the Leader, and I march forward, and I ask everyone down the line, "What are you doing?" And they do it to the person behind them. Once in a while the person down the line doesn't follow the leader. To follow the leader, you have to turn your attention to those in front of you, or you're going to be way off in oblivion doing things you're not supposed to do. Our attention in discipleship needs to keep going back to the leaders.

Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you. I believe Jesus, in this passage, is being redundant. He's just repeating Himself. It's hard to imagine this in such a large group, but imagine that we are in that group--that you are one of the eleven. Jesus says to you--the intimate group of disciples--that this is what I want you to do, go and teach. Make disciples of all nations. Jesus knows our hearts very well. I believe Jesus knew, and the subject was important enough that He didn't just say it once, but twice. What does that mean? Look at the beginning of verse 20. Teach them to observe all things. Here again, Jesus is redundant, and He's trying to get it through our fixed skulls. Why does He repeat it so vehemently? It's because we tend to take some of the plans. Look at the history of Christianity. It seems like a compelling tendency to take just some of the commands and not being intent on commanding every

command Jesus gave. Look at our heritage; we see it there--a tendency to stray from keeping all things. All things, whatsoever; now is this emphasis that we see in this passage: Is this really Jesus' heart? Is this really the way He taught?

Matthew chapters five through seven teaches the Sermon on the Mount. As we get to the end of it and cover all the teaching Jesus did, what is His emphasis? What does He say? Matthew 7:20: "Wherefore by your fruits ye shall know them." By their fruits, that's how you know Him. Verse 21, [*read verse*]. Who enters the kingdom of heaven, who that doeth the Will of My Father. [*Continues reading*] "...depart from me ye that work iniquity." Or as NKJV says, "You who practice lawlessness." Oh, Galatians 5 doesn't do that: what greater liberty could there be, to do the will of God! He concludes the Sermon on the Mount with a simple story. (We miss the message sometimes). It's a story about two builders. These men had several things in common: both were building a house, and both heard Jesus' sayings. Really, I don't know if you were there watching the houses being built, if you'd notice any differences or not. We don't know, really. We're building houses, aren't we? Sometimes, we can't immediately see what someone's foundation is. Are they building on the sand or rock? Jesus says we must build on the rock. He who hears the sayings and does it. [*Read verse.*] "Everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not..." Oh, we want to learn more! We like to learn new things. Are we as excited about putting it to practice? Jesus was about living it out in daily life. It's a call to give up my way, my ideas, my thoughts, and my dreams. The call to obedience is a call to love God. We love him so much we're willing to give up anything for Him. As this all takes place in our hearts, and we are committed to doing His will, we become compassionate.

Let's look at Matthew 19:16. This is the story of the Rich Young Ruler. We need to piece it together to get the entire Gospel. It's also found in Mark and Luke. [*Read verses*]. It's not about doing, it's about believing, right? It's not about doing! Shouldn't that be how Jesus replies? But He replies, if you want to go to heaven, keep the commandments. [*Continues verse*] Now, we heard the other evening that all the commandments, all the law and prophets, all the commandments hang on which two great commands, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God..." You can take the Ten Commandments and divide them into those two categories; the first five relate to loving God, and the last six loving your neighbor. The ones Jesus lists here, which category? Those five commands are summed up in loving your neighbor as yourself. So, the Rich Young Leader comes, and he says he's done it all. I have a lifestyle of loving my neighbor as myself. Jesus doesn't contradict him, does He? But Jesus says he lacks one thing. Mark and Luke both say it that way. In Matthew, verse 21, it says, "if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" and come and follow Me.

I'm doing that! I love my neighbor. I haven't murdered or committed adultery; I haven't coveted. I love my neighbor as myself. When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. Why did he leave sorrowful? It sort of gives the answer: he had great possessions. Is that the heart of it? Did he leave sadly because he loved his neighbor as himself? Because he loves God so much, he's so sad? Whom did he really love? Himself! If he loved his neighbor as himself, truly, truly, would it have been so hard to sell and give? Mmm...?

James 1:22 says, "but be ye doers..." That is one of the dangers of meetings like this; we receive a lot of information, and if we don't put it into shoe leather, we end up in deception. As we

receive knowledge, we must put it into practice.

When I was 21, I went to Lewisville, TX for administrator's training so I could be principal at an ACE school. There were lots of conservative evangelicals there from various denominations. On the first day I arrived, I was relieved to see another young man wearing a plain coat. How does that work? The first break, somehow we were beside each other. Another young man, a Baptist, sat beside us and had a question. Who are you? What do you believe? The young man beside me said, We take the Word of God and try to live it out. That young man looked back at me and said, "That's us, too. That's what we try to do." Now, you know my good little Mennonite brain was thinking "you're missing nonresistance, nonconformity, right on down the line about what you're not practicing. I've had to wonder since that time if he had some time to study our lives, what would he say? I really, really wonder what he would see. As Jesus looked at the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus saw what he was missing. While the Rich Leader didn't have any clue what he was missing. There is inherent within us to redefine God's standard of righteousness where we're living. We as churches do that. We look around at other churches. We look at more conservative ones and we see other churches. And the more liberal churches, they're just losing "all things." Can't they see these are commandments given in the Word of God? But good us: we're like the ones Laban described last night. Come look at us. We pat ourselves on the back, you've found us finally! That's just another confirmation that we got it right. I don't know, I think we're aware of this, we are not doing well at taking the Gospel to all nations. We are not doing well of taking to Gospel to the heathen. As I look across this group, I see Yoders, Stoltzfuses, Gingeriches, and Beachys and Beachys and Beachys. But I don't see many people with a non-Anabaptist name. That is shame on us. "Go ye therefore." Don't be so certain that your boundaries of righteousness are really getting out.

In Galatians 5 we read about the Fruit of the Spirit. Right on the tail end of that, before that, was the work of the flesh--just to help us get it. Galatians 5:24, [*read verse*]. They that are Christ's had crucified the flesh... They that belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with the lusts. What we do is redefine God's standard of righteousness to a level we can easily keep in the power of the flesh. And we fell pretty good. If we're really striving for the standard of righteousness Jesus gives, it cannot be done in the power of the flesh. It takes dependence, crying out to God, and a life of dependency, brokenness--not having what it takes; being willing to follow in His footsteps. The Rich Young Ruler was falling short, and he was mostly unaware of it. How did he come aware? Was it through reading the Word? Does God make us aware through reading the Word? Not with the Rich Young Ruler here. Does the Spirit make aware the needs in our life through the Holy Spirit? Not in this case. It was with a personal situation with a personal encounter. There were times the Holy Spirit was working on him, and I don't doubt it: what do I lack yet? God calls us sometimes to hear it very clearly and plainly, this is what you lack, this is what I see.

It is so interesting that sixteen times Jesus commands "Come, follow me." Follow Jesus, follow Jesus. Know what Paul says? Follow me, follow me, follow me. Not follow Jesus. Why would he not say, follow Jesus? Would we go home to the flock God and say follow me? Many times Paul says just that. There is something about an example that impacts people. The Holy Spirit works through the congregation, and that's the whole thing of a brotherhood speaking into our lives. Not one of us will get all of it. There are various gifts in the congregations, and so we

should be willing to submit one to another.

I think it is imperative that we gratefully and humbly recognize that we have a goodly heritage; the lines are fallen in pleasant places. We have a heritage that has tried to obey all things. They have been serious about it. They recognize the need for input from others. They could agree together on practical applications that would preserve principles and truth. Don't ever throw that out the door lightly--this idea of making practical application to the Word of God, and how that should be lived out in our community.

I'll just throw one out: separation and nonconformity is not maintained without brotherhood agreement and applications. [*Audience member: "You are right, brother."*] As I study history, separation and nonconformity is not maintained without agreement. You look at others who practiced it: Quakers and others--well yeah--I'm not sure what all to say about that. There is a tendency, if we practice it: there is a tendency to do it for the wrong reasons, and there is a real pull as we look at where we come from and where we are going. We are wise to recognize that most groups that have left the Amish have not for a long term been faithful in practicing the all things. Those who left the Amish and began the path of acculturation have not maintained the practice of all things. I don't have all the answers. It's good for us to know that, be aware of that, and to consider seriously the changes we make. I believe all of commands are based upon the command to love God and love your neighbor. As we strive to make changes that would help us love God more, and consider what is driving this change, is it because of our love for God or our love for the world, or for some other reason. I know that some rules are useless and we don't need to bind man with grievances on people. I don't know: Were your ancestors stupid? Do you come from a line of unintelligent people? Or do you think they tried to make a safe place to bring up their children? We need to be careful about throwing practices out the door.

What are the commandments for Jesus to obey: Deny yourself, take up your Cross and follow Jesus; lay up not for yourselves treasures on earth; pray without ceasing; go ye therefore and teach all nations; be not conformed to this world; be transformed; don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; associate with the lowly (How well do we do on that one?); abstain from fleshly lust; recompense no man evil for evil; husbands, love your wives; wives submit to your husbands; let your women be covered; set your affections on things above, not on earth; Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; obey those that have rule over you; and submit yourselves. How do we decide which ones to obey? What needs to be obeyed? How about, we can reinterpret it for our time and place. For example, greet one another with a holy kiss. It's unhandy; it doesn't fit very well culturally. I've sat in instruction classes which would say, when they first saw this practice, they first thought, *Naw, that's just not something we would do*. As they studied the Scriptures and they found the word that is translated *kiss* simply means kiss. There are Greek words translated five or ten ways. This is a narrow word: it means kiss. When we begin to redefine words to fit our preferences, we're on shaky ground, There are no convenient stopping points. A handshake doesn't convey the same message a kiss does. If you think it does, try to convince your wife. From now on, before we go to sleep, I'll give you a good handshake. When I leave in the morning, I'll give you a warm handshake. But there's something intimate about a kiss. There's a good reason the Apostle Paul wrote that. What do you know about Corinth? Struggles, strife, interpersonal relationships. With both letters, he closed with that instruction. Did he see that as part of what they needed in order to grow their love? There are a

number of churches he didn't write that to. That commandment is recorded five times in the New Testament. It's our duty to discern what Jesus commands, not what we decide to obey.

James 1:27 says, "pure religion... to keep himself unspotted from the world." The idea is getting a stain on yourself. I like big sandwiches; you keep putting good things on. The juicier they are, the better, but they tend to leave a spot on you. The world tends to also leave a spot on us. We could look at a wide range of spots: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. We need the brotherhood to keep the spots of the world off of ourselves; it's not out of place at all for us to have some dress standards that identify worldliness, or to say, "Young men, your hair--we don't want you following the fashions of the world. When a brother is in error, what are we going to do? Hmm, you're not following the standard; you need to submit to the church. Do you know you have an opportunity to touch his heart? Show him what's going on inside there? I hope we have a better grasp on that. Most of our young people haven't waked up to this. Not just to bring him into line, but to help him see his heart. Why do you want to cut your hair that way? We need each other to help see our motives, to see what's driving us. I've touched on an outer dress area; this applies to so many areas of life. Materialism. We need each other's help to keep the spots of the world off.

A question for you: which does God most desire, your love or your obedience? Often the answers we get are as good as the questions we asked. And right up front, that is a sorry question. You can't have one without the other. The Bible is clear about that. The command to obey, can you do that without love? Impossible! John 14, he that hath my commandments... Here again, Jesus is not wasting breath. In the waning hours before His crucifixion, He has a limited time to be with His disciples. Look at verse 23: if a man love Me, He will keep my words... In verse 24, he that loveth me not... Turn to 1 John 2:3-6, and then we'll close. I want you to notice this. Hereby we do know that we love Him... [*read verses*]. God's blessings.