

“Go Into All the World”

The Great Commission: Part 1

In Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16 Jesus gave His disciples what we now call the Great Commission. It is His charge to all who follow Him to take the gospel to all the world so that all men can have the opportunity of salvation. In Mark 16:15 He specifically states, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel.*”

Throughout the New Testament the apostles fulfilled this command to *go* as they preached the gospel in every city. They delivered the gospel to us through their sacrifices and preaching. Now we have the gospel recorded in the scriptures, therefore it is now in our hands to take the gospel to those who are in the world. Today there are many preachers traveling into areas such as the Philippines, various countries throughout Africa, China, even rural parts of the US. Like the apostles they travel from city to city and village to village preaching the gospel to souls in need. But does that mean that every single Christian needs to *go* into foreign countries as the apostles did? Does God require that we all leave our homes for weeks, even months at a time in order to fulfill the command to *go*? No it does not.

We who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel are reaping the benefits of those who do preach the gospel. But after gospel preachers preach to the few people that they may come into contact with, how do the rest of the people hear the gospel? How is the gospel supposed to get to those people that do not go to church, who do not know about their need for salvation, and who are not currently seeking salvation? Christians. We are, in a sense, God’s hands through which the gospel is spread to the people all around us. Many preachers *go* to many parts of the world, but Christians must take it upon themselves to simply *go* to their neighbors so that they may teach the gospel.

In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas were traveling on their first missionary journey when they entered a city called Antioch. When they arrived they went directly to the synagogue. While there they had an opportunity to preach to those Jews and to a few of the Gentiles. They were invited back the next week to continue their preaching. When the time came it says, “...*almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God*” (Acts 13:44). Where did all of these people come from? How did “almost the whole city” know that God’s word was going to be preached at that synagogue? The scriptures do not tell us specifically, but based on the information we are given we can make some conclusions. It says in Acts 13:42, “*the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them on the next Sabbath.*” Also, “*many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas...*” When people are this excited about something, what usually happens? They tell others about it; they share their excitement. When we are excited about something we tell people about it. This is how it should be, especially with the gospel.

This is the way Christians who do not travel around the world take the gospel to those who are in the world. Not all Christians are missionaries or gospel preachers, but we are in the world right now. There are people all around us whom gospel preachers cannot come into contact with unless we are doing our part.

When Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians he had heard of the great faith of the church in Thessalonica and their diligence in preaching the gospel. He wrote that from them “the word of the Lord had sounded forth” (1 Thess. 1:8). You see, the church in Thessalonica was fulfilling their part of the great commission—they were preaching the gospel.

Their diligence in this is our example. All Christians, no matter what their situation in life, no matter their gender or personality, have a God-given responsibility to *go* to their neighbors so that the gospel may be preached. This is not a burden, but a blessing. We have been given a great gift. God sent His Son to die on the cross; to sacrifice Himself so that we can have salvation. Servants of God put their lives at risk, often losing their lives, to ensure that this gospel reached you and me. Now that it is our hands we have to ask what we can do with it. Will we hoard it for ourselves? Will we think about it and learn from it for ourselves without sharing it with others? If Jesus died for the whole world, who are we to prevent His gospel from reaching those around us. If we have obeyed the gospel then we are His “workmanship” (Eph. 2:10). We are tools in His hands meant to do works of righteousness (Rom. 6:22). As we have received this great gift, so we must in turn take it to those around us.

How? How can average Christians take the gospel to the lost? How can we do our part to fulfill the Great Commission? First, we must have a love for Christ and a love for lost souls. We must have the desire to save their souls. With that love we must seek opportunities and take opportunities that are provided.

Every time we interact with people in the world is another opportunity to teach. Our going does not necessarily involve traveling to other countries. We can *go* by simply being in the world and interacting with our neighbors. We can go by talking to the electrician, the plumber, or the contractor who does work on our house. We can go by talking to the members of our extended families, by being involved in our communities, by talking to the person next to us in the Doctor’s office or on the plane.

There is so much we can do if our hearts are in the right place. Where are here on this earth for a finite amount of time. Paul said of himself, “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*” (1 Cor. 9:16). Concerning his goals and priorities he said, “*...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:13-14). He then exhorts us saying, “*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind*” (Phil. 3:15). Do you have this mind? Do you seek first the kingdom for Christ died to give you? Are you willing to fulfill the commission to “go” to those around you who need the gospel? Think of the joy you can have when you enter into heaven as a faithful servant of God. Think of the joy you can have then those who hear the gospel from you have that same opportunity.

In part two of this series we will be considering what we must teach when we go into the world.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in should not perish but have everlasting life”

--John 3:16--

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“Preach the Gospel”

The Great Commission: Part 2

In our last article we discussed the command to *go* as part of the Great Commission. As we delve further into this commission we find that Jesus did not send His people on some arbitrary mission. He had a very specific purpose for sending them into the world. He said, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:16). This is our mission—to preach the gospel.

This command shows us the emphasis on spiritual things which Christ expected His people to have. As Jesus was concerned about the souls of men while He was on this earth, so He expected His disciples to have that same concern. “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master*” (Matt. 10:24-25a). The goals that Jesus had for lost souls are the same as what we should have. It is up to us to show the world what the love of God looks like (John 13:35). It is up to us to have the kind of love which would drive us to preach the gospel to the lost, for without the gospel of Jesus Christ men cannot be saved (Acts 4:12). Therefore we are commanded to go into all the world and preach that gospel.

Sadly, however, there are many in the world who call themselves the church and who claim to be Disciples of Christ, but in their efforts to fulfill the Great Commission they are forgetting one very important thing—to preach the gospel. There are two things that we are going to discuss in this article that people often get mixed up when trying to fulfill the Great Commission. We need to seriously consider these things, because if we are not willing to properly do the work that Christ has given us to do, then we cannot honestly call ourselves His disciples.

1. There are many who take great amounts of food and clothing to other countries “in the name of Christ” or “in the name of the gospel.” They claim that by this they are fulfilling the Great Commission. They call themselves missionaries, saying that they are doing the same work that Paul and Barnabas did in the book of Acts. However, if we look closely at the works of Paul and Barnabas we will find that their emphasis was not on clothing and feeding people, but upon preaching the gospel. “*...but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*” (Acts 26:20). Paul was specifically chosen by Jesus to go to the nations of the world, but Jesus said nothing about doing what we call “charity work.” Rather, He said to Paul, “*I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me*” (Acts 26:17-18). In other words, Paul’s purpose was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews, like most in the world today) so that they may know the truth, obey that gospel, and have their sins washed away.

What is wrong with taking food and clothes to people? Absolutely nothing! In and of itself, it is a good thing. But remember, our discussion here is not about whether or not it is good to feed and clothe people who are in need. Our discussion is about the work that the church is to do as part of the Great Commission. As individuals we have an obligation to help those around us who are in

need. This was the point behind the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Even Paul said, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Gal. 6:10). Again, as individuals it is our obligation to help our neighbors as opportunity calls for it. But in the scriptures there is a clear distinction between the work of an individual and the work of the church. There is a clear separation between preaching the gospel and doing charity work.

“If we help people in other nations, won’t that draw more people to the gospel?” No, it won’t. Many churches have used food and clothing as a “lour” to get people to trust them and then subtly sneak in something about Jesus. But this is not the pattern Jesus left for us. There were times when Jesus did miracles involving food in order to prove His authority, but when people started seeking Him because of that food He rebuked them saying, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him”* (John 6:26-27). Therefore when the church sends men out into the world to preach the gospel the only thing that we may use to “lour” men is the gospel itself. It in itself has the power to draw people to God. As the word of God it has the ability to move the hearts of men who are willing to be saved.

As we move from this discussion we must set aside the idea that many in the world have of the church. The church that Jesus established is not a charity organization. There is something far more important than food and clothing at stake here—the souls of men. That must come first. As individuals let us do good to all men. But when it comes to fulfilling the Great Commission, let us stick to preaching the gospel.

2. The gospel that many people are preaching when they go into the world is not the same gospel that Jesus gave us in the Great commission. The same desire that causes men to use food and clothing to entice people also causes men to change the gospel in order to make it more appealing.

In 1 Cor. 15:1-8 Paul clearly defines the facts of the gospel; what Jesus did in order to give us salvation. 1) Christ died according to the scriptures, 2) He was buried, 3) He rose again the third day according to the scriptures, 4) He was seen by many witness as evidence of His resurrection. In a nutshell, this is the gospel. Most people get this part right. But how we are supposed to respond to that gospel is where many people start to change things.

Some teach that as long as we believe in the gospel we can be saved without doing anything else. Others teach that we are saved when we believe, but in order to keep that salvation we must eventually be baptized. There are also some who teach that it doesn’t matter what you do to respond to the gospel, as long as you do what makes you feel good. But if we take a closer look at the Great Commission we will find that Jesus did not approve of any of these things.

Mark 16:15-16, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* What did Jesus say we must do in response to hearing the gospel? Believe and be baptized. What if a person does not do these things? He *“will be condemned.”* So it DOES matter what we do in response to the gospel.

Jesus did His part for our salvation when He died on the cross. But the gospel also involves us doing our part. We know what Jesus did, but what must we do? In the scriptures there are no less than six things we must be willing to do if we are to be saved by the gospel. 1) Hear the word of God (Rom. 10:14, 17), 2) believe in the gospel (Mark 16:16), 3) Repent of our sins (Acts 2:38),

4) Confess that Jesus is Lord and Christ (Acts 8:37), 5) be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38), 6) live faithful to God the rest of our lives (Rom. 6:22; Rev. 2:10).

There are many other details that we must learn as we grow as Christians, but in order to be saved by the gospel these are the things that God says we must be willing to do. But why is this so important? Why does it matter if we tell people we do not have to be baptized? Why does it matter if we change the gospel a little bit if that is what people like? *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Gal. 6:8). This passage alone should answer that question. When Jesus died for our sins He established only one gospel. Anything that does not match up to that standard cannot save. Some think they are doing others a favor by changing the gospel a little bit here and there, when in fact they are doing much more harm than good.

Let us be content to preach the one true gospel that Jesus delivered on the cross. It is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom. 1:16). We must trust that it has power enough to draw people to God and to save their souls. By this we will fulfill our commission in the Lord.

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“To Every Nation”

The Great Commission: Part 3

In the previous article in this series we discussed the need to preach the gospel of Christ in order to fulfill the commission given in Matt. 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16. We also learned that there was only one gospel that was given to be preached. The apostle Paul emphasizes the fact that there is only one gospel in Gal. 1:8-9 where he writes, “*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*”

This is essential to our understanding the Great Commission. There are many teaching that “It doesn’t matter what we believe, as long as we believe in something.” Others may say, “It is good to go to church. But a person should be able to go to whatever church makes them feel the best, because it doesn’t really matter what we teach.” Dear reader, it just is not so. Jesus is the one and only Savior. He tells us, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). The apostle Peter also said concerning Jesus, “*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). In other words, the only way to get to heaven is through Jesus Christ. There is no other way. Now, since Jesus is one person, since He only died once, and since the faith that He has given us was delivered “*once for all*” (Jude 3), that means that there is only ONE GOSPEL. Therefore Paul wrote in Eph. 4:5 that there is only “*one faith*”

What does this have to do with the Great Commission? Everything! Because Jesus commanded us to preach this one gospel “*in every nation.*” That means that the same gospel that was preached in the book of Acts must be preached today. Nothing has changed. Also, it doesn’t matter if the people of a nation already believe in a different god or worship God in a different way, if they have not obeyed the one true gospel and if they are not worshipping the one true God then they are still lost. This answers the question, “Does it really matter what we believe?” Yes, it does! If we want salvation it must come through Jesus Christ. Which means that a person cannot be saved through Buddha, Mohamed, or the numerous Hindu and Native American gods.

In Gen. 1:1 it says, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” Well, if God created the heavens and the earth, where did all these other gods come from? Paul writes in Rom. 1:22-25, “*Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*” Idolatry started because men rejected God. They chose to live in their sins rather than follow the right ways of God. All men have sinned (Rom. 1:23). This means that all men were separated from God and therefore worthy only of death (Rom. 6:23). But God, being a God of love and compassion, does not want us to die in our sins. He does not want us to blindly follow after false gods which we make up with our own imaginations. He wants us to be with Him and to have salvation. Therefore it says, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not*

perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). But the only way we can have that everlasting life is if we are willing give up those false gods and sinful ways that separated us from God in the first place. That is why the gospel needs to be preached *in every nation*. That is why it doesn’t matter what a person believed before, they need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. Once they hear the one true gospel, they need to repent and begin serving the God who created all things.

In the New Testament we see several instances where the gospel was preached in idolatrous cities and men in those cities were willing to give up their former beliefs in order to have salvation in Christ.

“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:18-20).

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols...However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:16, 34).

So you see, it doesn’t matter what a person believes, it doesn’t matter what country they are from, it doesn’t matter what god they worship, the gospel is for all men. We who have already believed and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ must take it upon ourselves to take the gospel of salvation to the people who are around us. We cannot be afraid of offending them, for some will be offended. We cannot shy away from telling them about the one true God and the Savior Jesus Christ. The only way they will be saved is if they hear the word and believe. Their souls are at stake.

God is a great God, abundant in mercy and in compassion. That is why He has delivered the gospel to the whole world. But a time is coming when God will judge the world. Peter says of that day, *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”* (2 Pet. 3:10). So what is He waiting for? Why has He not yet judged the world? *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet. 3:9). He is waiting for those who are willing to believe in the gospel, to turn from their false gods and false worship and be converted by faith in Jesus Christ.

It is up to us to make sure that men from every nation have that opportunity. Time is limited. Jesus is coming. We need to make sure we have done all that we can to preach His gospel in every nation. This gift of salvation has been given to us, as many as have believed. Let us do what we can to give it to those who are around us.

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Make Disciples

The Great Commission: Part 4

In the Great Commission we are commanded to “go” and to “preach the gospel to every nation.” An essential question that we must answer before doing this is, what is supposed to happen when the gospel is preached? So we preach, but does Jesus have any expectation as to the outcome of our preaching? Yes He does. In fact, the outcome is very specific.

Jesus said in Matt. 28:19 that when we preach the gospel we are expected to “make disciples” of those who hear. Now, we all know that not everyone who hears the gospel is going to believe in it, so we are not talking about those people in this lesson. We are talking about those who hear the gospel and believe what it says. If they believe, what then? Well, Jesus says to “make disciples.” This task seems simple enough, but its significance is great.

As defined by Vine, a disciple is “a learner” or pupil. “One who follows one’s teachings.” In the New Testament we can read of the *disciples* of John who *followed* John and his teachings concerning the coming Christ and the kingdom (John 4:1). In like manner, Jesus also had *disciples* who *followed* Him through His travels and observed His teachings (John 4:1-2; 8:31). “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*” This is a disciple. Even in the Great Commission itself Jesus said in Matt. 28:20, “*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*”

When Jesus commanded us to “make disciples” He was commanding that we preach a gospel that teaches men to follow His character and teachings. Those who are willing to do so become His disciples. It should be observed that in Matthew’s account the word “gospel” is never used. It says, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*” (Matt. 28:19). This does not mean that we can make disciples without preaching the gospel. Rather, when we combine Matt. 28:19 with Mark 16:15 we must conclude that preaching the gospel and making disciples are synonymous. That is to say, we make disciples by preaching the gospel and when we preach the gospel, those who respond are made His disciples.

This conclusion brings to light several very important biblical truths. When the one true gospel is preached it leaves an indelible impression of the need for action upon the mind of the hearer. When Peter preached the gospel in Acts chapter two many who were present were “*cut to the heart*” and were compelled to ask, “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37). Those who believed the preaching of Philip in Acts 8:12 were compelled to be baptized, as was the Ethiopian eunuch when he asked, “*See, hear is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*” (Acts 8:36). All Philip did was “*preach Jesus*” to the eunuch (vs. 35), and yet he understood the need to do something. After Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius’ household it says that he “*commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord*” (Acts 10:48). This pattern is the same throughout the scriptures. When the gospel was preached it communicated not only the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but the need for action on the part of the hearers as well. It is the same for today. When we hear the one true gospel it should compel us to do something. If we hear a gospel that does not compel us to do something (i.e. all you have to do is believe, etc.), then it is not the gospel of Christ.

Another truth which we learn from this is that since “preaching the gospel” and “making disciples” of people are synonymous, the kind of action commanded in the gospel is an on going one. When Jesus was preaching He invited men to come to Him and learn from Him (be His disciples) in Matt. 11:28-30. “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (emph. mine). Even in this simple invitation Jesus indicates the need for continuous action in order to be His disciples, for those who come to Him are to take His yoke upon them. A yoke is literally a wooden coupler which binds two animals together for plowing or towing. Metaphorically it represents submission and authority and/or a burden. Notice Jesus also said, “*My burden is light.*” Jesus expects His disciples to be learning from Him. That is, to learn from His way of life, His speech, His teaching, His character, His righteousness, etc. The burden that He bore is that of righteousness and faithfulness to God. Thus He expects His disciples to continue in such righteousness and faithfulness, Just and He did while He was on the earth. The apostle John makes use of this very principle in 1 John 2:6 where he writes, “*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*” Paul also agrees as he writes, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1). To “learn from” Jesus and to “walk as He walked” are not things that we can do for a short period of time. These are on-going actions. For Jesus was faithful and “*obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross*” (Phil. 2:8). If we are to be His disciples and therefore be saved by His gospel then we must be followers and imitators of Him. Thus, we too must be obedient unto death—faithful for the remainder of our lives. Remember these things the next time you hear someone speak of “saved by faith only” and “once saved always saved.”

Finally, we have seen that the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament always motivated people to do something in response to what they were hearing. Therefore we must conclude that the gospel includes more than the story of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, the gospel, the good new of salvation, must also include the teachings of Jesus as to what we must do to be saved. In other words, the gospel includes commands which we must obey of we are going to be saved by it. Paul agrees with this conclusion as he states in Rom. 6:17, “*...yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*” Notice that those had received salvation “obeyed.” Also, in 2 Thess. 1:8 Paul stated that God’s wrath is coming upon those who “*do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The gospel is the most beautiful story every told. But according to Christ it is much more than a story. It is the good news, it is the way of salvation, it is the command of the Lord, and it is a way of life.

When we are preaching the gospel to our neighbors and to those in every part of the world let us remember to include the need for obedience—the need to follow Christ continually as His disciples. If our preaching does not motivate people do to something in response to the gospel (i.e. repent of their sins and devote their lives to following Christ as His disciples) then we are not preaching the one true gospel. Let us learn what Christ expects of those who follow Him. Let us learn how exactly He says we must be saved by His gospel. Finally, let us learn to preach and to practice all that the Lord has commanded us.

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“Baptizing Them...”

The Great Commission: Part 5

The purpose of this article is to show the necessity of being baptized for our salvation and to answer a few of the objections to this command. In our last lesson we discussed the principle of making disciples according to the Great Commission. We pointed out that when the gospel is preached and people respond to its message they are able to become disciples of Jesus. The question we are going to discuss in this lesson is, how do we become disciples of Jesus?

Simply put, Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, “...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...” So when we put everything together we get the following method for making disciples. 1. Preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). 2. People hear and believe the gospel (Mark 15:16). 3. Those who believe are made disciples by being baptized (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19). This is the pattern according to the Great commission.

It is so very clear when we look at it like this, but many people in the religious world have a difficult time seeing it. Over the past few centuries many have rejected Jesus’ command to be baptized. They still claim to be His disciples, but they are unwilling to teach baptism according to the true pattern. Why? If the words of Jesus are so very clear, then why would anyone who truly desires salvation reject His command to be baptized? There are many answers to this question, but the most common one is this: many people believe that a person is saved by faith alone, therefore we cannot be saved by works lest our salvation become a debt that God owes us instead of by the grace of God (as a gift). They believe that baptism is a work, therefore baptism cannot be necessary for our salvation. As we look to the scriptures, however, we will find that this objection is based on a misunderstanding of the relationship between works and salvation.

In the entirety of God’s inspired word, God has shown mankind the need for obedience. In the beginning Adam caused sin to enter the world because he disobeyed the command of God and ate the forbidden fruit. Since that time all men have sinned (Rom. 5:12); we have walked in disobedience. But from the beginning God has shown us that we can have hope in Him if we are willing to turn from our disobedience and be obedient to His commands. Noah and his family were saved because, “*Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did*” (Gen. 6:22). Abraham was chosen to be the father of God’s people because, as it says, “...*Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws*” (Gen. 6:5). Throughout the history of the Israelite nation God shows us how He punished the people when they were disobedient and blessed the people when they were obedient. Why do we have all of their rebellions and punishments recorded in the Bible for us? “*Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*” (1 Cor. 10:6). It is also written in Hebrews 4:11, “*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*” In other words, God is teaching us that we must be obedient to His command if want to have the hope of salvation!

Jesus did not die so that those who hate Him and reject Him can be saved. He did not die so that we can have our own way and do whatever we want without having to fear the consequences. His death only brings salvation to those who are willing to obey His commands. Therefore it is

written, “*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb. 5:9). See the need to obey!

Now, in Eph. 2:8 it says, “*For by grace you have been saved.*” This means that God gives us our salvation. We cannot earn it. There is nothing in the world that we can do to deserve the gift of salvation which God offers through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are saved by the grace of God. How can God save us by grace and still expect obedience? For the same reason a birthday boy has to open his presents to get to the gift inside. For the same reason that the poor person must travel to the community center to receive his free meal. For the same reason Naaman had to dip seven times in the Jordan river to be cleansed of his leprosy in 2 Kings 5. Obedience is God’s contingency upon our receiving the gift. The truth is, God could place any number of commands on us if He wanted to. He could have told us to climb the highest mountain or swim across the ocean to receive salvation. But He didn’t tell us to do those things.

All God expects us to do is to put our faith in Christ and to obey His word. To “kick start” that life of obedience He shows us five things that must take place. 1. We must hear the gospel message. 2. We must believe that message. 3. We must repent of our sins. This means to turn or to change our minds and commit to obeying Him. 4. We must be willing to confess Jesus as Lord and Son of God. 5. We must be baptized.

Why did God choose baptism? That is a question we cannot fully answer, but we can understand why it is important. John the Baptist was sent by God to “*make straight the way of the Lord*” (John 1:23). When a person wanted to become a disciple (learner or follower) of John that person needed to be baptized by John. It is not a coincidence that when Jesus came on the scene the same thing was true of His disciples. If a person wanted to become a follower of Jesus he was baptized, mostly by other disciples, but in the name of Jesus. “*...Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)*” (John 4:1-2). This pattern did not change after Jesus died and rose from the dead. His statements in Matt. 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16 were made after His resurrection.

It would only be speculation, but what if a person came up to Jesus while He was on the earth and said, “Lord, I want to be your disciple, but I don’t think I should have to be baptized.” The very notion is ridiculous. It is no less ridiculous for a person today to say the same thing. Baptism is important for the simple fact that it is commanded by our Lord and Savior!

Baptism is important because it is an inherent part of the gospel message. Philip preached things concerning the kingdom in Acts 8. In response to his preaching the people of Samaria were baptized in Acts 8:12. It says in Acts 8:35 that Philip “*preached Jesus*” to the Ethiopian eunuch. In response to this message the eunuch said, “*See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?*” (vs. 36). Peter commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptized in Acts 10:47. Paul (while still named Saul) was baptized in Acts 9:18. We later find that this was because he was commanded to be baptized by Ananias (Acts 22:16). Lydia and the Philippian jailor were baptized in Acts 16. In Acts 19:5 some men who were disciples of John were re-baptized in the name of Christ. Do we see a pattern? Baptism was not some arbitrary thing that Jesus happened to mention in passing. When He commanded His disciples to “*disciple all nations, baptizing them*” He was setting forth a pattern that He expected to be followed. By what we can see in all of the passages just mentioned, His disciples followed that pattern faithfully.

In Rom. 6:3-6 Paul compares baptism to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He said that we are “*buried with Him through baptism*” and that “*just as Christ was raised from the*

*dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (vs. 4). What better way to show our faith in Christ and in the power of His resurrection than to imitate it in our own conversion? Therefore Paul also wrote in Col. 2:12 that we are “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him **through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**”*

We see in these passages that by being baptized we do not try to earn our salvation. On the contrary, when we submit to Christ in baptism we are showing our faith in the power of God to forgive our sins. In 1 Pet. 3:21 we are taught that baptism saves us because it is our appeal to God for Him to make our consciences clean. The power in that, however, is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are saved in baptism, not of our own strength, not by any power that is in the water, but by the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

When we are baptized “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” that means that we do it by their authority. In the book of Acts the apostles baptized people “*in the name of Jesus*” (Acts 2:38). His authority is the same as the Father’s. We can rest assured that if a person has heard the one true gospel and is baptized having faith in that gospel then they have done so according to the will of God. There are many preachers and teachers in the world telling people that they are saved and that they have been made disciples even though they have not been baptized. They do not have authority for that because it does not follow the pattern Christ set forth in the scriptures.

We have a responsibility to teach all men to obey Christ. That commitment starts in our baptism. Let us be faithful disciples of our Lord and Savior and do all things according to His pattern.

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“Teaching Them To Observe All Things That I Have Commanded You”

The Great Commission: Part 6

Over the course of this series on the Great Commission we have discussed several points that are necessary for Christians to understand, but which have been neglected by the majority. Of every aspect of our commission the one discussed in this article is perhaps the most neglected. It concerns our need to teach new converts to “observe” all things that Jesus commanded. We saw last week how many preachers fail to teach people to be baptized, but that is just the beginning. In the religious world the failure to command baptism is only the first pebble in a landslide of the commands that people fail to observe. In this article we are going to be discussing the authority of Jesus and our need to obey Him in all things because of that authority.

In Matt. 28:18, before Jesus gave the Great Commission, He established the authority by which He sent His disciples into the world. He said, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” Jesus has all authority, not only on earth, but in heaven as well. This means that He has supreme rule. In the Old Testament it was prophesied that the Christ, the Savior of the world, would become king over God’s kingdom (1 Chron. 17:11). In Acts 2:30-31 Peter tells us that this promise of a king was fulfilled in Christ at His resurrection. “*Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ.*” Having sat down on His throne on high, Jesus has the preeminence over all creation. “*And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*” (Col. 1:17-18). In 1 Tim. 6:15 the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as the “*King of kings and Lord of lords.*”

Why is this important to the Great commission? Because only when we have a healthy respect for Christ’s authority will we truly be able to carry out our commission. In Acts 17:30 we are told that Jesus, as King over all things, is the One who is going to judge the world. He is going to judge all of us as to whether our deeds on this earth were good or bad; in obedience or disobedience. “*...but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:30-31). As King the words of Jesus are LAW. He spoke concerning the authority of His words in John 12:48 saying, “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*” In other words, Jesus is coming to judge the world where He will save the righteous and punish the unrighteous. The standard (the law) by which He will judge all men is His word. According to the Great Commission, our purpose in preaching the gospel is to save as many as possible from that judgment. Remember that Jesus said, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*”? Saved from what? Saved from the judgment which Christ is bringing upon the whole world. That is why it is so important that we strive to preach

the gospel to every nation. So that every person will have the opportunity to choose whether they want salvation in Christ or not.

The reason Jesus is going to judge the world is because from the beginning men have walked in disobedience to God. Our purpose on this earth is to fear Him and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13), but we have not fulfilled that purpose *“for all have sinned”* (Rom. 3:23). But in Christ God has given us the opportunity to undo the effects that disobedience; to turn back to Him and serve Him as we were created to do. Therefore, when the apostle Paul went about preaching the gospel he commanded all men, *“that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance”* (Acts 26:20).

That is the message that we are to be preaching according to the Great commission. We are to teach all men about the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in so doing show that He has been glorified in heaven as King and will judge the world. If we want salvation we need to turn to Him in obedience. We need to make Him King in our lives. How do we do this? By *“observing all things that He has commanded us.”*

When a person obeys the gospel he is not just “joining a church”; he is not simply making himself a better person. When a person comes to Christ by faith and is baptized he is making a commitment to submit to Christ in all things. He is saying that he believes that Jesus is in fact King, and that he will live before Christ in obedience. Paul illustrated this principle in himself in Gal. 2:20 when he said, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* Therefore, in making Jesus our King, we live as if He is living in us. Though we are alive in our physical bodies, we put those bodies to work for Him, serving Him in all things. Without this commitment one cannot be a disciple of Christ. Without this commitment one cannot be saved in Christ because we are told that He is the author of eternal salvation *“to all who obey Him”* (Heb. 5:9). Why? Because He is King!

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Jesus said, *“for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins”* (John 8:24). True faith in Jesus Christ requires more than acknowledging that He was a real person. True faith requires acknowledging that He is King, that He has all authority, and it requires our submission to that authority. That is why Jesus said to teach them to observe all that He commanded. Only when we live in obedience to His word will we know true joy, true peace, and true hope. Only when we live in obedience to His word will we truly have salvation in Him. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? If you do, then cast off the sins and cares of this world. Come to Christ with a humble heart and a meek and gentle spirit. Put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27) and begin living the way God intended for us to live. That is the call of the Great commission. Are you willing to respond?

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