

The Purpose and Plan for the Church

The Priority of Evangelism pt2

Matt 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Introduction

Review

Lesson

- I. The Passion for Evangelism
- II. The Person for Evangelism
- III. The Pattern for Evangelism
- IV. The Proclamation for Evangelism

1. A Passion for Evangelism

Ro 10

10 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Ro 9:1-3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

II. The Person For Evangelism

A. The Lost

All nations

⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations

15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Mk 16:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 And you are witnesses of these things.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Lk 24:47–48). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 1:8–9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us:

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

- 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 13:46–48). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 28:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The New King James Version. (1982). (Re 7:9–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Lost

10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The New King James Version. (1982). (Lk 19:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- 31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.
 32 I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance

The New King James Version. (1982). (Lk 5:31–32). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?
 5 And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.
 6 And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'
 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance

The New King James Version. (1982). (Lk 15:4–7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The New King James Version. (1982). (Mt 1:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Mt 18:11–12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

15 This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

The New King James Version. (1982). (1 Ti 1:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Unchurched or Unsaved? What Our Vocabulary Reveals About Our Beliefs

In 1914, Ernest Henry Shackleton led an expedition to cross the entire continent of Antarctica, but wound up shipwrecked on an uninhabited island. To rescue his team, Shackleton sailed a tiny boat across 850 miles of rough seas to South Georgia Island. Despite the choppy waters and gray skies, Shackleton was able to safely navigate the boat to their destination. If his coordinates had been off by even one half of one degree, his team would have missed their destination by hundreds of miles and perished.

Ship captains, airplane pilots, and astronauts will be the first to tell you that the tiniest navigational error can have disastrous consequences. The same is true for those of us who have been commissioned to lead our churches. A

seemingly insignificant shift in direction can have major implications.

In recent years, leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention have bemoaned the falling number of baptisms. Pastors, missionaries, professors, and analysts have all offered a variety of reasons for why our numbers are declining, along with advice for how we might get back on track.

But I wonder if one of the main reasons for the dwindling number of baptisms is represented by a subtle shift in vocabulary—so subtle that we might overlook it.

There was a time when we spoke of unsaved people as “lost and dying and on their way to hell”—a phrase that painted a vivid picture of the stakes of being outside of Christ. We spoke of unsaved people in this way for so long that such terminology became something of a cliché.

Today, it seems that many pastors and church members tend to shy away from terms like “lost,” “unsaved,” and “unbeliever.” Instead, we speak of the people we are trying to reach as “unchurched.”

I believe that this change in terminology betrays two mistaken beliefs:

1. First, it indicates that *our people believe the goal of the church is to grow the church.*

Evangelism becomes less about reaching the *unsaved* in order to see them get *saved*, and more about reaching *unchurched* people in order to get them *churched* (or even worse, reaching *other-churched* people in order to get them to *our* church).

Outreach becomes little more than an attempt to sell people on the benefits of coming to church.

Church-focused outreach is easier than Christ-focused outreach. In many places in the South, church attendance is still woven into the fabric of the culture. Many unchurched people already assume that they should go to church. So our outreach merely reinforces the cultural assumption that church attendance is important.

Furthermore, we are more comfortable reaching out to people with a Christian background than we are witnessing to Muslims and Hindus. In our increasingly multi-cultural world, it is much easier to reach the nominally “Christian” who already share our assumptions than the foreigners who are moving into our neighborhoods.

2. Secondly, our shift in vocabulary

indicates a lessening of the eternal stakes of salvation.

I am thankful for the Conservative Resurgence in our denomination that has brought a renewed emphasis on orthodox theology. But I wonder how much of that orthodox theology is truly believed by the people in our churches.

Do we truly believe that Jesus is the only way to God?

Do we truly believe that people outside of faith in Christ will perish eternally in hell?

Do we truly believe that people who claim to be Christians and yet show no fruits of repentance have a false assurance of salvation?

Do we truly believe that people of other faiths are “lost and dying and on their way to hell”?

If so, why do we lessen the stakes of evangelism by speaking in a way that emphasizes church attendance over salvation in Christ?

Of course, evangelism includes inviting people into our churches. But inviting people to church is not the goal; it is only one means whereby God may accomplish his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

So yes... we believe that people need what the church has to offer. But we are not called to sell others on the greatness of our church, but to proclaim the greatness of our Savior. In the choppy waters of our postmodern, increasingly post-Christian society, staying on course is no easy task. Jesus told us the way is narrow. God commanded the Israelites: "You shall be careful therefore to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."

If we need a course correction, let's do it now. Let's remind our people of the Christ-centeredness of the Great Commission. Let's plead with lost people to flee to Jesus and escape the wrath to come. Let's make evangelism and outreach about Jesus again. Maybe then, we will see lost people be found, unsaved people get saved, condemned people be pardoned, and then (and only then) unchurched people be churchied.

B. The Laity

Who is responsible to do this

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came

and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations

Must Every Christian Evangelize?

Article

08.27.2013

Church members sometimes wonder if they should just leave evangelism to the “professionals.” After all, isn’t evangelism a spiritual gift?

In this article I offer quick guide for pastors to know how to answer them.

ANSWERING TWO COMMON ARGUMENTS

Must every Christian evangelize? The scriptural answer is “yes.” But I have encountered two main reasons for why some argue the answer is “no.”

1. The Great Commission was only given to the apostles and therefore does not apply to us today.

First, some argue that the Great Commission was only given to the apostles and therefore does not apply to us today. While it is true that contextually the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) was given *to* the apostles, it was not *only* for the apostles. The command “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” certainly includes the command to make disciples. D.A. Carson notes that the Great Commission does not record Jesus saying to the apostles, “. . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, except for this commandment to make disciples. Keep their grubby hands off that one, since it belongs only to you, my dear apostles.”[1]

What had Jesus commanded the apostles? Among many other things, he commanded them to preach the gospel to the whole creation. So this command of Jesus given to the apostles also applies to every believer today. In addition, should we try to limit Jesus’ promise “I am with you always, to the end of the age,” as only

applying to the apostles, or does it apply to us today? Certainly it applies to us today!

2. *Since only some people have the “gift of evangelism,” not everyone is obligated to witness.*

Second, some claim that since only some people have the “gift of evangelism,” not everyone is obligated to witness. Space prohibits a full discussion on the topic of “the gift of evangelism,” but a few observations are in order.

First, evangelism is not recorded in the common spiritual gifts listings in Scripture; instead, the office of evangelist is mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Some (myself included) question whether “evangelism” should be seen as a distinct spiritual gift, such as giving, serving, and so on.

In addition, even if evangelism is a spiritual gift, it is also a command for all believers, just like giving, serving, and so on. Not having “the gift of evangelism” does not excuse a believer from his or her call to share Christ with others.

FOUR BIBLICAL REASONS WHY EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD EVANGELIZE

Does Scripture mandate that every believer should evangelize? I argue “yes,” for the following four reasons.

1. *The commands to witness are given to all followers of Christ*

First, the commands to witness are given to all followers of Christ. Acts 1:8, for example, reads, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This verse gives a command from the risen Lord to all his followers. As John Stott argues, “We can no more restrict the command to witness than we can restrict the promise of the Spirit.”[2]

In writing to the Corinthian believers, Paul maintained, All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

It's not only apostles that have the ministry of reconciliation and the role of Christ's ambassadors—all believers do! Other verses that reflect on this ministry of witness for all believers include Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Peter 3:15, Philippians 2:14-16, Colossians 4:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9.[3]

2. The example of “ordinary believers” in the early church

Second, consider the example of “ordinary believers” in the early church. As we follow the storyline of the early church it is obvious that the apostles sought to evangelize and disciple others. But we see ordinary believers sharing the gospel as well.

Following the stoning of Stephen we read in Acts 8:1, “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” And what did those ordinary believers do? Acts 8:4 tells us: “Now those who were scattered went about preaching (*euangelizomenoi*) the word.” They went about sharing the gospel with others.

Noted historian Kenneth Scott Latourette makes this observation about the spread of the gospel:

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.[4]

3. The stewardship the gospel imposes on us.

Third, consider the stewardship the gospel imposes on us. Jesus reminds us, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). We have been given no greater gift than the gospel, and we have no greater stewardship than to share that message of good news with others. Paul expresses it well in 2 Corinthians 5:14: “for the love of Christ controls us.”

4. The “work of ministry” in Ephesians 4.

Finally, consider what Paul calls “the work of ministry” in Ephesians 4. In this chapter Paul notes different offices in the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers). He declares part of the reason God “gifts” the church with such leaders is so they will “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of

Christ” (Eph. 4:12). And we should certainly include evangelism in “the work of ministry.”

Ephesians 4 raises a challenge for pastors: Are we training our people to do evangelism? Are we setting an example for them in our own personal evangelism? Some people run from the idea of evangelism because they assume it means they must be obnoxious and pushy. There are many approaches to sharing the gospel. The only fixed method is the message: telling others about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

LEAD BY EXHORTATION AND ESPECIALLY EXAMPLE

Pastors, we can say to our people with confidence, “you are called to be a witness for Christ in both word and deed.” As leaders, let us challenge other believers not only with our exhortations but also with our example.[5] And let us take great confidence in the gospel, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

[1] D.A. Carson, “Ongoing Imperative for World Mission,” in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, edited by Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch (Broadman & Holman, 2008), 179.

[2] John R.W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 58.

[3] While the context of 1 Peter 3:15 is what can be called “passive evangelism” (responding to a question that an unbeliever asks), this command is clearly given to all believers “to be ready” to answer when asked.

[4] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Harper & Brothers, 1937), 1:116.

[5] Among the many helpful resources for personal evangelism, I highly recommend: Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*; Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism*; and J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

1. Eph 4:11-15

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets,
 some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry,
 for the edifying of the body of Christ,
13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the
 knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the
 measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro
 and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the
 trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful
 plotting,
15 but, speaking the truth in love,

The New King James Version. (1982). (Eph 4:11–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Other verses that indicate the responsibility is larger
 the the professional clergy
 That the whole church is responsible**

Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Romans 10:11-15

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Philemon 6

And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

Mt 5:13–16

- 13** “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.
- 14** “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.
- 15** Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house.
- 16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

Colossians 4:2-6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Luke 12:8 “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,

Acts 2:1-47 ESV / 31 helpful votes Helpful Not Helpful
 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ...

Acts 8:4-25 ESV / 31 helpful votes Helpful Not Helpful
 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip

when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. ...

1 Corinthians 11:1-2 ESV / 28 helpful votes Helpful Not Helpful

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

The *original disciples* to whom Jesus spoke these words certainly were in a unique position to fulfill Jesus' words as they were used by Him in a special way to begin the Church.

Missionaries who are committed to full-time ministry of spreading the Gospel through many venues in many places undoubtedly are ones who today can continue the advancement of this commission.

Church leaders whose responsibility it is to [support and promote God's mission](#) undoubtedly have a strategic part in its fulfillment.

People with the spiritual gift of evangelism who have that special divine empowerment to share the Good News would especially be drawn toward the Great Commission.

What about *all other Christians*? Is the Great Commission everybody's responsibility?

Nowhere in the context of these verses do we read that Jesus intended to direct these words only to missionaries, church leaders, or people with the gift of evangelism.

Verse 16 does let us know that He was speaking to the eleven disciples. However His concluding words in verse 20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age," suggest this commission was to continue on past the original disciples.

Are you a disciple of Jesus today? You too have a responsibility to fulfill Jesus' command to "go and make disciples."

The responsibility for making disciples does not rest with a denomination, a state convention, a seminary, a parachurch organization or a pastor and deacon board. The responsibility is given to all of God's people in and through His church.

III. The Pattern for Evangelism

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 28:16–20). Chicago: Moody Press.

Availability

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. (28:16)

The first three elements for effectively fulfilling the church's mission are attitudes, the first of which is implied in the fact that **the eleven disciples** were where the Lord had told them to be.

As someone astutely observed many years ago, as far as a believer's service to God is concerned, the greatest ability is availability. The most talented and gifted Christian is useless

to God if he is not available to be used, just as God's greatest blessings are not available to those who are not present to receive them.

Faithful discipleship does not begin with knowing where you will be serving the Lord or in what capacity. It does not start with having a clear call to a certain ministry, or occupation, or place of service. It always begins with simply being available to God, putting all reservations and preconceptions aside.

The eleven disciples had not received the blessing of seeing the resurrected Jesus in the garden because, unlike the faithful women, they were not there. Now, however, **the eleven** were where Jesus wanted them to be, and consequently they received His Great Commission and His great promise.

Both before and after the resurrection Jesus said He would meet His disciples in Galilee (see Matt. 26:32; 28:7, 10). He had called a great conclave of His followers for the purpose of commissioning them to reach the world in His name, and now they were gathered at the appointed place.

We are not told when or how the Lord specified the exact time and place in Galilee where they were to gather, but they were now at **the particular mountain which Jesus had designated** on some previous occasion.

The last recorded appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem was eight days after the resurrection, when Thomas saw the resurrected Lord for the first time (John 20:26). The journey from Jerusalem to Galilee would have taken about a week, and after they arrived there some of the disciples went fishing, during which time the Lord appeared to them again, providing a catch too heavy to haul into the boat. Then, after having breakfast with them, Jesus asked Peter three times about his love for Him and gave the commission to feed His sheep

(John 21:1–17). That event would have occurred at least fifteen days after the resurrection and probably closer to twenty. Because Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives in the presence of the disciples, they had to take another week to travel back to Jerusalem. And because Jesus' postresurrection appearances covered a total of forty days (Acts 1:3), His giving of the Great Commission on the Galilean mountainside would have had to occur some time between twenty and thirty-five days after His resurrection.

We are not told who was present when Jesus gave the Great Commission, but it seems probable that it was the group of more than five hundred that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:6. That has been the view of many biblical scholars throughout church history.

The fact that Matthew specifically mentions only **the eleven disciples** does not limit the gathering to them. The angel's message for the women to give to the disciples seems to imply that the women would also see Jesus in Galilee (see Matt. 28:7). There would have been no reason for Jesus to send the eleven to Galilee, only to have them return a few days later to the Mount of Olives for His ascension. It seems more reasonable that the Lord assembled a large group of believers and that He chose Galilee for the meeting place because most of His followers were from that region.

Because the Great Commission applies to all of His church, Jesus would surely have wanted to deliver it to the largest possible group of His faithful followers. Not only were most of Jesus' followers from Galilee, but that region was secluded and was a safe distance from Jerusalem, where most of Jesus' enemies were. And because the commission extends to all the world, Galilee, often referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles, also was appropriate for that reason.

Wherever the mountain was, it became a place of great sacredness, where more than five hundred of Jesus' disciples came with their weaknesses, confusion, doubts, misgivings, and fears. They were not the most humanly capable people in the world, nor the most intelligent or powerful or influential. But they were where the Lord wanted them to be, and that obedience gave evidence of their willingness to be used in His service. Like Isaiah after his vision in the Temple, they said, in effect, "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Because they were there, they met Christ, Because they were there, they were commissioned. Because they were there, they received the Lord's promise of His continual presence and power as they ministered to the world in His name. It all started with being available.

Worship

And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, (28:17–18a)

The second element implied here for effective fulfillment of the church's mission is the attitude of genuine worship. When God is not truly worshiped, He cannot be truly served, no matter how talented, gifted, or well-intentioned His servants may be.

The moment Jesus appeared and the disciples **saw Him, they worshiped Him**, prostrating themselves in humble adoration before their divine Lord and Savior. When they saw the risen Jesus on the hillside, their confusion disappeared and their shattered dreams were restored. Their sorrow turned into unbelievable joy and their disillusionment into unwavering hope.

The believers gathered there were not giving homage to a human dignitary or mere earthly ruler but were worshiping God's own Son, the Lord of heaven and earth. Though no spoken words are recorded, in their hearts they must have been saying with Thomas after his last doubts were assuaged, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

On but one previous occasion does Scripture say that the eleven disciples actually worshiped Jesus. After He walked to them on the water, they "worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (Matt. 14:33). Now their awe and their certainty of His divinity were immeasurably greater, because He was risen from the dead. It is probable that the worship of Christ on that day in Galilee has been equaled few other times in all of human history.

Yet, amazingly, **some were still doubtful**. That simple phrase inserted by Matthew is but one of countless small and indirect testimonies to the integrity of Scripture. In transparent honesty, the gospel writer sets forth the incident as it actually happened, with no attempt to make it more dramatic or convincing than it was. As he portrayed Jesus in His divine perfection, he also portrayed Jesus' followers, including himself, in their human imperfection.

Those who attempt to write history to their own liking are inclined to magnify that which is favorable and omit that which is not. Had Matthew and the other gospel writers contrived Jesus' resurrection, they would have had made every effort to exclude any fact or incident that would have tarnished their case. Nor would they have hesitated to falsify evidence and distort the truth. A person who lies about something of major importance has no scruples about telling lesser lies to support his primary deceit. Matthew's simple honesty testifies both to his own honesty and to the integrity of God's Word.

The identity of the doubters is not given. Because the eleven disciples are the only ones specifically mentioned in this passage, some interpreters insist that those who **were doubtful** were of that group. But as already noted, it is probable that hundreds of other believers were also present.

Exactly what was doubted is also not specified. If the fact of Jesus' resurrection was in question, then the doubters could not have included any of the eleven, because all of them had already witnessed the risen Christ, some on several occasions. It seems most likely that the doubt concerned whether or not the person who appeared to them was actually the physically risen Christ or some form of imposter. Out of that large group, only the eleven disciples and some of the women who had come to the tomb had seen the risen Christ. Perhaps some of those in the back of the crowd could not see Jesus clearly and, like Thomas, were reluctant to believe such an amazing truth without firm evidence.

As if to alleviate that doubt, **Jesus** graciously **came up and spoke to them**. Whatever the doubt was and whoever the doubters were, as the Lord came nearer and as His familiar voice sounded in their ears once again, all uncertainty was erased. Now those who had doubted fell down and joined the others in worship.

Nothing else now mattered. It made no difference where they lived, what their heritage was, what their economic or social position was, or what their nationality was. They were now in the presence of the living God.

The complete focus was on Christ. That is the essence of true worship-single-minded, unhindered, and unqualified concentration on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Not simply to the Corinthians, but to every person to whom he spoke and in every place he ministered, Paul "determined to know

nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). In his own life the apostle was determined to “know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Paul’s life was so totally Christ-centered that he could say with perfect sincerity, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

Submission

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (28:18b)

The third element for effective fulfillment of the church’s mission is another attitude, the implied attitude of submission. The focus of Jesus’ declaration here is on His sovereign lordship, but in context it also clearly relates to the believers response to His rule.

Before the Lord states the Great Commission, He establishes His divine authority to command it. It is because of His sovereign power that His followers are to have the attitude of complete, humble submission to His will.

Exousia (**authority**) refers to the freedom and right to speak and act as one pleases. In relation to God, that freedom and right are absolute and unlimited. The **all** is both reinforced and delineated by the phrase **in heaven and earth**. The sovereign authority **given to** Jesus by His heavenly Father (see Matt. 11:27; John 3:35) is absolute and universal.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated His authority over disease and sickness (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), over demons (4:24; 8:32; 12:22), over sin (9:6), and over death (Mark 5:41–42; John 11:43–44). Except for the forgiveness of

sins, Jesus even exhibited the authority to delegate such powers to certain of His followers (Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:9, 17). He has authority to bring all men before the tribunal of God and to condemn them to eternal death or bring them to eternal life (John 5:27–29; 17:2). He had the authority to lay down His own life and to take it up again (John 10:18). He has the sovereign authority to rule both heaven and earth and to subjugate Satan and his demons to eternal torment in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). Satan’s tempting Jesus by offering Him rulership over the world (Matt. 4:8–9) not only was wicked but foolish, because lordship of both heaven and earth was already Christ’s inheritance by divine fiat.

Even the prophet Daniel foresaw sovereign authority being given to Christ. In his night vision he beheld “One like a Son of Man ... coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13–14; cf. Isa. 9:6–7).

Jesus Himself described His coming dominion. “The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,” He said, “and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30; cf. 26:64).

Jesus’ sovereign authority was **given to** Him by His Father, who “has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22), “made Him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), and has “highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,

and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9–11). Then, finally, in an act of adoring love and submission, “when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Before giving the commission, Jesus first established His absolute, pervasive authority, because otherwise the command would have seemed hopelessly impossible for the disciples to fulfill, and they might have ignored it. Were it not for knowing they had the Lord’s sovereign demand as well as His resources to guide and empower them, those five hundred nondescript, powerless disciples would have been totally overwhelmed by the inconceivable task of making disciples for their Lord from among every nation on earth.

Submission to the absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ is not a believer’s option but is his supreme obligation. It is not negotiable or adjustable to one’s own particular inclinations and plans. It is rather the attitude that says with absolute sincerity, “Whatever the Lord commands, I will do.”

Obedience

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; (28:19–20a)

The fourth element for effective fulfillment of the church’s mission is obedience to the Lord’s command, made possible only when the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission characterize the believer’s life.

It was in light of His absolute, sovereign authority that Jesus commanded, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all**

the nations.” The transitional word is **therefore**. “Because I am sovereign Lord of the universe,” Jesus was saying, “I have both the authority to command you to be My witnesses and the power to enable you to obey that command.”

In light of the Old Testament teaching about Israel’s mission to be God’s light to the Gentiles and in light of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it should not be surprising that His commission was to **make disciples of all the nations**.

Mathēteuō (**make disciples**) is the main verb and the central command of verses 19–20, which form the closing sentence of Matthew’s gospel. The root meaning of the term refers to believing and learning. Jesus was not referring simply to believers or simply to learners, or He would have used other words. *Mathēteuō* carries a beautiful combination of meanings. In this context it relates to those who place their trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him in lives of continual learning and obedience. “If you abide in My word,” Jesus said, “then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). It should be noted that some disciples were not true (see John 6:66).

A person who is not Christ’s true disciple does not belong to Him and is not saved. When a person genuinely confesses Christ as Lord and Savior, he is immediately saved, immediately made a disciple, and immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Not to be Christ’s disciple is therefore not to be Christ’s at all.

Scripture knows nothing of receiving Christ as Savior but not as Lord, as if a person could take God piecemeal as it suits him. Every convert to Christ is a disciple of Christ, and no one who is not a disciple of Christ, no matter what his profession of faith might be, is a convert of Christ.

The very point of Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler was that this man—although highly moral, religious, generous,

and admiring of Jesus-refused to give up everything for Christ and submit to Him as Lord. He sincerely wanted eternal life and had the wisdom to come to the source of that life. But he was unwilling to give up his own life and possessions and obey Jesus' command to "come, follow Me" (Luke 18:18–23). He was willing to have Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and Christ would not receive him on those terms. Because he refused to be Christ's disciple when the cost was made clear (like those in John 6:66), he could have no part of Christ or of the eternal life that He gives.

Some popular theologies today teach that Jesus was referring to those who are already believers when He taught such things as, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27; cf. v. 33). Such forms of easy believism maintain that the only requirement for salvation is to "accept Jesus as Savior." Then, at some later date, a saved person may or may not become a disciple by accepting Christ as Lord of his life. Taking up one's cross and following Christ (Matt. 10:38) is looked on as a secondary, ideal level of relationship to Christ that is commendable but not mandatory.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the term the Lord uses in this commissioning is **make disciples**. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, whatever that may mean or demand. The truly converted person is filled with the Holy Spirit and given a new nature that yearns to obey and worship the Lord who has saved him. Even when he is disobedient, he knows he is living against the grain of his new nature, which is to honor and please the Lord. He loves righteousness and hates sin, including his own.

Jesus' supreme command, therefore, is for those who are His disciples to become His instruments for making disciples of all nations. Jesus' own earthly ministry was to make disciples for Himself, and that is the ministry of His people. Those who truly follow Jesus Christ become "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Those who become His disciples are themselves to become disciple makers. The mission of the early church was to make disciples (see Acts 2:47; 14:21), and that is still Christ's mission for His church.

Jesus' command for His followers to **make disciples** was given only once, climactically, at the very end of His earthly ministry. Some might ask, "If it was so crucial, why did Jesus mention it only once?" The reason, no doubt, is that the motivation for reaching others for Christ is innate to the redeemed life. One might as well ask why God's command for man to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) was given only once. In each case, reproduction in kind is natural to life. The call to make disciples is stated only once because it is natural for the new creation to be reproductive. It would beg the issue to repeat what is so basic.

The specific requirements Jesus gives for making disciples involve three participles: going (rendered here as **go**), **baptizing**, and **teaching**.

The first requirement makes clear that the church is not to wait for the world to come to its doors but that it is to **go** to the world. The Greek participle is best translated "having gone," suggesting that this requirement is not so much a command as an assumption.

Jesus' initial instruction to the disciples was for them to go only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6; cf. 15:24). God's design was to offer salvation first to the Jews and then to use them as His missionaries to the rest of the

world. The gospel is the “power of salvation to everyone who believes,” but “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16; cf. John 4:22). But when Israel as a nation rejected the Messiah-King who was sent to her in Jesus, the invitation for salvation went directly to the entire world.

Jesus compared Israel’s response to God’s call to a wedding feast given by a king for his son. When the favored guests refused to accept the king’s invitation and maligned and even killed some of the messengers, the king had his army destroy the ungrateful and wicked guests. He then sent his servants out to the streets and highways to invite to the feast anyone who would come (Matt. 22:1–10). The picture was of an apostate Israel who refused her Messiah and thereby forfeited the kingdom that He offered to them.

At the end of His earthly ministry, Christ had only a small remnant of believers, and it was to part of that remnant that He gave His commission to evangelize the world. The first sermon of the Spirit-filled church was preached by Peter and directed to Jews and Jewish proselytes who had come to worship in Jerusalem (Acts 2:22). But God later had to dramatically convince Peter that the gospel was also for Gentiles (10:1–48).

As he traveled throughout Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece, even the apostle Paul, “the apostle to the Gentiles,” normally began his ministry in a given city at the Jewish synagogue (see Acts 9:20; 13:5; 18:4). But his message was always for Gentiles as well as Jews. At his conversion on the Damascus Road, the Lord said to him,

Arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness, ... delivering you from the Jewish people

and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to life and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16–18)

The second requirement for making disciples is that of **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**. To baptize literally means to immerse in water, and certain forms of baptism had long been practiced by various Jewish groups as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. The baptism of John the Baptist symbolized repentance of sin and turning to God (Matt. 3:6). As instituted by Christ, however, baptism became an outward act of identification with Him through faith, a visible, public testimony that henceforth one belonged to Him.

The initial act of obedience to Christ after salvation is to submit to baptism as a testimony to union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. “Do you not know,” Paul asked the Roman believers, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–4).

Immersion is the most appropriate mode of baptism, not only because the Greek word behind it connotes immersion but even more importantly because that is the only mode that symbolizes burial and resurrection.

Although the act of baptism has absolutely no saving or sacramental benefit or power, it is commanded by Christ of

His followers. The only exception might be physical inability, as in the case of the repentant thief on the cross, a prisoner who is forbidden the ordinance, or a similar circumstance beyond the believer's control. The person who is unwilling to be baptized is at best a disobedient believer, and if he persists in his unwillingness there is reason to doubt the genuineness of his faith (see Matt. 10:32–33). If he is unwilling to comply with that simple act of obedience in the presence of fellow believers, he will hardly be willing to stand for Christ before the unbelieving world.

Baptism has no part in the work of salvation, but it is a God-ordained and God-commanded accompaniment of salvation. Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Jesus made clear that it is disbelief, not failure to be baptized, that precludes salvation; but He could not possibly have made the divine association of salvation and baptism more obvious than He does in that statement.

The association was indisputably clear in Peter's mind as he exhorted his unbelieving hearers at Pentecost: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). The association was just as close in Paul's mind, as witnessed in his great manifesto of Christian unity: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6).

A person is saved by God's grace alone working through his faith as a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). But by God's own declaration, the act of baptism is His divinely designated sign of the believer's identification with His Son, the Lord Jesus

Christ. Baptism is a divinely commanded act of faith and obedience.

New converts need to be taught that they should be baptized as soon as possible, not to seal or confirm their salvation but to make public testimony to it in obedience to their newfound Lord. The call to Christ not only is the call to salvation but also the call to obedience, the first public act of which should be baptism in His name.

Throughout the book of Acts, baptism is shown in the closest possible association with conversion. The three thousand souls converted at Pentecost were immediately baptized (Acts 2:41). As soon as the Ethiopian believed in Christ, he stopped his chariot so that he could be baptized (8:38). As soon as Paul received back his sight after his conversion, he was baptized (9:18). When Cornelius and his household were saved, Peter “ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:48). As unbelievers in Corinth were being won to Jesus Christ, they were also being baptized (18:8). When Paul found some disciples of John in Ephesus who had only been baptized for repentance, he told them about Jesus, the one for whom John was merely preparing the way, and when they believed “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:1–5).

In the context of the Great Commission, baptism is synonymous with salvation, which is synonymous with becoming a disciple. As already emphasized, discipleship *is* Christian life, not an optional, second level of it.

Baptism is to be made **in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**. Jesus was not giving a ritual formula, although that beautiful phrase from the lips of our Lord has been commonly and appropriately used in baptismal services throughout the history of the church. **In the name of**

is not a sacramental formula, as seen in the fact that the book of Acts reports no converts being baptized with those precise words. Those words are rather a rich and comprehensive statement of the wonderful union that believers have with the whole Godhead.

In His statement here about baptism, Jesus again clearly placed Himself on an equal level with God **the Father** and with **the Holy Spirit**. He also emphasizes the unity of the Trinity by declaring that baptism should be done in Their one **name** (singular), not in Their separate names. As it does in many parts of Scripture, the phrase **the name** here embodies the fullness of a person, encompassing all that he is, has, and represents. When he is baptized, the believer is identified with everything that God is, has, and represents.

The pronoun Jesus uses here (*eis, in*) can also be rendered “into” or “unto.” Those who teach baptismal regeneration—the belief that water baptism is essential for salvation—insist that it must here be translated “into.” But that is a completely arbitrary translation and, in any case, cannot stand up against the many other passages that prove baptism has no part in regeneration but is rather an outward act, subsequent to regeneration, that testifies to its having taken place.

Baptism does not place a believer into oneness with the Trinity but signifies that, by God’s grace working through his faith in Jesus Christ, the believer already has been made one with **the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**.

The third requirement for making disciples of all nations is that of **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**. The church’s mission is not simply to convert but to teach. The convert is called to a life of obedience to the Lord, and in order to obey Him it is obviously necessary to know what He requires. As already noted, a disciple is by definition

a learner and follower. Therefore, studying, understanding, and obeying “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27) is the lifelong task of every true disciple.

In Jesus’ parting discourse to the disciples in the upper room, He said,

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.

These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:23–26)

Jesus did not spend time teaching in order to entertain the crowds or to reveal interesting but inconsequential truths about God or to set forth ideal but optional standards that God requires. His first mission was to provide salvation for those who would come to Him in faith, that is, to make disciples. His second mission was to teach God’s truth to those disciples. That is the same twofold mission He gives the church.

No one is a true disciple apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no true disciple apart from an obedient heart that desires to please the Lord in all things. The writer of Hebrews makes that attitude of obedience synonymous with saving faith, declaring that Christ “became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9). Thanking God for the salvation of believers in Rome, Paul said to them, “Through you were slaves of sin, you became

obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed” (Rom. 6:17).

Every Christian is not gifted as a teacher, but every faithful Christian is committed to promoting the ministry of teaching God’s Word both to make and to edify disciples of Christ.

Power

“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (28:20b)

As crucial as are the first four elements for effective fulfillment of the church’s mission, they would be useless without the last, namely, the power that the Lord Jesus Christ offers through His continuing presence with those who belong to Him. Neither the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission, nor faithful obedience to God’s Word would be possible apart from Christ’s own power working in and through us.

Idou (**lo**) is an interjection frequently used in the New Testament to call attention to something of special importance. *Egō eimi* (**I am**) is an emphatic form that might be rendered, “I Myself am,” calling special attention to the fact of Christ’s own presence. Jesus was saying, in effect, “Now pay special attention to what I am about to say, because it is the most important of all. I Myself, your divine, resurrected, living, eternal Lord, **am with you always, even to the end of the age.**”

A helpful way to keep one’s spiritual life and work in the right perspective and to continually rely on the Lord’s power rather than one’s own is to pray in ways such as these: “Lord, You care more about this matter I am facing than I do, so do what You know is best. Lord, You love this person more than I

do and only You can reach into his heart and save him, so help me to witness only as You lead and empower. Lord, You are more concerned about the truth and integrity of Your holy Word than I am, so please energize my heart and mind to be true to the text I am teaching.”

Always literally means “all the days.” For the individual believer that means all the days of his life. But in its fullest meaning for the church at large it means **even to the end of the age**, that is, until the Lord returns bodily to judge the world and to rule His earthly kingdom. (See Matt. 13:37–50, where Christ uses the phrase “end of the age” three times to designate His second coming.)

Jesus will not visibly return to earth and display Himself before the whole world in His majestic glory and power until **the end of the age**. But until that time, throughout this present age, He will **always** be with those who belong to Him, leading them and empowering them to fulfill His Great Commission.

Some years ago, a missionary went to a primitive, pagan society. She became especially burdened for a young wife and eventually was used to win the woman to Christ. Almost as soon as she was saved the woman told the missionary with great sorrow, “I wish you could have come sooner, so my little boy could have been saved.”¹¹ When the missionary asked why it was too late, the mother replied, “Because just a few weeks before you came to us, I offered him as a sacrifice to the gods of our tribe.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 28:16–20). Chicago: Moody Press.