

Session 2

April 21, 2024

SHARING CHRIST

Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Christ's ascension marked the end of His earthly ministry. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, awaiting the day of His return for the church. In the meantime, His church is charged with its own ministry: making disciples. Unlike some of the more difficult teachings of the Scriptures, the Great Commission is quite easy to understand. Jesus made it crystal clear what needed to be done and how to go about it.

The Great Commission method (Matt. 28:18-20). The Great Commission (in one form or other) is recorded in all four Gospels and again in Acts. As the final words of Jesus, the command carries tremendous weight. When Jesus said, "It is finished," His work was done, but the church's work was just beginning. Several key principles are expressed. The first and last phrases act as "bookends" to the commission. Verse 18 mentions *His power*. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." In this case, "All authority" means just that! Verse 20 mentions *His presence*. The promise "I am with you always" was a clear encouragement to His disciples then, just as it is to us today. Sandwiched between those two promises are four components of the Commission itself. First, believers are told to "Go." Scholars have argued through the centuries whether this is an imperative (GO!) or a simple participle ("As you are going..."). Both translations are acceptable, and both are appropriate! Yes, "go!" and yes, "as you go!" Sharing the good news of Christ should be both intentional and incidental. Second, "make disciples of all nations;" not simply interested parties (as the multitudes often were), but true and dedicated followers of Christ. And not just nearby, but to the ends of the earth (see also Acts 1:8). Third, "baptizing them..." (literally, "immersing them."). This is not a means of salvation, nor is the so-called "baptismal formula" a verbatim requirement for true baptism. But baptism was (and is) an important public proclamation of one's commitment to Christ. In fact, in the New Testament (and in many parts of the world today), baptism acted as the profession of faith. Fourth, "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." Notice especially the order: make Christ-followers, *then* baptize them, *then* teach them. For reflection: *Given the clarity of the teaching, why have so many churches strayed from its simplicity, separating the profession of faith from baptism, and/or requiring doctrinal classes before agreeing to baptize?*

The Great Commission message (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Once the apostle Paul was knocked off his donkey in Acts 9, he took the Great Commission very seriously! His life was dedicated to spreading the Gospel, and his writings were dedicated to defining it and defending it. In some places (like 1 Cor. 15:1-4), his explanations are general and somewhat generic. But in others, his teachings expound on the finer points of the Gospel. This text is an example of that. The key component in this text is the doctrine of *reconciliation*. "Forgiveness" is one thing. It deals with the "legal debt of sin." In other words, through Christ's sacrificial death and our acts of repentance and faith, Christ justifies us, declaring us "not guilty." As verse 19 says, God no longer counts our trespasses against us. That is forgiveness, and that is a wonderful thing! But there is more. Not only is the debt of sin we owed removed (not counted against us) but God makes a deposit of Christ's righteousness into our account (v. 21). But there's still more! Whereas forgiveness removes our debt of sin, reconciliation restores our relationship with God.

We who were once “far away” from God, have been brought back close to Him (see Eph. 2:13). In other words, the ideal and original relationship for which we were created (and which sin has destroyed), has been restored by Christ. For this reason, we are new creations in Him (v. 17). So, what is the message of the Great Commission? That sinners who were once helplessly and hopelessly lost, can now be brought back into a right relationship with our creator, through Christ’s sacrificial death. That was His service to us...and now is our service to others (v. 19). For reflection: *Reread verses 18 and 19. Who is doing the reconciling here? What does this tell us about the sovereignty of God? What does it say about His character?*