

# The Great Commission

By

Kenneth Fortier

After Judas betrayed Jesus, the Apostles that were to remain faithful to him, watched as Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified. They had been astounded when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection. Now he is about to depart from them and ascend up into heaven to be with the Father. But, before he leaves them, he gave them a solemn charge:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

They had heard his teachings, they had seen his miracles, and witnessed his compassion on mankind. Now Jesus was about to depart, and these last words of exhortation were to have a profound impact on the entire world because of their dedication to the doing of his will. He had sent them out before, saying, “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5–6). Now, after his death and resurrection, that “limited” commission is changed into the “Great Commission” as “all nations” are to hear the Good News of salvation in his name. The real impact of the charge is found as we look at the Christ, who gave the great commission.

“All authority has been given to me.” The Apostles, who saw the many marvelous signs which Jesus did, continued to be amazed at his power: “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the seas obey him?” (Matthew 8:27). Others knew of his powers also: “That evening after sunset the people sent to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was” (Mark 1:32–34).

This wasn’t done in secret, and among those who sought to kill him, the miracles of Jesus were well known: “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling Council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him’” (John 3:1–2). His claim to power and authority was well-substantiated by his deeds!

God, by his powerful word, had created everything visible, and every living thing on this world. By his word he caused Mary to conceive Jesus. God sent his spirit to overshadow Mary and cause her to be pregnant just as he had sent an angel to reveal what he was going to do. In itself, this was a miracle of unmatched proportion in the annals of the world. It had never been done before. Matthew record that the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary was to fulfill what the Prophet Isaiah prophesied: “The virgin will be

with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1:23). The Apostle John records that God’s “word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Truly, as Nicodemus said, “For no one could perform the miraculous signs you (Jesus) are doing if God were not with him.” Yes, God was with Jesus, and was filled with the Holy Spirit of God when he was baptized by John the Immerser in the Jordan River—who witness the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus like as a dove (see John 1:32–34).

The Apostles realized that Jesus was the Son of God long before his resurrection: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). And the claim of Jesus, “All authority has been given to me,” was based on him being the Son of God and his ministry to spread the Good News of salvation—backed up by the power of the Holy Spirit of God in his deeds. He died on the cross, and shed his blood, “So that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14–15). That he had been “in the form of God ... And in equality with God” (Philippians 2:5), meant that he could speak for God (John 3:34). Just before his arrest, Jesus prayed, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you have granted him authority over all men that he might give eternal life to all those you have given to him” (John 17:1–2).

When the Apostles began to preach under the authority of this commission of Christ, the message was very plain: “God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The Apostle Paul later called him “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). Even as Jesus claimed “all authority” or “all power” in the great commission, the Apostles also claimed it for him: “Declared to be the Son of God with power” (Romans 1:4). They never claimed to take his place or power, for theirs was an apostleship—ambassadors or envoys. Christ remained the only head!

“Therefore go and make disciples.” We read in the Bible of “the disciples of John” (Matthew 9:14); the “Pharisees disciples” (Mark 2:18); “Moses disciples” (John 9:28), and “disciples of Jesus” (John 4:1–2). The word “disciple” simply means a “learner, pupil” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). Jesus shows what it means to make disciples as he says, “Teaching them.” The great commission in Mark 16:15–16 reads like this: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. Whosoever believes and being baptized will be saved, but whosoever does not believe will be condemned.” As you can see, there cannot be “discipleship” without learning; there can be no making of disciples without teaching; without the proclamation of the Good News there can be no believers. That is why the Apostle Paul later wrote, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes it ... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed” (Romans 1:16–17). The very heart of the great commission is the teaching that leads people to become disciples of Christ Jesus.

“Baptizing them.” Jesus, in the great commission, also said what to do to start the new life made for “disciples.” Notice again what is said in Mark 16:16: “He that believes and being baptized shall be saved. He that does not believe shall be lost.” When the Apostles went out preaching under the authority of this commission, their message was clear: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven ... and now what are you waiting for? Get up, get baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 2:38, 22:16). When people responded to

the preaching of the great commission, it was always in the same way: “They then that received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41); “When they believed...they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12); “Here is water: what does hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Those who wanted to become disciples of the Lord were eager to be baptized, for that is what made them Christians—followers of Christ!

Their response to the great commission made a profound and big change in the lives of hearers. “Are you ignorant that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through immersion into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:3–4). Because they were now “in Christ,” they were different: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Discipleship demands a new life! As we read:

“Having been buried with him by your immersion, wherein you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead ... if then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is ... seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that had create him” (Colossians 2:12, 3:1, 9–10).

The last paragraph mentions the kind of discipleship that caused the Apostle Paul to say: “I have been crucified with Christ: and it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Can you truly repeat what Paul said? If you are a Christian, you should; and with a very strong, intense feeling!

“Teaching them to observe all things.” Being a disciple means more than just learning: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). Jesus asked: “Why call me Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?” (Luke 6:46). We must learn and do! Obedience is involved in coming to Christ: “You have purified your life in your obedience to the truth ... whereas you were the servants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching which was delivered to you; and being made free from sin, you became servants of righteousness” (1 Peter 1:22, Romans 6:17–18). Obedience is also involved in being a disciple of Christ: “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all of them that obeyed him ... if you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Hebrews 5:9, John 14:15).

When the Apostles first preached under the great commission of Christ, people responded (Acts 2:41). Then, “They continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). They had to learn some before they became disciples, but they also were to continue their learning as they grew in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Give heed to reading ... take heed to thyself, and to your teaching ... and the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (1 Timothy 4:13, 16, 2 Timothy 2:2). All disciples must continue to read and study in

order to know how the Lord wants them to live. Jesus speaks to us now through his word, and if we would be his disciples, we will study and live by what he said.

As disciples we should always strive to learn and do what Jesus has taught us through his Apostles and writers of that Sacred Book, the Bible. “Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but only he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). The true disciple will live by the same rule which governed our Lord Jesus: “Father, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Notice: “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your life. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves” (James 1:21–22). True disciples will not live by the world’s moral standards (Galatians 5:19–21), but by the Lord’s (Galatians 5:22–23). Disciples of Jesus will “observe all things” with regard to worship (John 4:24, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:23–28, Colossians 3:16–17); service in the Lord’s church (Ephesians 3:10–11, 20–21); duty to fellow men (Luke 10:30–37, 1 John 4:8); and seeking to make new disciples (Acts 5:42, 8:4, 2 Corinthians 4:13).

“And surely I will be with you always.” Here is what makes it possible for us to speak out for truth in Christ Jesus. The Lord is with us when we are doing his will “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear ... be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:1–2, 10–11).

When the Apostle Paul went out preaching for Christ, he met with much opposition. But the Lord told him, “Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee” (Acts 18:9–10). So, unafraid and not holding his peace, Paul went over land and sea to make disciples for the Lord. He then wrote for us: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). We need to take stock of our God-given strength, for “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Romans 8:31). That the Lord was with him enabled Paul to say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me” (Philippians 4:13). That should be the triumphant cry of every disciple of Christ!

When the Good News was proclaimed some 1900 years ago, we hear that “Some mocked; but other said, ‘we will hear thee again’... But certain men clave unto him and believed” (Acts 17:32). What is your response to all this? Remember, “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Do you feel something tugging at your conscience? If you do, and it is sincere, I want you to know that you can become a Christian now. You can become a Christian just as people became Christians 1900 years ago. Then as a disciple, you can “Go, make disciples.”

Note: The word “baptized” means “immersed.” This is agreed upon by every Scholar of every single church of Christendom. It is a proven fact by both secular and sacred history. That men have replaced the word baptism with other words does not detract or take away the meaning of the term. It is “immersion” that Christ commanded, and not something else. It is an action word, an action of being immersed in water to portray the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

\*\*\*\*\*

Copyright 2007, Kenneth Fortier. Published by Ken Fortier Ministries. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce and distribute copies of this article provided that nothing is taken out nor added to it, and that appropriate acknowledgment is given to the author. This permission statement is to be considered a part of this article and must remain with it.

\*\*\*\*\*