

## The Great Commission

(Matthew 28:19-20)

by Rev. Ferdinand J. Valdez

**“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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** (Matt. 28:19-20)

### **Introduction:**

As we look at this **Great Commission**, I believe the real task goes beyond the traditional belief of evangelism. It was not only given to individuals, but **the task is given to the church to reach the lost, assimilate them into the body of Christ, and train them to become Christlike**. In order for the church to do this, it must recognize that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is not a single event – but a **process** that encompasses several different events taking place over a period of time. It starts by appealing to individuals who in many cases, have only a superficial awareness of God, then stepping them through a growth process **with the objective of them becoming Christlike**.

### **The Great Commission – A Process**

The Great Commission is a process that includes the event of salvation as well as many steps leading up to and beyond salvation (**sometimes called pre-conversion, conversion, and post-conversion or pre-evangelism, evangelism, and post-evangelism**). These steps in developing maturity in the individual involve a ministry that utilizes the various spiritual gifts of all church members. The entire body of Christ needs to participate in the process of the Great Commission. If we examine closely the text (**Go, make disciples of all nations, baptize and teach**) **reveals this process to us**.

**Go** is not a request; it is a command that requires immediate obedience, because **evangelism is between life and death**.

**Make disciples**, in the New Testament times, when someone accepted the teaching of Christ and became a follower of Christ, he became a disciple (a follower). Today, when a person gets saved, we call him a Christian. When he matures beyond being a pew sitter and really attempts to accomplish something for Christ, we recognize him as a disciple. However, the name Christian came later when disciples were first called

Christians in Antioch, after they had become imitators of Christ or Christlike. This suggests that we are ***to reach people and lead them or influence them to become disciples first, then teach them to become Christians.***

**Making disciples in Scripture is getting people saved.** (However, let's not get hung up on terminology. Some would argue, using today's meaning of disciple, that the Commission is **not a command to evangelize but to make disciples**, with the term "***disciple***" encompassing the whole procedure of the Commission. In application, both arrive at the same destination.)

### **All nations.**

These two words in the Great Commission give us insight as to whom Jesus was giving the Great Commission. Is it to the individual or to the Church? How many nations do we have now? How many billion people are in the world today? How can any individual "take the Gospel to every creature. ***The Great Commission is given to the Church. Only the church with its many members using their various gifts and abilities, working together as a team, can fulfil the Great Commission.***

### **Baptizing them.**

These two words destroy the argument of many people who say that the Great Commission is given to individuals, because the individual does not have the authority to baptize. ***God gave this authority only to the church. If the authority to baptize is given only to the church and that authority is given in the middle of the Commission, then the whole Commission is given to the church to be fulfilled as a corporate body, where people fulfill it as part of a team, not individually.***

### **Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

This is the second part of the procedure of reaching lost people for Christ. Doctrinally some may argue whether baptism is submersion or sprinkling, but functionally, we all agree it equals identification with the body of Christ or the local church. ***It is not enough simply to lead people to Christ. They should be active members, involved in the ministry, fellowship, education, worship, and stewardship of the local church. Baptizing is getting people churched. "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house maybe filled" (Luke 14:23).***

## **Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.**

In this last verse, we see that the fulfillment of the third part of the procedure of the Great Commission is **to teach**. Christ gives the command to teach them (the world) **to observe all things that He commanded. All things take in the entire content of the Scriptures. It takes in every area of our lives, not just the spiritual aspects but the daily aspects as well. Jesus spoke of money, of relationships to our spouses, of our relationship to Him, of prayer life, and so forth.** This is part of developing a mature Christian. **This is being Christlike, which is the third part of the Great Commission.**

The Promise, **"And lo I am with you always at the end of the ages."** This is an assurance of the presence of Jesus in doing the Great Commission.

## **Two Major Principles**

In summary, the Great Commission communicates two major principles:

1. The Great Commission is more than a single function that stops with the event of someone's salvation. It is more than just a command to evangelize the world. ***It is a process by which we evangelize, reach the unchurched who are usually lost (non- Christians), make them aware of their sin, and lead them step-by-step closer to accepting Christ.*** The event of conversion is when they go from darkness to light and ***identify themselves with the local church through baptism.*** The procedure does not stop there. ***It continues as we instruct them in all the things the Bible teaches us. They must learn to become Christlike. The Scripture commands us, the church, to reach, baptize, and teach. The functional command tells us to lead them to Christ, get them churched, and bring them to maturity in Christ.***
2. Rarely do people recognize that the Great Commission only tells us what to do and who is to do it, not how to do it. Many scholars think that for the most part of the Bible is void of methodology. This leaves each generation free to develop a methodology that is relevant to the culture to which it ministers. This does not mean that a methodology can be developed without adhering to biblical principles. It does mean that we do not have to imitate every movement of those who did successful evangelism in the Scriptures or in the last century or even in the last decade.

Expanding the Commission from traditional views has not limited it or added barriers to it, but in reality, simplified its potential for fulfillment. **Team Evangelism recognizes**

***that in order for the Church to fulfill the Great Commission, a broad spectrum of talents, gifts, and abilities is required.*** Surely God does not give every Christian the many gifts required to do all of the functions to carry out this procedure. In rarely is a single individual strong in several, let alone all, of these functions. But God has given us an organism containing many different, gifted individuals who can excel in the various areas required to fulfill the complete process of the Great Commission. ***We call this group of people the church, the Team. Dr. Charles Arn writes, “The Local church-with its complementary assortment of spiritual gifts – more accurately reflects the body of Christ than any one individual member.”***

### **In a Nutshell**

The task of the Great Commission is more than a command to evangelize. ***It is a process that encompasses pre-conversion, conversion, and post-conversion. We must lead people to Christ, but we must also influence them to identify with the local church – to become active members – and instruct them in all the things the Bible has taught us, so they grow into mature Christians.***

***To fulfill the Great Commission, TEAM Evangelism incorporates the broad spectrum of talents, gifts, and abilities God has given each of us. We work together using our strengths as a united team to reach, baptize, and teach others for Him.***

#### Review Questions:

1. What is the Great Commission?
2. To whom was the Great Commission given?

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As team members of the local church, what must we do to fulfil the Great Commission?
2. Is your church fulfilling the Great Commission? How or why not?
3. What can you as an individual do to help fulfil the Great Commission?

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#### Reference:

*Team Evangelism (Giving New Meaning to Lay Evangelism)*  
by Larry Gilbert,  
Published by Church Growth Institute  
Lynchburg, VA 24502