

The Mission of the Church Pt.1

Note, the brackets after A: contain summaries of the answers arrived at in discussion

I. A survey of key passages

A. Matthew 28.19-20

Part of our project is to survey some key passages. Without question, the Great Commission of Matthew 28.19-20 is the *locus classicus* regarding the mission of the church. **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."** (28:16-20)

1. The major hurdle

The major hurdle for using this classic text is the fact that this mandate was given to the apostles (**the eleven disciples went to Galilee...And Jesus came and said to them**). Similarly, the promise of a mission to the ends of the earth in Acts 1.8 was given to the apostles and the Book of Acts records the fulfillment of what Jesus promised.

Q: Interesting question: what should we make of the fact that Jesus commissions the apostles to establish the church and thus that, first, this text gives us the mission of the apostles not the mission of the church?

A: [One thing that we need to learn from this is that our pursuit of “the mission of the church” by use of the classic text must begin with this historical-redemptive fact, namely, that the mission of the church is a derivative of the mission of the apostles, which is a controlling and structural truth that must be put in place to properly understand all the questions that pertain to this topic. The work of the apostles is foundational for the church not only in the giving of the canon to the church but also in the very formation of the church itself.]

2. The mission of the apostles

One verb of the four in 19-20 states the hallmark of the great commission. It is the main verb, make disciples, on which the other verbs (going, baptizing, teaching) depend. The apostles are to “make disciples” by going, baptizing, and teaching. Disciples are essentially learners, so, bringing about and engaging in a process of discipleship-learning is the commission’s hallmark. It is truly the great teaching commission. The apostles make disciples by *going* to the nations *with gospel proclamation* that includes *teaching about baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping*.

3. The evangelize then teach mistake

To make a point: Jesus is not saying, “Make disciples then follow up with teaching of the commandments” (first evangelize then get them into the church for instruction). Teaching about baptism, gospel washing, commitment, authority, the trinity, and the commandments is how the apostles make disciples. There is no restriction of teaching to some state of affairs that comes after evangelism and conversion. The apostles make disciples to the end of time from all nations by initiating a process of gospel proclamation by preaching and teaching.

4. Application to the time between

Nonetheless, Matthew 28.20 and 10.23 point beyond the time of the apostles (Mat 10.23, **When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes**).

Q: How do we know that these passages point to the time between?

A: [The end is the coming of the Son of Man, 10.23 and the end of the age, 20.20]

Q: Why should we conclude from these texts that the mission of the apostles is realized in the work of preachers today?

A: [Baptizing is a sacrament and the unity of word and sacrament places baptism (with communion) into the hands of preachers in the local setting, i.e. pastors. In the larger context of the training of the twelve to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, Acts 1.8, they will preach the gospel: **to the eleven...he said...Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation**, Mk 16.14-15] How can we summarize the central place of preachers in the mission of the church according to Paul in Romans 10.13-15 (**For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** ¹⁴**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?** ¹⁵**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!"**)? [Whatever the failures of preachers, this text shows us that they have beautiful feet in their "going, baptizing, and teaching."]

5. Q: From the great teaching commission and from the job of pastor-teachers, what is the main task or job of church members, and to reflect it, how might we rename the commission?

A: [Notably, from the classic text on mission for the time between the comings of Christ, the main task, job, or work of the church is the obverse of the work of pastor-teachers: their work is to be disciples learning gospel. In this connection, consider how the book of Romans, the entire book, is the gospel that Paul preached by teaching and taught by preaching to church at Rome. Evangel-gospel proclamation is a single fabric that includes going out to nations (to all men, everywhere) finding those who will hear preaching, calling them to discipleship, baptizing them, and teaching them in local settings under Christ in His church, in a school of lifetime learning. Fittingly, therefore Paul exhorted Timothy to read Scripture, exhort, teach with careful persistence for the salvation of himself and his hearers: **Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.** ¹³**Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.** ¹⁴**Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.** ¹⁵**Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.** ¹⁶**Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers** (1 Tim 4.12-16).]

Q: How might we rename the commission?

A: [It is the Great Commission, that is, the Great Teaching Commission, and in turn, the Great Teaching-Learning Commission]