

The Commands of Christ

Command # 34

“The Last Command – Go and Make Disciples.”

Matthew 28:18-20

Tonight we end our series on *“The Commands of Christ”* where we began way back in October of 2002. As we embarked on this study I told you that in Bill Gothard’s study of the Command’s of Jesus that he had identified 49 general commands of Christ found in the Gospels. [The Commands of Christ: The Curriculum of the Great Commission. (Oak Brook, Illinois:Institute in Basic Life Principles, 2002).]

In our study of the commands we looked to the original Greek to determine what the commands are. In the original Greek it is the Imperative Tense which tells us those things that are to be seen as commands. In examining those Imperative commands we have confined our efforts to Matthew’s gospel and have examined only those imperative commands that were not addressed to specific group or individuals.

We began by looking at the statement that Jesus made in Matthew 28:20 that we are to *“teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded.”* *But just what is it that we are to teach these new believers in Christ?* Some believe that we are to teach them a legalist list of rules, the do’s and don’t, if you will. Tell them, *“If you keep this list, then you will please Christ.”*

Others believe that we should teach these believers social responsibilities. Or as one little girl said, *“Jesus wants us to be nice.”* But that is hardly words to live by.

Some Christians want to focus on social programs and social problems. And there is a place for that. Stop for just a moment and consider things that have happened because of the influence of the Christian church. It was evangelical Christians who led out in the abolishing of slavery in British territory, it Christian’s who led some of the efforts to abolish child labor and establish better working conditions for workers. It is the church that has led to the humane treatment of the insane and the formation of orphan-ages for abandoned and unwanted children. And as good as those things are they are not the purpose of the church.

“Despite the efforts of evangelists, para-church ministries and local churches, the percentage of American adults who are born again Christians is no different now than in 1982, according to a study by the Barna Research Group. The study found that 34% of all Americans can be identified as born again—that is, they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and say they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their savior. Among those surveyed, 62% said they had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today. However, among those who have made a commitment to Christ, only 55 percent believe they will go to heaven because of accepting

Christ as their personal savior (the basic belief in the “born again” movement). Most of those surveyed said they would go to heaven because of living a good life, or obeying the 10 commandments, or because all people will go to heaven. Others who said they had made a commitment to Christ said they were unsure about what will happen to them after they die.” [Reported in Inland Northwest Christian News, March, 1990, p. 3 - www.bible.org/illus/nt/nt-125.htm]

Research study such as the one I just read, indicate that an amazing number of Christians do not live any differently than people who do not claim to know Christ. The Church is therefore not making a real difference in this world because people who call themselves Christian are not different.

Long before the corporate world caught a vision for developing a missions statement, Jesus gave his church a missions statement that has not changed in over 2,000 years. This mission statement outlining the core of the purpose of the church is given in what is referred to as the “Great Commission” and is found in Matthew 28:18-20.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples (*matheteusate*- imperative command) of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen”

First let’s dispel the erroneous thought that the command in this verse is that we “go.” Certainly “going” is an essential part of carrying out the Great Commission. If we don’t go, then we can’t tell. But the fact is that this is not the command associated with the Great Commission. Going is assumed for all genuine dedicated followers of Christ. The text literally says, “*even as you go.*” The three components of the Great Commission are; Evangelize, Incorporate and Disciple.

First, We Are to Evangelize.

First, Jesus says “*go, therefore and make disciples of all nations.*” The KJV says, “*teach all nations*” in fact it uses the word “*teach or teaching*” twice in this passage. But the word translated “*teach*” in verse nineteen (*matheteusate*) literally means “*make disciples.*” First we have to reach them with the gospel, we have to evangelize.

The Bible is also clear on how this call is to be carried out. In Acts 1:8, one of the other records of the Great Commission, Jesus says to his disciples, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

Jesus says that the church was to begin where it was and reach out in an ever widening circle of influence until the whole world had been reached by the Gospel.

We Have A Responsibility To Reach Our Local Community

People who study Church Growth tell us that churches can be divided into three classes. First, magnetic – attracting more people than they lose each year to death, transfer or shift to inactive. Second, neutral attracting about as many people as it lose each year. Third, dying – those churches that lose more members than it attracts each year. [Herb Miller. *How To Build a Magnetic Church. Creative Leadership Series.* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1987) p. 13]

It is not true that liberal churches don't grow and conservative churches grow. The fact is churches that aggressively seek new member tend to grow, those that don't, won't.

Since the average church lose 6-7% of its members each year by death, moves (16.6% of Americans move each year), or drift away to inactivity. It is not just a good idea but a necessity that we attract new people, it is the difference between life and death.

So what can we do to do a better job or reaching our Community?

You Can Invite Our Friends. People do not come to church because we have the best looking building in town or because we have the biggest church in town. *Do you know number one greatest reason given for any person's decision to attend a particular church?* Statistics tell us that 70% to 90% who join any church do so due to the influence of friend relative or acquaintance. "No amount of theological expression from the pulpit can overcome a lack of invitational expression from the pew." [Miller. p. 32]

We had very good attendance today I believe for that very reason (we had **** visitors) and almost 50 people more than Memorial Day a year ago.

You Help Us To Do A Better Job of Following Up On Our Visitors.

We had a plan in corporate a ministry called the CARE ministry to follow up on our visitors. Some of you even singed up to help. But this plan never got implemented. I accept responsibility for that and am going to ask you to help us when we come to in the coming weeks for help in carrying out some form of this plan.

Here is what the experts tell us about follow up visitation. "When laypersons (some one other than staff) make a fifteen-minute visit to the homes of first-time worship visitors with thirty-six hours, 85 % of them return the following week. Make this visit with seventy-hours and 60% of them will return. Make it seven days later and 15% will return. (This next part is the part that astounds me.) The pastor making this call, rather than lay persons, cuts the results in half." [Miller. pp. 72-73]

We could really use someone who would see this as their ministry much like Bro. Stan Campbell does with the Discipleship Ministry.

So keep your ears open for details about helping out with following up on our visitors.

We Have A Responsibility To Help To Take the Gospel To The World.

Paul says in Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Charles Malik, Lebanese ambassador to the United Nations, asked in a speech: "What has been the greatest American contribution to the rest of the world? Has it been money? Has it been food? Has it been medical skill? Has it been military might? Has it been industrial know-how?" Then he answered, "The greatest thing to come out of America has been the American missionary effort: The quiet, selfless men and women who have left the comfort and security of their homeland to bring the gospel of Christianity to less favored nations."

We hear about churches that are "missions-minded" and First Baptist Church is "missions-minded, but we are more than that! Missions is First Baptist Church's purpose for existence.

Coca-Cola may seem to be an odd place to get mission advice but Coca-Cola does seem to be everywhere. But how does it get there? I think that the motto, posted in the company's headquarters, explains it, it says, "THINK GLOBALLY, BUT ACT LOCALLY." What this slogan is to Coke, the Great Commission is to the church.

We have made great strides since we began "Faith Promise Mission's Giving" in 1990. That first year we promised \$18,878.00 for the year, and in 2004 at the completion of our 15th annual Mission's Conference we had pledges totaling \$134,174.00. In those intervening years we have given over 1 million dollars to missions. So while recognizing and appreciating our progress I want us to continue to grow.

Secondly, We Are To Incorporate.

The second thing Jesus says that we must do is "... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." In the command to "baptize" we see the importance of not only reaching the lost with the message of the Gospel but the need of incorporating these new believers into the body of Christ.

This baptism is not the means by which a new believer is saved, but the means by which a new believer becomes part of the local church.

If we are to establish fruit that will remain we must see new believers led to an involvement in the life of a local church.

Third, We Are To Indoctrinate.

Although the term "indoctrinate" often carries a bad connotation it does have to. We think in terms of "brainwash" - as in something that "cults" do. But indoctrination or

discipleship is the final part of the Great Commission where we are told, “... *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*” The word “*teaching*” (*didaskontes*) means “instruction.” And that is instruction in “observing” or “keeping” the commands of Christ.

And although this has been the basis for this study I believe the greater call here is a call to discipleship.

I personally believe that one of the grave problems of the modern Church is that it is like the Rio Grande River, it three miles wide and ½ inch deep. What I mean by that is, that many believers do not know what they believe nor why. They have never been discipled.

It is for that reason that I believe that every believer throughout his or her lifetime should see himself as a disciple. Every believer should therefore be in the process of being discipled by someone or involved in discipling someone else. Discipleship is a life-long learning experience. Our Discipleship Ministry headed by Bro Stan Campbell begins with Basic 101 – taught in a classroom setting - is an introduction to our church for all individuals new to the church. Discipleship 201 is designed to be a one to one presentation of a series of 13 lessons on the basics of Christianity. An individual after completing 201 can in turn lead someone else through this level. Discipleship 301 is to incorporate the believer into a ministry. Discipleship 401 is outreach/evangelism.