

THE GREAT COMMISSION, OUR COMMISSION

Discipleship Message #10: The Great Commission is the Church's Mission

Is the Great Commission, given by the Lord to His Apostles after His resurrection, for us today?

- This may seem like an odd question to ask, but as we continue to study the Bible together, I think it will become increasingly clear as to why we need to clarify this: Yes! The Great Commission is our mission.

The Great Commission is our mission today in the Church Age.

- We have just started a new church and we have spent the last two or three months studying what the Bible has to say about our purpose and mission as a church (and as members of the Church).
- Our purpose: God has placed us here to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.
 - ✓ But, how do we do that? That question addresses our mission...
- Our Mission: To be and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ (John 17.4) In order to fulfill our purpose on earth, we have to finish the work God gave us to do.
 - ✓ As we have seen in the last several weeks, that work is the work of being and making disciples.
 - ✓ We know that being and making disciples (discipleship) includes both evangelism and edification.

(Mat 28.18-20) This mission was given by the Lord and is commonly called the “Great Commission.”

- So, what's the problem with the Great Commission and us today in the Church Age?
 - ✓ The Great Commission was given specifically to Israel in another dispensation.
 - ✓ And because of this, there are some today who say that the Great Commission does not apply to us.
- That's what I want to look at today and also in our next message next Sunday. Let's consider first the Great Commission in it's context and then see how it can and does apply to us today.

I. The Great Commission in Context

A. The Revelation of the Church, the Body of Christ

1. The Church, the Body of Christ, was hidden until Paul

- a) We are going to take all of this and develop it a little bit more next Sunday, but for now let's look at the basic, general argument and problem in applying the Great Commission to us.
- b) When did God *reveal* the Church, the Body of Christ—Jew and Gentile alike in one Body: (Eph 3.1-7) Not until Paul, at least in Acts 9 which detail's Paul's conversion.
- c) (Gal 1.11-17) Paul received *new* revelation directly from the Lord and that new revelation pertained to the *gospel* that was to be taken and preached to the Gentiles.
- d) (Gal 2.7-9) This meant also a change in apostleship: From Peter (Jewish apostleship) to Paul (Gentile apostleship).
 - This change is touched on also in Romans 11 where Paul speaks of Israel being “cut off” and the Gentiles being grafted in.
- e) We see this very same thing in Daniel 9 and the prophecy of the 70 weeks.

2. The Church, the Body of Christ, is a “parenthetical gap” in the key prophecy of Daniel 9,

- a) We are going to study Daniel 9 in detail during our mid-week Bible study. One of the chapters in the *How to Study the Bible* series is in “Things to Come,” and Daniel 9 is the key text.

- b) (Dan 9.24) Seventy weeks are pronounced upon Israel before the Kingdom is established.
- (1) The weeks here are “weeks of years”—seven year blocks. So, we have 490 years in total.
 - (2) After 70 weeks of years (70 blocks of seven years), Messiah will come and establish everlasting righteousness on earth: the second coming and the Millennium.
- c) (Dan 9.25) At the first coming of Christ (the Gospels), there had passed already 69 weeks.
- (1) And those 69 weeks are broken down into two periods: seven weeks and the 62 weeks.
 - (2) That means that at the first coming of Christ in the Gospels, there is only one week of years left—there were only seven years left until the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.
- d) (Dan 9.26) After the second period of 62 weeks, Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. He was cut off for us! This speaks of the crucifixion and Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice.
- That means that at the crucifixion, we only one have one week (seven years) left...
- e) (Dan 9.27) The 70th week of seven years is what we call the Tribulation.
- The 70th week divides into two halves (one of peace and safety, the other of sudden destruction) and it ends with the consummation of the plan of God: the second coming.
- f) Where is the Church and the Church Age in this prophecy?
- The Church is not mentioned; it sits in a “gap” (a parenthetical gap) between Daniel 9.26 and 9.27. It is not revealed until Paul.
- g) Jesus' Disciples (later called the Apostles) had a *very clear* understanding of Daniel 9, the 70 weeks, and the establishment of the Kingdom seven years after the cutting off of Messiah.
- (1) (Luke 24.44-45) Jesus gave His Apostles special, supernatural understanding of the Scriptures with regard to prophecies concerning the Messiah.
 - (2) (Acts 1.6) This is why, after the resurrection, they asked about the establishment of the Kingdom and not about a 2000-year Church Age.
 - (3) (Acts 1.7-8) And it is in this context (the coming of the Kingdom) that Christ gave to His Apostles the Great Commission.
 - (a) Jesus did not correct them and say that the Kingdom was not to be established.
 - (b) He simply said they should not focus on the *time* of the establishment of the Kingdom, but rather on their current task of preaching the Gospel.
 - (4) Therefore, when the Apostles go forth, they did not preach about the Church Age like Paul did (the Church was not revealed until Paul). They went forth preaching about the *Kingdom to Israel*.
 - (Acts 3.19-21) The Apostles and early believers preached the fulfillment of Daniel 9, the coming of Christ to establish His everlasting, righteous Kingdom on earth.
 - (5) (Rom 11.11, 15) When Israel “officially” rejected the offer of the Kingdom (in Acts 7 when they stoned Stephen), God put the fulfillment of Daniel 9.27 (the final week of seven years, the Tribulation) “on hold” while He took what He intended to give to Israel first, and gave it to the Gentiles instead. And He raised up Paul to do just that.

3. What does all this have to do with the Great Commission and us today? A lot!

B. The Great Commission was given before the revelation of the Church, the Body of Christ

1. The Great Commission was given *before* the rejection of the Kingdom by Israel in Acts 7; it was given *before* the great transition from Israel to the Church—from Jew to Gentile.

2. The Great Commission is distinctly Jewish in nature and very much focused on the Kingdom in which Jesus reigns over the Gentile nations through the chosen nation of Israel.
 - a) This has some very important implications for us today. For example...
 - b) (Mat 28.18-20) One of the commands in the Great Commission is to teach new disciples *all* that Jesus taught *His* Disciples (they are the “you” in context; Christ is speaking to the eleven).
 - c) (Mat 6.14-15) Christ taught His Disciples conditional forgiveness. Do we teach that today?
 - d) (Col 2.13) Jesus, through Paul, teach us today that our forgiveness is unconditional and complete at the very moment of salvation.
3. So, we need to understand the Great Commission in its proper and biblical context in order to know how it applies to us today—to us “Gentile Christians” living in the “parenthetical” Church Age.
 - a) We are going to take some time next week to look more in the context of the Commission.
 - b) Right now I'd like to do a brief overview and survey of the Great Commission passages so that we can see that *every essential principle* of the Great Commission can be found in the life, ministry, and teachings of our Apostle, Paul.
 - (1) There are some today who say that the Great Commission is not for us in the Church Age.
 - (2) I do not agree with them. I believe the Great Commission, in context, does apply to us.
 - (3) The Lord did *not* issue a new Commission with Paul. He simply adapted (slightly) the Great Commission that He gave originally to Apostles before His ascension.
 - c) Let's take a look at the five Great Commission passages and see how every essential element of the Great Commission is repeated and communicated through Paul.

II. The Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20

- A. Christ told His Apostles to go and teach “all nations” and this command has not changed.
- B. (2Tim 2.3-4) God still wants *all* men *everywhere* to be saved. He wants *no one anywhere* to perish.
 1. Our Commission today still contains this same element of foreign missions: We need to go!
 2. (1Thes 1.5-8) Paul lifted up the Thessalonian church as an example for all believers in the Church Age to follow. They went to other nations in order to preach the Gospel and make disciples.
- C. (1Cor 1.13-16) We even still are expected to baptize new believers by immersion in water.
 1. Paul was baptized when he got saved and Paul baptized new believers when they got saved.
 2. Obviously we are not sent to baptize in the same sense we are sent to preach the Gospel (the preaching of the Gospel is primary). But, that does not negate the fact that *Paul baptized*.
 3. Baptism is the first step of obedience, one of the first opportunities for a new disciple to *identify with Christ* (an essential element in the means of spiritual growth).
 4. We are expected to follow Paul as he followed Christ, and Paul baptized new believers.

III. The Great Commission in Mark 16.15

- A. Christ told His Apostles to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and this command has not changed.
- B. The presentation of the Great Commission in Mark is distinctly evangelistic (which is why para-church ministries that focus on evangelism, like Living Waters and Way of the Master, use Mark 16.15).
- C. (1Cor 1.18, 21; 2.-15) In the Church Age, God has ordained the *preaching of the Gospel* to the lost as the means of their salvation.

- D. (2Cor 5.18-20) And God has commanded every one of the reconciled (every saved believer) to take the word of reconciliation (the Gospel) to the lost.
- E. (Rom 10.13-17) We are all commissioned and commanded to go and preach the Gospel to every creature in all nations.

IV. The Great Commission in Luke 24.46-48

- A. The same elements of foreign missions and evangelism can be seen in Luke's presentation of the Great Commission. The unique element that he adds has to do with the content of the preaching.
- In the Great Commission passage of Luke we see that the Lord has commanded that we preach repentance as we go to all nations with the Gospel message.
- B. This command has not changed.
1. (Acts 17.30-31) God commands all men everywhere to repent (through us as we go to all men everywhere preaching to the Gospel).
 2. (Acts 20.20-21) Paul's presentation of the Gospel included a clear call to repentance and faith.
 3. (Acts 26.19-20) That's why we see Paul preaching to sinners around repentance (turning from sin) and turning to God in order to live different (bring forth works meet for repentance).

V. The Great Commission in John 20.21

- A. The Commission in John is presented a bit differently than in the other Gospels: Christ sent His Apostles with the same mission that He received from the Father.
1. (Luke 19.10) Jesus was sent with the specific mission of seeking and saving that which was lost.
 2. (1Tim 1.15) Jesus was sent from heaven to the earth in order to seek and save sinners (us):
- B. This command has not changed: We are called to go to all men everywhere in order to save them through the preaching of the Gospel.

VI. The Great Commission in Acts 1.8

- A. Just as Jesus sent out His eleven Apostles (and all the early believers) to witness, we are also commanded and expected to go forth and witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- B. We see this pattern in the life and ministry of the Twelve Apostles in Acts 1-7 and we see this pattern of life and ministry in Paul in the latter chapters of Acts (and in all of his Epistles).

Conclusion:

Paul never repeated the Great Commission in his Epistles.

- Paul never used the same words that the Lord spoke to His Apostles: “Go and make disciples of all nations, preaching the Gospel to every creature, and calling them to repentance and faith...”
- Why didn't he repeat the Commission? He didn't have to!
- There was no need to repeat the Commission originally given by the Lord, because the Lord had already given it to His disciples—to those who would follow Him after His resurrection and ascension.

Paul took the very same Great Commission and expected all Christians to obey its general commands.

- We are expected to evangelize, baptize new believer, and teach them to obey Christ's commands to them.

However, the Great Commission passages of the Gospels and Acts must be understood in their proper context in order to avoid some serious errors.

- (2Pet 3.15-16) We do not want to be guilty of “wresting” (twisting) Scripture simply because we didn't take the time or make the effort to understand the context of a passage we want to apply to our lives.
- So, next week we are going to talk about “anachronisms” and the Great Commission.

What we should ask ourselves this morning is this: Are we fulfilling the Great Commission?

- If not, let's keep praying that God would bless us (Harvest Baptist Church) by raising us up and sending us out into the His harvest (preaching the Gospel to the lost everywhere and teaching believers to obey what Jesus Christ has commanded them—making disciples by evangelizing the lost and edifying believers).