

ANACHRONISMS AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

Discipleship Message #11: The Great Commission in its Doctrinal Context

This will be the last message in our Discipleship: The Mission series.

- This message is not meant to be so much preaching as it is teaching.
- Since this first series of Harvest Baptist Church is about the Mission God gave us to be and make disciples, we have been focusing on what is commonly called “the Great Commission.”
- In our last message we established this biblical fact: The Great Commission, in context and in principle, is our mission today in the Church Age.

In this message we are going to look specifically at the Great Commission in its doctrinal context.

- If we don't understand a little bit about the doctrinal context of the Great Commission we are going to find ourselves guilty of twisting Scripture (wresting it out of its proper context).
- Most of the Great Commission can be applied to us (“most”), but some of it cannot. And, therefore, we need to understand what can be applied to us, what cannot, and why.

If you find that the general teaching in this lesson is difficult to understand...

- I would encourage you to begin now to look at your weekly schedule and see if you can make time on Wednesday nights (7:00-8:30pm) to attend our midweek Bible study on *How to Study the Bible*.
- We'll be announcing more about this study soon (when it will start, where we will meet, etc.).

I. Two Principal Errors in Biblical Interpretation: The Allegory and the Anachronism

- There are two principal errors that are commonly committed in Bible study and interpretation (and just about all the bad doctrine that exists today began with one of these two errors).

A. The Allegory

1. This is the error of not taking literally what was written literally.
2. (Gal 4.24) Obviously there are allegories in Scripture (we often call them pictures and types).
3. The problem is not with that which was written as an allegory but rather with that which was written literally (normally, historically, doctrinally) but which some want to interpret as allegory.
4. Here are just two examples of this error:
 - a) The seven days of creation in Genesis 1-2 were not really days of 24 hours each, but rather indefinite periods in which God used evolution to “create” the world.
 - b) Adam and Eve were not really literal people but rather representative of the first humans that evolved (or a Jewish myth of how life began).
 - c) These are an allegorical errors because Genesis was written as a book of history and therefore it should be interpreted “normally” as a book of history (not myth and allegory).

B. The Anachronism

1. This is the error of that occurs when people or events are placed incorrectly in chronological history.
 - a) “Ana” (Greek) is a prefix which means *against*.
 - b) “Chronos” (Greek) is a word which means *time* (like in *chronology*).
 - c) Together they mean “against-time”—an anachronistic error is an error made “against time.”

2. Here are some common examples of anachronistic errors:
 - a) Applying something from the past to the present (e.g., the error of Sabbath keeping today).
 - b) Applying something from the future to the present (e.g., the error of the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe they are the 144,000 of the Tribulation).
 - c) In *How to Study the Bible* we are going to spend some time talking a little bit more in detail about this when we cover dispensations.
3. The didactic (teaching) tool that helps us avoid anachronistic errors is the ***time line***.
 - a) God gave us His revelation in Scripture chronologically and progressively through time.
 - b) Therefore, if we can understand that progressive revelation through time (history), we can avoid a great many errors and problems.
 - c) Again, this will be something we develop in more detail later in *How to Study the Bible*. Right now, it's important to simply think "linearly" (according to a time line of events).

C. Review and Conclusion

1. Every other system of theology except dispensationalism ***must*** commit these two errors (to a greater or lesser extent). Otherwise, that system of theology would eventually become dispensationalism.
2. Dispensationalism is the only theological system that avoids these two errors because it is the only theological system that is consistently based on the a "normal" interpretation of Scripture (taking what was written literally as literal and what was written allegorically as allegory).

D. Focus of the Current Study

1. This study will focus on a very common anachronistic error and it might challenge you a little bit as to how you have always understood the Great Commission.
2. My challenge to you, therefore, is this: What does the Bible ***say***?
 - a) We want to take the Great Commission (specifically Matthew 28.18-20) and simply ask ourselves, "In the chronological progressive revelation of God, what does this passage ***say***?"
 - b) If what the Bible ***says*** goes against what we have been taught or what we have always believed, what would be a right response? We should correct ourselves in order to align ourselves with Scriptures, rather than trying to align Scripture with what we have always believed.
3. **Focus Question for this Study:** Is the Great Commission for us today—is it specifically and doctrinally for Christians living the in Church Age?
 - a) In the last message we talked about the "general principals" of the Great Commission and how they apply to us.
 - b) In this message we are going to focus on specific, doctrinal details and we are going to use Matthew 28.18-20 as our base text.

II. **The Great Commission in Mathew 28.18-20**

A. **The Chronological Context of the Great Commission:** When did the Church (the Body of Christ) ***start***, when was it ***revealed***, and when will it ***end***?

1. (Acts 2.1-4) The Church, the Body of Christ, ***started*** with the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in believers (thus making them "born again by the Spirit"—the regeneration).
2. (Eph 3.1-7) However, in spite of the fact that the Church (the Body of Christ ***existed***) since Acts 2, it was not ***revealed*** to men until Paul (at least Acts 9, Paul's conversion).
3. (1Thes 4.13-18 cf. 1Cor 15.51-58) The Church Age will end just as suddenly as it began. It began with a sudden coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers (Acts 2), and it will end with the removal of all believers who have the Holy Spirit: the Rapture.

4. The Great Commission Chronological Context:

- a) Remember that the Church, the Body of Christ, was *not revealed* until Paul (Acts 9).
- b) Therefore, to read the Church, the Body of Christ, back into the Great Commission is an anachronistic error (it is applying something from the present to a period in past history).
- c) When Christ gave the Great Commission to His Apostles, the revelation of the Church, the Body of Christ, was *still yet future* (no one in Matthew 28.18-20 knew anything about the Church, the Body of Christ, or the the Church Age).

B. The Doctrinal Specifics of the Great Commission

1. (Mat 28.16-20) The Great Commission was given after the resurrection and before the ascension. It was given to the Eleven Disciples who are also called Apostles (the Twelve, including Mathias).
2. (Mat 28.19a) There are two commands (imperatives) in the Commission: *Go* and *Teach*.
 - a) They have to “go” in order to fulfill the Commission.
 - (1) The Lord wants disciples from among all nations, therefore they must go to all nations.
 - (2) The Lord gave the Commission to *Jews*, who are *very* nationalistic (because of the covenants given to them concerning the land). It was not normal or natural (or, in some cases, even permitted) for Jews to *go* out among other nations.
 - (3) Therefore, the Lord *commanded* them to *go* (it is an imperative, a command).
 - b) After they go, they are to teach.
 - (1) This is how a disciple is made: You *teach* the Gospel to the lost in order to “make/create” a disciple and then you *teach* the Scripture to the saved in order to “make/mold” a disciple into the image of the Lord.
 - (2) The two “-ing” words following this command give us a description of what this teaching is to be like: It's not just intellectual but rather volitional (“teaching to obey”).
 - (a) Water baptism forms part of the teaching process because it is the first step of obedience, the step by which the disciple identifies with his Lord.
 - (b) Then follows a whole process of “teaching them to *observe* all things whatsoever” the Lord commanded.
 - c) Here is where we begin to see that the Great Commission is *very specific*.
 - (1) Jesus is *very specific* in what He *commanded* the Eleven to teach to new disciples: New disciples are suppose to learn and obey *all things* that Jesus taught *to His Eleven Apostles*.
 - (a) Read the passage again and ask yourself, “What does the Bible say?”
 - (b) The passage says that Jesus commanded His Eleven Apostles to teach all nations to observe all things that He (Jesus) commanded them (“you” is the Eleven Apostles).
 - (2) (Acts 2.41-42) The Apostles obeyed the Lord to the letter:
 - (a) (v41) They baptized their new converts.
 - (b) (v42) And they taught their new converts to continue steadfastly in the *apostles'* doctrine—the doctrine of the Apostles (the doctrine given to the Apostles, the Eleven).
 - (c) Do we teach today that same “apostles' doctrine”? No we do not, and one example shows clearly that we do not.
 - i) (Mat 6.12, 14-15) Jesus taught His Apostles *conditional* forgiveness.
 - ii) (Col 2.13) Jesus, through Paul, teaches us *unconditional* forgiveness.
 - iii) The “apostles' doctrine” contains the teaching that if you do not forgive others, God will not forgive you. We do not teach that today. Today we teach that since God has so forgiven us, so should we forgive others.

- d) The Great Commission “*looks back*” to the earthly ministry of Jesus to the Jews under the Law. Here is where we see many commit an anachronistic error:
- (1) If we say that the Great Commission is specifically and doctrinally for us today, then we are saying that we “*look back*” to the Gospels for our teaching on how to follow Jesus.
 - (2) If we say that the Great Commission is specifically and doctrinally for us today, then we are saying that it is *wrong* to “look forward” to Paul for our teaching on how to follow Jesus.
- e) How, then, are we supposed to understand the Great Commission in its proper doctrinal context and thereby avoid anachronistic errors?
- (1) Here is another principle we are going to learn and apply in *How to Study the Bible*: God promised to preserve His *words* (not just the “word,” the message, but the “words”) and therefore the *words* are the key to the Bible.
 - (2) There is a phrase in the Great Commission of Matthew 28.18-20 that is *key* (essential and fundamental) to the proper interpretation of the Commission in its context.
 - (3) (Mat 28.20b) The post-resurrection, pre-ascension Great Commission will be fulfill “*unto the end of the world.*”
 - (a) This phrase is used *almost exclusively* in the Scripture by Matthew and Matthew is *very specific* in how he uses it throughout his Gospel.
 - (b) And you can see this same phrase (*the end of the world*) in both English and Greek: **συντελειας του αιωνος**..
 - i) You can get out your Strong's Concordance or use whatever Bible program you want, and you can trace this phrase through Scripture (especially Matthew) and you can see the same thing in English as you can see in Greek.
 - ii) Matthew recorded in writing that the Lord said the Great Commission would be fulfilled “unto the end of the world.”
 - (c) The Church, the Body of Christ, will *not* even be *on the earth* at the end of the world because Christ will rapture us out at least seven years before the end of the world. Therefore the Church, the Body of Christ, *cannot fulfill* the Great Commission as it reads in Matthew 28.
 - We can see this by simply comparing Scripture with Scripture in order to see how Matthew uses this phrase to refer to something very specific and clearly defined.
3. (Mat 24.3) The disciples asked about Jesus' coming and the *end of the world* (Greek: **συντελειας του αιωνος**).
- a) Remember: Matthew was very specific when he said that the Great Commission would be fulfilled “unto the end of the world.” He uses the *same phrase* in Matthew 24.
 - b) Matthew 24 is the key comparison chapter in order to properly understand the Great Commission in its doctrinal context:
 - (1) (Mat 24.14) The “end” (**συντελειας**) will come after the *gospel of the kingdom* has been preached in all the world, in all nations. That is the Great Commission of Matthew 28!
 - (2) The key to understanding the Great Commission is Matthew 24:
 - (a) Both the Great Commission and Matthew 24 have their focus on “the end” (same word in the same phrase: *the end of the world*; **συντελειας του αιωνος**).
 - (b) Both the Great Commission and Matthew 24 deal with the preaching of the gospel.

- (c) Both the Great Commission and Matthew 24 deal with the preaching of the gospel to all nations.
- (d) The Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20 is almost *identical* to Matthew 24.14.
- c) (Mat 24.14 cf. 24.3) The Great Commission is the command Jesus gave to his Jewish Apostles to preach the *gospel of the kingdom* in all nations until the second coming and the establishment of that kingdom on earth.
4. The Doctrinal Context of the Great Commission (comparing Scripture with Scripture: Matthew 28 with Matthew 24—the writings of the same author, in the same book):
- a) The Great Commission in the Gospels (and in Acts 1.8) is historically, doctrinally, and specifically for the Tribulation, the period of time just before the “end” when Jesus returns.
- (1) Remember Daniel 9 and the 70 weeks (of years): When Jesus was crucified, there was only one week left (one period of seven years) left in the prophecy and then the *consummation* would come (that word *consummation* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, is *συντελειας*).
- (2) The Great Commission was given as a command to preach the kingdom, not the Church.
- b) To say that the Great Commission is historically and doctrinally for the Church, the Body of Christ, is to commit an anachronistic error because *no one* at that time knew *anything* about the Church (God did not reveal the Church until Paul).
- c) The Gospel the Apostles were commanded to preach in the Great Commission is the “Gospel of the Kingdom.”
- (1) (Gal 1.11-17) This is *not* the Gospel of the Grace of God that Paul received later.
- (2) The Gospel of the Kingdom is the “Good News” (*gospel* means *good news*) that the Kingdom is at hand (i.e., that the *end* is at hand, the second coming is close!).
- (a) (Mat 3.1-2) This is the same gospel that John the Baptist preached.
- (b) (Mat 4.17) This is the same gospel that Jesus preached during His earthly ministry.
- (c) (Mat 10.5-7) This is the same gospel that the same Apostles preached during the earthly ministry of Jesus.
- i) (Mat 10.8) Note: The preaching of this gospel (the gospel of the kingdom) is accompanied by *signs, wonders, and miracles*.
- ii) (Mark 16.15-18) This is why we see the same signs, wonders, and miracles in the Great Commission: It is a commission to preach the *gospel of the kingdom*.
- (d) (Mat 6.10) The gospel of the kingdom is the proclamation that God is going to establish His reign “on earth” just as He reigns in heaven.
- i) (Luke 1.31-33) Jesus will be the King in this kingdom (in fulfillment of the promise God gave to David in 2Samuel 7.12-16)
- ii) Israel will be the head of all the other nations (that means that in order to be saved in the kingdom, a Gentile must come to God “through Israel”).
- (Dan 7.27) All dominion over all other nations under the whole heaven will be given to God's chosen people, Israel.
 - (Isa 2.1-5) The Gentile in the kingdom who wants to know God and follow God will have to come to the Lord “through Israel.”
- iii) (Zech 14.16-19) Therefore, according to the gospel of the kingdom (the good news of salvation in the kingdom), the salvation of the nations will be through Israel. Those who choose *not* to do will be punished.

- (3) For those who still hold to the belief that there is only one gospel in the Scripture, we should point out two passages:
- (a) (1Cor 15.1-4) Paul clearly defines the gospel that he preached and that we continue to preach today. That gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our salvation.
 - (b) (Luke 18.31-34) The Apostles (who were sent before to preach the gospel of the kingdom) understood none of these things.
 - (c) If the Apostles were preaching the same gospel as Paul, they were preaching a gospel they new nothing about.
- d) The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel of the Twelve and the gospel of the Great Commission.
- (1) (Acts 1.6) The Apostles are waiting for the restoration of all things—the restoration of the kingdom and all its promised blessings to Israel.
 - (2) (Acts 1.7) Christ does *not* correct them; He does not tell them “no, the kingdom is *not* going to be restored.” What he puts in question is the *time* of that restoration.
 - (3) (Acts 1.8) And then He tells them to go *preach*: Go fulfill the Great Commission!
 - (4) (Acts 3.19-21) They do just that: They go forth preaching that the *kingdom is at hand*, just like the did before the crucifixion, just like Jesus did during His earthly ministry, and just like John the Baptist did to prepare the way for the coming of the King.
 - (a) They go forth preaching the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom that we call today the Millennium.
 - (b) The Twelve are *not* preaching the Church, the Body of Christ, because no one knew anything of the Church or the Church Age until Paul.
 - (c) (Acts 2.41-42) They are fulfilling the Great Commission by preaching the gospel of the kingdom, baptizing new converts, and teach the *Apostles'* doctrine (the doctrine Jesus gave to His Twelve Apostles in the Gospels).
 - (d) (Acts 2.46) And they are *not* starting churches! They continue just as before in Temple worship.
 - (e) This gospel, and the Great Commission to preach this gospel, is *distinctly Jewish* and has a *distinct focus* on the second coming and the establishment of the kingdom.
- e) The preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (the gospel of the Great Commission):
- (1) (Mat 24.14 cf. Mat 28.18-20; Mark 15.16-18; Luke 24.46-48; John 20.21; Acts 1.8) The good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (the gospel of the kingdom) will be preached among all nations... and then the *end* will come.
 - (2) (Mat 24.15) That *end* is connected with the abomination of desolation mentioned in Daniel.
 - (a) The preaching of the gospel of the kingdom—the gospel of the Great Commission—is done during the same time as the abomination of desolation in Daniel 9.27.
 - (b) Daniel 9.27 is Daniel's 70th week, the last seven years of the prophecy, the Tribulation.
 - (c) That last (70th) week (the last set of seven years) ends with the “consummation” (in the Septuagint: **συντελειας** , just like in Matthew 24 and Matthew 28).
 - (3) Historically, doctrinally, and specifically, the Great Commission is a command to Israel to preach the gospel of the kingdom among all nations because the second coming is at hand.

III. A Chronological Summary (avoiding the anachronism)

- A. (Dan 9.24-26) When Messiah is killed, not for Himself but for us, there is only one “week” of years left in Daniels prophecy of the 70 weeks. Once that 70th week is over, the end (the consummation, the **συντελειας**) will come and Christ will establish His reign (the reign of heaven) on earth.
- B. (Mat 28.18-20) Knowing this, Christ gave to His Jewish Apostles the Great Commission.
1. (Mark 16.15-18) They are to take the gospel (the good news) of the coming kingdom to the nations, and there will be specific signs and wonders following their preaching.
 2. (Mat 24.14) The gospel they are preaching is the *gospel of the kingdom*.
 3. (Acts 1.6; 3.19-21) They are preaching the coming *kingdom*, not the Church, the Body of Christ.
 4. (Acts 2.46) They are not establishing churches but rather continuing in *temple worship*, according to the custom of the Jews (Israel).
 5. This means that the first chapters of the Book of Acts *could have been* part of Daniel's 70th week (the last seven years of his prophecy that ends in the consummation of the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth).
- C. (Acts 7.54-60) In Acts 7, however, the Jews “officially” reject the gospel of the kingdom by rejecting the King of the kingdom, Jesus (the stoning of Stephen marks their rejection as “official” in Acts 7).
- D. (Acts 9.15-16) In Acts 9 God saves Paul.
1. (Gal 1.11-17) The Lord gives Paul a new revelation of a new gospel.
 2. (Gal 2.7-9) The Lord gives Paul a new mandate to take his gospel to the Gentiles (Israel has been “cut off” and the Gentiles “grafted in”—salvation is no longer “through” Israel; the Gentiles in the Church Age have “direct access” to God through Christ).
 3. (Eph 3.1-7) God leads Paul to write down the new revelation of the Body of Christ so that we can understand our gospel by reading what Paul wrote.
- E. (Acts 10.43-48 cf. 11.15-18) With the salvation of Cornelius (a Gentile just like us), God confirms to all that the Gentiles can be saved “directly” without having to go “through” Israel.
- F. (Acts 28.28) The transition from Israel to the Church (from the gospel of the kingdom to the gospel of the grace of God) comes to completion in Acts 28.28 with the confirmation that God has “cut off” Israel from her promised blessing (for a time) and has “grafted in” the Gentiles directly (into His blessing).
1. (Rom 11.11, 15, 17-24) Paul confirms this cutting off and grafting in when he writes to the Romans.
 2. (Rom 11.25) This situation (the Church Age) is not permanent; it is only for a time.
- G. (2Cor 5.16) We Christians (who follow Christ in the Church Age) do *not* teach disciples to what Christ taught His Twelve Apostles while He was on the earth in the flesh.
1. (1Cor 11.1) We follow Christ (and teach others to do so) *as Christ teaches us through Paul*.
 2. (Php 4.9) Paul teach us Gentile Christians in the Church Age how to be saved and how to follow Christ during our dispensation.
 3. We do *not* “look back” to the Gospels for our ministry model and discipleship pattern. We look at *our Apostle*, Paul, and learn from Him how God expects us to follow Christ today.
- H. (Rom 11.25; 1Thes 4.13-18; 1Cor 15.51-58) Our dispensation will end with the Rapture of the Church.
- I. (Mat 24.3, 14 cf. Matt 28.18-20, and all the other Great Commission passages) After our Rapture, the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached on earth, among all nations, during the Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week), and then end of this world as we know it will come—Jesus will return and establish His reign on this earth just like He reigns in heaven.

Conclusion: Is the Great Commission for us today in the Church Age? Yes and no!

Historically and doctrinally, no, the Great Commission is not for us Christians living in the Church Age.

- If we read the Great Commission just as Christ gave it in the Gospels and in Acts 1.8, the Commission deals specifically with the preaching of the *gospel of the kingdom* during Daniel's 70th week (the Tribulation).
- The end of the preach Great Commission is the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom—the Millennium.
- Daniel calls this “end” the *consummation*; it is the “end of the world” as we know it because it is the beginning of a new kingdom that will last forever.

However, personally and “spiritually,” yes, the Great Commission applies to us today *in principle*.

- (1Tim 2.3-4) God still wants all men everywhere to be saved, therefore He wants us to go to all nations.
- (2Cor 5.18-21) We are still supposed to *evangelize* the lost by *teaching* them (preaching to them) the gospel message.
- (2Tim 3.16-17) We are still supposed to *edify* other believers (disciples) by *teaching* them Scripture.
- (1Cor 1.14-17) We are even still supposed to *baptize* our new converts to provide them with a public means of identifying with Christ.

If we would simply interpret Scripture “normally” and in its proper historical and doctrinal context, we would avoid all (or almost all) of the *anachronistic* errors that exist today surrounding the Great Commission:

1. We would avoid preaching the wrong gospel.
 - The Twelve Apostles: They and their followers preached the gospel of the kingdom (which come across as a social, do-good gospel today).
 - The Apostle Paul: He and his follower preach the gospel of the grace of God.
2. We would avoid the false teaching that signs and wonders accompany the conversion of the lost.
 - The Twelve Apostles: (Mar 15.16-18) The gospel of the kingdom is accompanied by confirmation signs.
 - The Apostle Paul: The gospel of the grace of God, preached among the Gentiles, has not promise of confirmation signs.
3. We would avoid teaching bad doctrine. For example:
 - The Twelve Apostles: (Mat 6.12, 14-15) The gospel of the kingdom speaks of conditional forgiveness of sins (remember: the sermon on the mount is basically the “constitution of the kingdom”).
 - The Apostle Paul: (Col 2.13) Today we preach the gospel of the grace of God and the unconditional and complete forgiveness of sins at the moment of salvation.
4. We would avoid the error of following (imitating) a ministry model that was never intended for us.
 - The Twelve Apostles do not give us a proper pattern of ministry to follow because in the Gospels we see Jesus preaching the gospel of the kingdom to Jews (and He trained the Twelve to do the same!).
 - The Apostle Paul provides us with our pattern of ministry and discipleship because he took the gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles. We follow Paul as he followed Christ—Paul is our pattern, not the Twelve.

One last word about the Great Commission: Let's fulfill it in principle!

- God did *not* give us a new Commission through Paul but He did “alter” that Commission some through Paul.
- Therefore, we should say, “Yes! The Great Commission is for us today!”
- But at the same time we need to understand the Commission in its proper context. God altered the Commission because the Jews rejected the original message. He altered the Commission through Paul.
- We need to understand the Great Commission in its proper context... We need to follow the proper pattern of ministry if we hope to be a church that fulfills the Commission give to us... And that means we need to follow Paul as he followed Christ.
 - ✓ We need to be all about *intentionally evangelizing* the lost and *systematically edifying* believers in the context of the local church.
 - ✓ That is how we fulfill the Great Commission today, and that is how we can glorify God and enjoy Him forever.