The Simplicity of the Great Commission

(by Billy Norris)

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples a great charge in which He pointed out to them their duty and the plan of salvation for sinners. Because of the importance of this commission, it has been recorded by three of the gospel writers.

Matthew shows the power, or authority, with which it was given. ***“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”*** (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

Luke records the language of Christ, ***“Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”*** (**Luke 24:46-47**).

Mark records the great commission, ***“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”*** (**Mark 16:15-16**). Over this commission there has been much controversy, not because of the difficulty of the language, but because men have endeavored to justify doctrines that Christ did not teach.

*Notice what Jesus* ***DID NOT*** *say…*

1. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall not be saved, for there is no God”* – justifying the doctrine of atheism. Nature, of course, shows that there is a Supreme, All Powerful, All Wise Being. ***“The heavens*** ***declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork”*** (**Psalm 19:1**). The Bible, with all of its internal evidence, fulfilled prophecies and promises, perfect laws, & tremendous influence for good, shows that there is an Almighty God. ***“The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God’”*** (**Psalm 14:1**).
2. *“All men shall be saved, and may believe and be baptized”* – justifying the doctrine of universal salvation. If the Bible shows that even one soul shall be lost, this doctrine falls. Actually, the Bible shows that the greater number will be lost. ***“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”*** (**Matthew 7:13-14**). The doctrine of universal salvation is dangerous because it encourages loose, undisciplined living, and it discourages carrying out the great commission. If all people are going to be saved, why go to the trouble of preaching the gospel to every creature?
3. *“He that believeth shall be saved and may be baptized”* – justifying the doctrine of salvation by faith only. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by faith, but specifically shows that it is not by faith only. ***“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”*** (**James 2:24**). Faith and works (obedience) are inseparably connected. One’s faith is demonstrated by his obedience. When Moses struck the rock, instead of speaking to it as God commanded, God said to him and Aaron, ***“Because ye believed Me not… ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them”*** (**Numbers 20:12**). Four men brought a paralytic to Christ. They could not reach Him because of the crowd. They uncovered the roof, and let him down in the presence of Christ. The Scripture says, ***“When Jesus saw their faith”*** (**Mark 2:5**). Their faith was demonstrated by their action. The idea that salvation by faith only is a very wholesome doctrine may be found in the creed books, but not in the word of God.
4. *“He that is baptized in infancy and later believes shall be saved”* – justifying the doctrine of infant baptism. Subjects for baptism are those who have been taught the gospel. ***“Teach all nations, baptizing them”*** (**Matthew 28:19**). Subjects for baptism are those, who, having been taught the gospel, believe and repent of their sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Infants have not the mental faculty for understanding and believing the gospel; nor do they have any sins for which to repent. Of the little ones Jesus said, ***“Of such is the kingdom of heaven”*** (**Matthew 19:14**). The doctrine of infant baptism may be found in the creed books of men, but not in the word of God.

*Notice what Jesus* ***DID*** *say…*

1. ***“He that believeth.”*** God has given great evidence in His word that Christ is His Son, the Savior of man. Since faith comes by hearing the word of God (**Romans 10:17**), when the gospel is preached, men accept and believe this unimpeachable evidence.
2. ***“And is baptized shall be saved”*** (**Mark 16:16**). This baptism is for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**). It saves from sin and the terrible consequences of sin. In the blood of Christ we have redemption. ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”*** (**Ephesians 1:7**). We appropriate His redeeming blood by being baptized into His death. ***“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”*** (**Romans 6:3**).

***“But he that believeth not shall be damned.”*** This statement is conclusive evidence of the inseparable relationship of faith and obedience. One who believes shows his faith in his obedience to the gospel. In this faith he is saved. One who does not believe, consequently does not obey. In this disbelief and disobedience he is damned.

Jesus said, ***“But he that believeth not is condemned already”*** (**John 3:18**). Christ has made His commission, and the plan of salvation, clear and plain. It becomes controversial only when seen through the doctrines of men.

Dismissing the Message

(by Jamey Hinds)

***“Whoever heeds correction is on the pathway to life, but someone who ignores exhortation goes astray”*** (**Proverbs 10:17**). Sometimes we confuse the message with the messenger — and we may feel that if we can dismiss the messenger (right or wrong), then we can dismiss the message. But they are not one and the same. Titus was told to ***“Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you”*** (**Titus 2:15**). If Titus taught everything Paul wrote to him to teach, then someone was going to have a problem with his message. Did Titus have authority? Paul apparently thought so as he himself commanded Titus to ***“rebuke with all authority.”***

We know not everyone accepted Jesus’ teachings, even when they came from His own mouth into their ears. Should we be surprised when we are rejected for telling the truth? Even the apostle Paul asked the Galatians, ***“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”*** (**4:16**). The Corinthians wanted to reject Paul’s message because of Paul (**2 Corinthians 10:10**). Jesus asked, ***“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great”*** (**Luke 6:46–49**). Are we taking God’s message seriously? Or are we dismissing it because of the messenger?