The Great Commission: Social Work, Political Action, or Evangelism?
Scripture: Matthew 28
Code: BQ52010

It was in light of His absolute, sovereign authority that Jesus commanded, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations."** The transitional word is **therefore**. "Because I am sovereign Lord of the universe," Jesus was saying, "I have both the authority to command you to be My witnesses and the power to enable you to obey that command."

In light of the Old Testament teaching about Israel's mission to be God's light to the Gentiles and in light of Jesus' earthly ministry, it should not be surprising that His commission was to **make disciples of all the nations**.

Matheteuo (**make disciples**) is the main verb and the central command of verses 19–20, which form the closing sentence of Matthew's gospel. The root meaning of the term refers to believing and learning. Jesus was not referring simply to believers or simply to learners, or He would have used other words. *Matheteuo* carries a beautiful combination of meanings. In this context it relates to those who place their trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him in lives of continual learning and obedience. "If you abide in My word," Jesus said, "then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31). It should be noted that some disciples were not true (see John 6:66).

A person who is not Christ's true disciple does not belong to Him and is not saved. When a person genuinely confesses Christ as Lord and Savior, he is immediately saved, immediately made a disciple, and immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Not to be Christ's disciple is therefore not to be Christ's at all.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the term the Lord uses in this commissioning is **make disciples**. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, whatever that may mean or demand. The truly converted person is filled with the Holy Spirit and given a new nature that yearns to obey and worship the Lord who has saved him. Even when he is disobedient, he knows he is living against the grain of his new nature, which is to honor and please the Lord. He loves righteousness and hates sin, including his own.

Jesus' supreme command, therefore, is for those who are His disciples to become His instruments for making disciples of all nations. Jesus' own earthly ministry was to make disciples for Himself, and that is the ministry of His people. Those who truly follow Jesus Christ become "fishers of men" (Matt.

4:19). Those who become His disciples are themselves to become disciple makers. The mission of the early church was to make disciples (see Acts 2:47; 14:21), and that is still Christ's mission for His church.

Jesus' command for His followers to **make disciples** was given only once, climactically, at the very end of His earthly ministry. Some might ask, "If it was so crucial, why did Jesus mention it only once?" The reason, no doubt, is that the motivation for reaching others for Christ is innate to the redeemed life. One might as well ask why God's command for man to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) was given only once. In each case, reproduction in kind is natural to life. The call to make disciples is stated only once because it is natural for the new creation to be reproductive. It would beg the issue to repeat what is so basic.

The specific requirements Jesus gives for making disciples involve three participles: going (rendered here as **go**), **baptizing**, and **teaching**.

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