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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THEREFORE GO” (Part 1)
Matthew 28:16-20**

What is the Great Commission?

Close, but no cigar! Regrettably, we have been taught an abridged form, a sort of Reader’s Digest condensed edition.

□ Please turn to Matthew 28:18-20. Let us read the Commission aloud in its entirety, beginning with the words **“All authority”**:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

That is the Great Commission. We have severed the declarations of authority and presence from the exhortation. In doing so, we have deprived ourselves of much of the inspiration and power we need to really **“go and make disciples.”**

Let’s dig into these framing statements.

■ Verse 18: **“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”** This is Christ’s declaration of authority.

✎ Matthew uses the Greek word ἐξουσία (exousia). It communicates two dimensions of authority: 1) one is *de*

jure legal authorization, the lawful and moral right to govern; the other is 2) *de facto* ability, the practical power to actually rule.

The Lord Jesus claims every right and capacity of dominion. All the privilege and power of cosmic kingship should, and does, belong to Jesus.

Many people imagine that Christ governs the universe in much the same way a mortal human being would – and our track record is not very good.

Some leaders have ample strength to rule their home, church, workplace, town or nation – by means of manipulation, fraud, bribery, threat and violence. They call the shots, compelling family, friends, and enemies to do their will; but by exercising this power they forfeit the right to govern.

Some leaders have every right to govern: it has been bestowed on them by lawful, moral means – yet they are unable to enforce justice or promote the common good at home, at church, on the job, in the community, or in the nation. They lack the practical power to actually rule.

Most of our leaders are neither despots nor incompetents. They are ordinary human beings, created in God’s likeness but stricken by sin. Many seek out, or stumble into, positions of authority with decent intentions. Still, it is easy for us to get in over our heads, or to be corrupted by the power we wield.

Not so with the Lord Jesus! Philippians 2:5-11 clarifies the **grounds of his authority**: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”** – the Greek literally says, **“This think you among you,”** so

the emphasis here is not on our thought world but on our communal attitudes and relationships –

who, being in nature very God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [that is, exploited for his own benefit], but made himself nothing [emptied himself], taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God the Son has always had every right and power to govern, for **“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”** {Jn 1:3}. Yet he gained even greater authority (if that were possible) when he willingly relinquished his rights and power to become the Word-made-flesh. To honor his suffering service God the Father **“exalted him to the highest place,”** raising him to resurrection life at Easter and then to glory at the Ascension, for the purpose that he shall have command of the whole creation.

✎ Creaturely ignorance or rejection of his claim does not in any way diminish his ἐξουσία. The basis of Christ’s authority (in the Holy Godhead), and the means by which

he attained it (through Creation and self-sacrifice), forever guarantee the integrity and effectiveness of his rule. Our risen Lord shall **“reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”** {1 Co 15:25}, including sin, death and the devil.

Matthew 28:18: **“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”** This leads into the exhortation to **“go and make disciples.”**

■ Let’s take a look at verse 19.

How does it begin? The phrasing varies from translation to translation, but most say something like: **“Therefore go”** {NIV, NLT}, **“Go therefore”** {NASB, NRSV}, **“Go, then”** {GNB}, or **“So go”** {NCV}.

The Greek word οὖν (oon) means *therefore, hence, as a result, for that reason, consequently*. It indicates a strong causal relationship, and inextricably links Christ’s declaration of authority with the exhortation to **“go and make disciples.”**

So what? What are the implications for us?

☛ 1st, disciple-making is our essential response to Jesus’ announcement of complete authority.

Many Christians ask: *Is the Great Commission binding for the whole Church?* Or is it required only of missionaries, pastors, and specially gifted lay people? Verse 18 addresses this issue of responsibility.

Where and when and over whom does the exalted Christ have authority? In every time and place, over every creature! **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to”** him.

Since his universal authority is what justifies the Great Commission, it applies to all who confess his divine right and power to govern, who believe he is the co-Creator and that he set aside his rights, died a sacrificial death, rose again, and ascended to his Father.

☆ At its most basic, disciple-making is an act of submission to the One to whom “**All authority...has been given.**” Christ has the right to command obedience, and we have the duty to comply.

☆ But true disciple-making is not just a matter of following orders; it is about making the Lord’s government real in the here and now. It goes without saying that many of our neighbors are unaware of, or knowingly reject, Christ’s authority. As Hebrews 2:8 acknowledges: “**at present we do not see everything subject to him.**” However, when we citizens of God’s kingdom “**go and make disciples**” we are helping to help accomplish the Lord’s declaration of authority. It is part of God’s plan that his people should be cooperative partners in this.

The Great Commission is the essential response of the whole Church.

✪ 2nd, the “**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” {Rev 19:16} himself has authorized us to make disciples. It is on his authority that we baptize and teach others to obey his commands.

Many Christians ask: *Do we have the right to convert others to our faith?* What entitles us to stand in judgment of their religion? Verse 18 addresses this issue of authorization.

Who instructs us to “**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations**”? The One to whom “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given**” him.

Does the Son of God, the Word-made-flesh, the Messiah, have the lawful and moral right to require human worship and obedience? Absolutely!

It follows that we have the lawful and moral right to go and make new disciples. Christ has deputized us to be his agents, representing him and acting on his behalf.

We must be clear that this authorization does not in any way, shape, or form, justify the use of manipulation, deceit, threats, or violence to compel conversion. We are to “**go and make disciples**” at all costs to ourselves, not at all costs to our neighbors who do not know and love Jesus. The Lord calls some Christians to die in order to make disciples; he never, ever calls his people to kill to make disciples.

Nevertheless, we most certainly do have the right to persuade non-Christians to follow Jesus, using every means that is pleasing to the Lord of the Church.

The “**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” has authorized us to make disciples.

■ On to the second half of verse 20 (we will examine the substance of verse 19 next week): “**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” This is Christ’s declaration of presence.

☺ He who was born to be Immanuel, “**God with us**” {Mt 1:23} is still with us even though he ascended to his Father’s throne. He is here, in and among us:

above all in the person of the Holy Spirit (who is “**the Spirit of Christ**” {1 Pe 1:11}), and also **in the Church** (which, for now is “**the body of Christ**” {1 Co 12:27} on earth). And someday, we will see him in his glorified body, when he “**will come back in the same way** [the apostles saw] **him go into heaven**” {Ac 1:11}.

The risen and exalted Christ is always at hand to fill us with *αγαπᾶ* love, conviction and strength as we seek to make disciples. *What greater inspiration and power do we need to carry out the Great Commission than the very presence of Jesus?!*

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

This is the Word of the Lord.