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A FRESH LOOK AT THE GREAT COMMISSION

Part of our global missions vision, in the United Pentecostal Church International, states that we are sending the message and training the messenger. Both involve effectively handling the Word of God. This lesson adapted from the *Advance Educators Series* focuses on that portion of our vision.

We cannot relax in our efforts in training. Make it a priority. Make provisions for it in your budget. Here is why:

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is the one of the most significant passages of Scripture, for two reasons:

- It is considered to be the last personal instruction given by Jesus to His disciples. It is the marching orders for all followers.
- It is a special calling from Jesus Christ, to followers, to take specific, deliberate action while on earth.

In Greek, the language that the New Testament was written, there are different types of verbs. This helps distinguish between the main verb and auxiliary verbs. In Matthew 28:19, which we know as the Great Commission, we find four verbs, namely:

- Go

- Make disciples (Teach)
- Baptize
- Teach

Ever notice the main verb (some say it is the only verb) of the Great Commission? It is imperative, crucial, urgent, and very important. Due to familiarity with the English translation, some commonly suppose that the main verb is "go." However, in the Greek sentence, the main verb is the word "disciple." In the KJV it says, "teach." The main action verb in the Great Commission is "teach." It is a command. Many English translations say "make disciples." That is our task: to make disciples.

The great commission therefore is:

DISCIPLE
... by going
...by baptizing
...by teaching

Most versions say, "Therefore go and make disciples." Many authors interpret this as follows:

1. "Go" is a participle (verb ending), meaning "as you go," or "when you go" or "if you go."
2. The heart of the command is the imperative, "make disciples." The core of the Great Commission is to make disciples.

Then the Great Commission is something like this:

DISCIPLES,

DISCIPLE
... as you are going
... as you are baptizing
... as you are teaching

Based on Matthew 28:18-20, we can derive the following disciple-making formula:

Go
+ Baptize (Evangelize)
+ Teach (Educate)
= Make Disciples
(Mature Follower of Jesus Christ).

Most sermons put the emphasis of the Great Commission on the word “go” rather than “teach” or “make disciples.” It seems that what we value is “going.” “Going” is certainly important but it is not the main point of the Great Commission.

Jesus tells us what to do (disciple) and how to do it.

- Go
- Baptize
- Teach

That doesn't mean the other components are unimportant. It only means that each one of them is necessary to fulfill the command of making disciples. “Go” is the driving force of the imperative. It is impossible to fulfill the command to “make disciples” without going. But, it is possible to go without making disciples. Some speak of a “great crusade.” A crusade cannot be considered to be great unless disciples were made.

“Jesus came and told his disciples, I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them.... Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, NLT).

Notice that disciples reproduce themselves by training other disciples. 2 Timothy 2:2 is very close to this understanding as well. That commission represents a continuous cycle.

In the Greek society a disciple was a person who submitted himself to a gifted teacher. A disciple is someone that believes and practices the teachings of another.

A disciple is a student. He is one who has dedicated his life to follow the teachings of his master. Jesus said we are to teach His disciples to “observe” (or obey) everything He has commanded us. Discipleship begins with obedience (Luke 6:46’ John 14:15, 23-24). George Barna tells us that the Great Commission is not primarily about evangelism. It is about discipleship. I think it includes both. You cannot have one without the other.

The Great Commission called for the discipleship of the nations. It was not merely about making converts but disciples. We not only evangelize, we educate.

What is it that every minister of the gospel should have in common? That is the ability to teach God's Word. I look specifically at 1 Timothy 3:2 here. Most translations either say “apt to teach” or “able to teach.” A few others say that the minister should have “the gift for teaching” (Weymouth); be “good at teaching” (World English Bible); be “a teacher” (Douay-Rheims Bible); “must know what he is talking about” (MSG); and be “a ready teacher” (BBE). No matter which way you look at it, God is calling you to be a teacher. What are you waiting for? Go and teach...