

LEAD! A.2 God's Commission

In Which We Discover God's Call For Us As Leaders, And What Theology Has To Do With It

Adoration

[Psalm 47](#)

Bible

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

This passage is well known to us as "The Great Commission", and is commonly quoted in the context of evangelizing the lost. But more than that, Jesus' penultimate words actually contain a profound vision for what it means to be *His* leaders.

Then the eleven [disciples](#) went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had [appointed](#) them.

The first thing to note is that is that the audience is the eleven (remaining) disciples, men who had been with Jesus from the earliest days of his ministry. They had shared in his miracles, his teaching, his last supper, and finally his death and resurrection. As disciples, they had willingly placed themselves under his tutelage. But that doesn't mean they understood everything he was doing:

And when they saw him, they [worshipped](#) him: but some [doubted](#).

Isn't that just like us? Yes, we are willing to bow our knees publicly before Jesus, but in our hearts we can't help but wonder if he really is who we thought he was -- the one we've been waiting for all our lives.

As usual, Jesus understands our deepest fears, but chooses to address them on his own terms:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All [power](#) is given unto me in [heaven](#) and in [earth](#).

This mind-boggling assertion is, in a nutshell, the basis of all Christian leadership. It is only because Christ has complete authority over *everything*, spiritual and secular, than any of us have the right (not to mention the responsibility) to exercise authority in his name. Conversely, because all authority is ultimate *his*, we hold authority in our own hands "loosely", knowing we are merely temporary stewards of what belongs to him alone.

So what does he want us do in and through that authority?

Go ye therefore, and [teach](#) all [nations](#),

Most [modern translations](#) render "teach" as "make disciples." The Greek word involved is "[matheteuo](#)", and goes beyond the idea of instructing the mind to include submitting the will to that instruction. Central to the Biblical vision of leadership (and this study!) is the idea of discipling people's wills, not merely informing their minds. This also means that we need to keep our focus on making full-fledged disciples, not simply winning "[converts](#)."

Equally interesting is "[ethnos](#)", the word translated as "nations". In Biblical times this term didn't have the same connotation of a political [nation-state](#) it does today; a more literal translation would be "ethnic group", "tribe", or "[people group](#)." More informally, Jewish writers used the term as a shorthand for all the Gentile peoples.

This verse is often understood as commanding us to make disciples *from* all nations, i.e., to win and disciple individuals converts from all the different people groups in the world. While that is certainly part of our mandate, it may also reflect our Western tendency to focus on the *individual*. An equally plausible interpretation (especially from a [Transformationalist](#) perspective) is that Christ wants us to [disciple whole nations](#) -- that is, bring entire communities under the Lordship of Christ.

This tension between an "[individualistic](#)" and "[communitarian](#)" interpretation of scripture is something we will revisit throughout this study -- especially when we get to the [Trinity](#):

[Baptizing](#) them in the [name](#) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

This phrase is quoted so often it is easy to lose sight of how profound it is. In fact, there are at least three different ways of interpreting the act of "baptizing in the name".

1. The first is simply to treat it as a **symbolic** act, where we affirm our allegiance to the Christian God as opposed to some pagan deity.
2. The second is to see it as a **ritual**, or [sacrament](#). Here, the emphasis is on baptism as a spiritual transaction, where it shifts us from a position of condemnation to one of [justification](#) before God.
3. Finally, and most powerfully, we can interpret it **substantively** -- as changing our substance. That is, we interpret baptism as [death and resurrection](#), and the [name of God](#) as referring to the character of the Godhead into which we are reborn.

Though all have their place, it is this last perspective we will adopt for this study; that is, we define becoming Christ's disciple as the process of dying to our old nature and progressively replacing it with the character of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- and we see the goal of leadership as producing such disciples.

That is why we will spend our first trimester on "theology" -- studying the character and work of God -- to make sure we know what our disciples are supposed to look like!

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you

This use of the word "teaching" really does refer to intellectual instruction, though even here the focus is on observance to Jesus' commands. However, the most challenging part of this verse is actually the phrase "*all things*."

Historically, the church has tended to repeatedly overreact in emphasizing one aspect of Christ's teachings at the expense of others (e.g., Love vs. Judgement, Purity vs. Forgiveness, Truth vs. Compassion, Authority vs. Freedom, etc.) -- leading to us eventually swallowing camels while straining gnats. Our task as leaders is to continually push ourselves (and those under our authority) to move beyond what is comfortable within the context of both secular and religious culture, to embrace the fulness of what God is currently calling us to.

Sound like a big mandate? Yes, it is. It is far too big to capture in a one-year course -- or even in a single lifetime. Fortunately, we are not on our own in accomplishing this:

and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.

This is literally the last word on Christian leadership. Everything we do, we do in, through, and by the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. As long as we hold fast to Him above all things -- including religious things! -- we can rest assured that He will be glorified.

Conversation

1. What do you see as the difference between a "disciple" and a "convert"? Which are you? Which is your ministry helping create?
2. Do you agree with the definition of "disciple-making" as "forming the character of God" in someone? Are you comfortable doing that? Have you seen it being done?
3. Which of Christ's teachings do you find easiest to obey and talk about? Which is the hardest?
4. When have you most felt that Christ is with you? Have you ever felt that he wasn't?

Decision

- **Repentance:** Where in your life and ministry have you fallen short of God's commission?
- **Action:** What changes will you make in response to what you've learned today?
- **Worship:** How can this vision of God's plan for our lives inspire us to praise and submission?

Encounter

Break into your accountability pairs and discuss where God wants you to die to yourself

so that He can birth more of Himself. Identify Bible verses that address those areas of need, and pray for each other.

For More Information

- [A Church in Every People:](#)
- [Dawn Ministries | Training Consultants for Saturation Church Planting](#)
- [Why Make Disciples?](#)
- [Names of God in Judaism – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [Transformationalism – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

Group Activity

Schedule a time to meet with your subgroup to plan a "creative work" exalting some aspect of God's character and purpose.

Homework

Read [Exodus 3](#). What is God trying to make Moses understand? Why?