The Church's Great Commission

"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."
—Matthew 28:19,20

IN GIVING THIS GREAT commission, Jesus addressed the apostles; and indirectly, with and through them, he addressed all his followers. It will be noted that the commission is divided into three parts: (1) Teach in all the nations; (2) Baptize; and (3) Continue instructing them. The Lord's true people, while not neglecting to make their own calling and election sure, are to be engaged in each and all of the three phases of this commission as they have opportunity.

TEACH IN ALL NATIONS

A disciple, according to the scriptural definition, is a taught, or trained, one; and before anyone should embark upon the work of teaching and

training others so that they become the Lord's disciples, it is important to note the words of Jesus in this connection, for he was the greatest of teachers.

Jesus knew that, according to his Father's plan, the Gospel Age was a period for the calling, testing, and selecting of the true church, and that all people during this dispensation would not be capable of being taught or trained. So, he would on occasion say, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matt. 11:15) He also said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."—John 6:44

Nevertheless, throughout his earthly ministry Jesus was faithful in bearing witness to the Truth, and he proved his loyalty in connection with it, being fully aware that, as he stated, "Every one that is of the truth [having been drawn to Jesus by the Father] heareth my voice." (John 18:37) Praying to the Heavenly Father, some of our Lord's words were, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: . . . I have given them thy word; . . . they have kept thy word."—John 17:6,14

Jesus was always loyal and faithful to his Father's Holy Word and will, and the words that he proclaimed were not his own, but the Father's who sent him. (John 14:24) "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." "The words that I speak unto you," are "spirit" and "life." "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."—John 7:16; 6:63; Luke 14:27; Matt. 11:29; John 8:31

As Jesus faithfully proclaimed God's Word and will, so did the Early Church. We read, "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." (Acts 15:35) "He [Paul] continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." (Acts 18:11) "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." (Acts 28:31) We, today, as fully consecrated followers of Jesus, have the great privilege and responsibility of proclaiming the true Gospel, and thus proving our loyalty in connection with it, never believing or teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

In our witness work, and our general fellowship in the Truth, it is our great joy to meet those whose hearts the Lord has opened. Because they give evidence of being in various stages of Christian growth and development, we, as ambassadors for Christ, are to be prepared to "declare . . . all the counsel [or will] of God," even as did the Apostle Paul. (Acts 20:27) Thus we will be shining lights in the world, holding forth the Word of life, assisting all with whom we come in contact, whether they are young or old in the Christian life.

The Lord is continuing graciously to guide and bless the great work of proclaiming the true Gospel of the kingdom "in all the world for a witness unto all nations."—Matt. 24:14

There is abundant evidence that as the true Gospel is thus being proclaimed, there are those with the 'hearing ear' and the 'seeing eye' who are be-

ing very richly blessed by the Lord with an understanding of the Truth. By Divine grace, disciples are being formed, developed, and assisted to be faithful unto death.

In addition to this collective service, we are also to be on the alert, and to seize our own individual and local opportunities. It may be that in these closing days of the High Calling those newly interested ones who respond to the Truth in our particular locality are but few. However, it is much in evidence that these have ears to hear, and are hungering and thirsting after the Truth and righteousness and, by the Lord's help, we are to assist them to the full extent of our ability so that they may become mature Christians, fully established in the faith. As those who have progressed but a little way in this Christian life become instructed in Truth and in righteousness, they learn that repentance—which means to change the mind—and conversion—meaning to turn about—are very necessary early steps to be taken. They further learn of the wondrous love and grace of God in the great work of redemption through Christ's precious ransom sacrifice, and are encouraged to believe unto consecration and justification of life.

They realize that such as hear and obey his call are "justified [declared right] by faith" (Rom. 5:1), having their sins covered. They are reconciled to their Father through faith in Christ. If faithful in following Christ, they will become joint-sacrificers with him, and eventually be made joint-heirs in his kingdom and in its great work of blessing the world.

"BAPTIZING THEM"

Those who respond to the preaching of the Gospel, and take the step of full consecration, are, by this complete surrender of self to him, baptized into Christ. In three short verses, the Apostle Paul deals very thoroughly with the real and essential baptism, which is to precede the symbol of water immersion. He says, "Know ye not, that so many of us [those who are already members of the body of Christ] as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3), and are made participators with him in his sacrificial death. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death." (vs. 4) This 'baptism into death' with the Lord, this burial of ourselves—which resulted in our becoming members of his body as New Creatures—took place when we made the full surrender of our will to God.

This full consecration was followed by our begettal by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth to newness of life, to a new spiritual nature. The apostle says, "As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death [his sacrificial death], we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."—vss. 4,5

Being thus baptized into Christ, as members of his body, he is to be our 'Head,' our ruler. We are nothing; he is everything. Herein is Divine wisdom, because in every detail the will of Jesus, our beloved Lord and Head, is our Heavenly Father's will. Reckonedly, we are dead to our own will. "Ye are

dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3) We are "in Christ." And if anyone be 'in Christ,' he is not the same old creature, but "a new creature." (II Cor. 5:17) There has been a burial, or immersion, of our will into the will of Christ. We have been begotten to a heavenly inheritance. Now we are to be conformed "to the image of his [God's] Son."—Rom. 8:29

Baptism into water is a wonderful, divinely instituted symbol of the true and essential baptism that has already taken place in the heart and life. It is a beautiful symbol that our Lord Jesus himself observed at Jordan. It is a Divine arrangement for all his followers who have similarly fully consecrated themselves to do the will of God.

When Jesus reached the age of priesthood under the Law [thirty years], he immediately made a complete consecration of himself, a full sacrifice of all his earthly interests, hopes, ambitions, and desires, that he might do his Father's will, not his own will. As he came to John the Baptist at Jordan, the language of his heart to his Heavenly Father was, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."—Heb. 10:7

Our Lord, thus consecrating himself to the Father's will, realized that his outward baptism in water symbolized, or pictured, the complete surrender of his earthly life and nature, which had already been immersed, or buried, into the Father's will even unto death. From this standpoint, his baptism in water was full of meaning to him, and it is full of meaning to us today.

Here was Jesus, the prospective Head of the prospective body of the Christ. He set a wonderful example in himself that would be appropriate as a beautiful lesson, full of meaning, to all his followers. It behooved him to symbolize [by water immersion] his real baptism into death, the complete consecration which he had already made of his will and all that he had, to his Father, even unto death. And we, coming after, gladly follow in his steps "in the name of [by the authority of] the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."—Matt. 28:19

Concerning our being "dead with Christ" (Rom. 6:8) by complete consecration; this is fittingly illustrated by our being lowered beneath the surface of the water. And then, respecting our being quickened by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of Truth at, and since, consecration—also our walking in newness of life, being risen with Christ; this condition is fittingly portrayed as we are raised out of the water.

CONTINUED INSTRUCTION

As a result of our Father's drawing power, and because there is a certain faithful witness among the nations to the true Gospel, there are those who are still being called out of darkness into the marvelous light of Divine Truth, and are being made disciples [taught, or trained, ones] of Jesus. Those who gratefully and fully respond, go on to full consecration. They are baptized into Jesus Christ, into his death, and very properly they testify to this complete consecration—the essential baptism—by water immersion.

There is, however, according to our Lord's great commission, another phase of work to be done by the church—that is, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) These disciples of Jesus still need to be instructed. In fact, all that has gone before in their Christian experience has prepared them to receive this continued instruction.

It is important to note that, without the promised power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were not to go forward with this work. Jesus had previously said to them, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) At Pentecost they received the anointing of that holy power. That anointing taught them concerning the Divine plan of the ages (Eph. 3:11, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*), even as Jesus had promised, that it "shall teach you all things, and remind you of all things which I said to you."—John 14:26, *WED*

Before Pentecost it was impossible for the apostles to understand the great eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus, but the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which the fully consecrated ones received on the Day of Pentecost, was the means used for teaching them some great truths and secrets of God. This holy, powerful influence, as Jesus had already explained to them, was "the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it beholds it not, nor knows it."—John 14:17, *WED*

Our Lord Jesus received an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and was authorized to "preach good tidings" (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18), so also every fully consecrated member of the true church—the body of Christ—even to the present day, comes under

that same anointing which first came upon our Head, Christ Jesus, and since has flowed to all those sanctified and built up into him as members of his body.

Henceforth we, as fully consecrated followers of Jesus, whom the Father has begotten by the Word of Truth, and in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly—and who are rooted, grounded, and established in the faith—realize that it is our great privilege and responsibility to proclaim what we know concerning all the will of God. We are glad to testify to the various features of God's Holy Word and will, according to our varied opportunities, whether it be to a recent seeker after the light of Truth, or to a mature Christian.

In the fifth and sixth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christians were chided for not making headway and advancing beyond the first principles of "the doctrine of Christ." (chap. 6:1) They should have progressed to the deeper spiritual nourishment that had to do with the full development of the new mind of the New Creature, enabling them to progress toward full maturity in Christlikeness, the image of God's dear Son.

As we continue to teach, we must include the scriptural instructions that all disciples of Jesus are required to go on to completeness. To use figurative language, they are not to remain at the "milk" stage, but must progress to partake also of the strong "meat." The Apostle Paul had occasion to reprove some Christians in these words, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able."—I Cor. 3:2

We are to include in our teaching that which will help and encourage all disciples to progress in the Christian way, that they "may be filled, as to the exact knowledge of his [God's] will, with all spiritual wisdom and understanding; to walk worthily of the Lord, pleasing him in all things; bringing forth fruit by every good work, and increasing in the exact knowledge of God; being strengthened with all strength according to his glorious power, for all patience, and endurance with joy."—Col. 1:9-11, *WED*

Jesus has promised, through the Revelator, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."—Rev. 2:10; 3:21 ■