

# The Great Commission

by J.C. Ryle

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*Christ's Great Commission to his disciples is a call to go and teach all nations, making disciples of all people, and to live according to his word.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:18

**Topics:** "The Great Commission", "Christ's Authority"

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## Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the significance of the Great Commission, where Jesus commands His disciples to spread the Gospel to all nations, highlighting the authority given to Christ and the necessity of public confession of faith through baptism. He addresses the doubts of the disciples and the importance of obedience to Christ's teachings, asserting that true faith is demonstrated through action. Ryle also reflects on the doctrine of the Trinity and concludes with the comforting promise of Christ's perpetual presence with His followers, encouraging believers to remain steadfast in their mission.

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## Transcript

"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure. So they took the money and did as they were instructed, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (Matt. 28:11-20)

These verses form the conclusion of the Gospel of St. Matthew. They begin by showing us what absurdities blind prejudice will believe rather than believe the truth. They go on to show us what weakness there is in the hearts of some disciples and how slow they are to believe. They finish by telling us some of the last words spoken by our Lord upon earth--words so remarkable that they demand and deserve all our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, the honor which God has put on our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord says, "All power is given unto me, in heaven and earth." This is a truth which is declared by St. Paul to the Philippians, "God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." It is a truth which in no wise takes away from the true notion of Christ's divinity, as some have ignorantly supposed. It is simply a declaration, that, in the counsels of the eternal Trinity, Jesus, as Son of man, is appointed heir of all things. He is the Mediator between God and man, the great fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. It was for this joy set before him that he endured the cross.

Let us embrace this truth reverently and cling to it firmly. Christ is he who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed priest who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the fountain of living waters in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the Prince and Savior who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In him all fullness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the altar of refuge. He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son has not life. May we all strive to understand this. No doubt men may easily think too little of God the Father, and God the Spirit, but no man ever thought too much of Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, the duty which Jesus lays on his disciples. He bids them "go and teach all nations." They were not to confine their knowledge to themselves but communicate it to others. They were not to suppose that salvation was revealed only to the Jews, but to make it known to all the world. They were to strive to make disciples of all nations and to tell the whole earth that Christ had died for sinners.

Let us never forget that this solemn injunction is still in full force. It is still the bound duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person, and by prayer, to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith if we neglect this duty? Where is our charity? It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel himself if he does not desire to make it known to all the world.

Let us observe, in the third place, the public profession which Jesus requires of those who believe his gospel. He tells his apostles to "baptize" those whom they received as disciples. It is very difficult to conceive when we read this last command of our Lord's, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance, to be administered to all who join his church. That outward baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, the case of the penitent thief plainly shows. He went to paradise unbaptized. That outward baptism alone often confers no benefit, the case of Simon Magus plainly shows. Although baptized, he remained "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." But that baptism is a matter of entire indifference and need not be used at all, is an assertion which seems at variance with our Lord's words in this place.

The plain practical lesson of the words is the necessity of a public confession of faith in Christ. It is not enough to be a secret disciple. We must not be ashamed to let men see whose we are and whom we serve. We must not behave as if we did not like to be thought Christians, but take up our cross and confess our Master before the world. His words are very solemn, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Let us observe, in the fourth place, the obedience which Jesus requires of all who profess themselves his disciples. He bids the apostles "teach them to observe all things, whatsoever he has commanded them." This is a searching expression. It shows the uselessness of a mere name and form of Christianity. It

shows that they only are to be counted true Christians who live in a practical obedience to his word and strive to do the things that he has commanded. The water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper alone will save no man's soul. It profits nothing that we go to a place of worship and hear Christ's ministers and approve of the Gospel if our religion goes no further than this. What are our lives? What is our daily conduct at home and abroad? Is the Sermon on the Mount our rule and standard? Do we strive to copy Christ's example? Do we seek to do the things that he commanded? These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative if we would prove ourselves born again and children of God. Obedience is the only proof of reality. Faith without works is dead, being alone. "You are my friends," says Jesus, "if you do whatsoever I command you."

Let us observe, in the fifth place, the solemn mention of the blessed Trinity which our Lord makes in these verses. He bids the apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This is one of those great plain texts which directly teach the mighty doctrine of the Trinity. It speaks of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as three distinct persons, and speaks of all three as co-equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. And yet these three are one.

This truth is a great mystery. Let it be enough to receive and believe it, and let us ever abstain from all attempts at explanation. It is childish folly to refuse assent to things that we do not understand. We are poor crawling worms of a day and know little at our best about God and eternity. Suffice it for us to receive the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity with humility and reverence, and to ask no vain questions. Let us believe that no sinful soul could be saved without the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and let us rejoice that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who cooperated to make man, do always cooperate to save him. Here let us pause. We may receive practically what we cannot explain theoretically.

Finally, let us observe in these verses, the gracious promise with which Jesus closes his words. He says to his disciples, "I am with you always even to the end of the world." It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering, and sanctifying than these. Though left alone, like orphan children in a cold, unkind world, the disciples were not to think they were deserted. Their Master would be ever with them. Though commissioned to do a work as hard as that of Moses when sent to Pharaoh, they were not to be discouraged. Their Master would certainly be with them. No words could be more suited to the position of those to whom they were first spoken. No words could be imagined more consolatory to believers in every age of the world.

Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is with us always. Christ is with us wherever we go. He came to be "Emmanuel, God with us," when he first came into the world. He declares that he is ever Emmanuel, "with us," when he comes to the end of his earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive, to sanctify and strengthen, to defend and keep, to lead and guide. He is with us in sorrow and in joy, in sickness and in health, in life and in death, in time and in eternity.

What stronger consolation could believers desire than this? Whatever happens, they at least are never completely friendless and alone. Christ is ever with them. They may look into the grave and say with David, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." They may look forward beyond the grave and say with Paul, "we shall ever be with the Lord." Jesus has said it, and he will stand to it, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world." "I will never leave you and never forsake you." We could ask nothing more. Let us go on believing and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a King, such a Priest, such a constant Companion, and

such an unfailing Friend, as the true servants of Christ.

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