

CONTINUING TO TEACH

"Then Jesus came unto them and said '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'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

This passage of Scripture is commonly called "The Great Commission". In Matthew 10:5,6, for example, we find a "lesser" commission. On that occasion Jesus sent out His disciples to preach only to "the lost sheep of Israel". He specifically forbade them to go among the Gentiles or to any town of the Samaritans. The commission of our text, however, is not limited. It is for "everyone in all the world". This "Great Commission" is found in all four Gospels and also in the book of Acts. (See Matt. 28:18- 20; Mk. 16:15,16; Lk. 24:45-48; Jn. 20:21-23; Acts 1:8) This command is central to Christianity. Obviously the followers of Christ cannot avoid it.

In this commission Jesus gave His disciples four commands (1) Go (2) Make disciples (3) Baptize (4) Continue to teach. Technically speaking, the only imperative is to "make disciples". It is the Greek word is "mathateusate," which is the 2nd pers. pl. aor. 1, imper. act. of "matheuo." The Greek word for "disciple" is "mathetes". It comes from "manthano" which means "to learn", and is the basis of our English word "math". The Dictionary of N.T. Theology states that the noun "mathetes" occurs 264 times in the N.T. (Exclusively in the Gospels and Acts) The commands to "Go", "Baptize", and "Teach", are written as participles. The Great Commission therefore places an emphasis on "making disciples". Being a disciple involves continual learning. The disciples of Jesus did not just follow Him one day, but forever. Jesus said: **"A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40).** The apostles were to not just lead people to Christ, but "fully train" them to be like Jesus.

The teaching of disciples therefore does not stop at baptism. Being a disciples involves a life time of learning. It is the purpose of this brief article to focus on continuing to teach new disciples everything that Jesus commanded!

PASSION FOR SOULS

Colegio Biblico was founded in 1945 in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico to train disciples to mature in Christ. When the late Dean Cary was president of that college he lamented that many children are conceived in a moment of passion that no one wants to teach or take care of. He then observed that too often the same thing happens in evangelism. We passionately lead people to confess Christ. We then baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And then, too often, we abandon them to go out and passionately lead others to Christ. The Great Commission commands to continue teaching disciples after they are baptized. It is not good to father a child and then abandon it.

The late Zig Ziglar was a super salesman in the United States who was famous for training salesmen. He stressed that the sale was not complete until the customer had received the product and was satisfied with the service. He discovered that maintaining a good relationship with old customers was an ideal way to get new customers. A satisfied customer is good advertising. The same is true about leading someone to Christ. The job is not done until the student is satisfied and fully mature.

A similar lesson can be learned from building a fire. A snow covered log will not be set on fire by a tiny spark. If properly managed, however, a tiny spark can set fire to a small amount of dry kindling. That tiny fire, however, must not be neglected. A neglected fire soon burns out, especially when it is small. If additional wood is carefully added to the small fire, however, it can become

a blazing inferno. Then the big fire will consume the snow covered log and not vice versa. In a similar vein babes in Christ should not be neglected. If properly trained these tender disciples can grow up to be on their guard, stand firm in the faith, be men of courage, and be strong (1 Cor. 16:13). Immature Christians have to be continually taught, while mature Christians teach others (Heb. 5:11-14).

By continuing to teach we can get many new converts, build big fires of evangelism, and ultimately present everyone perfect in Christ (Col. 1:28).

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

Paul came to Thessalonica and taught for three Sabbath days in their synagogue. He explained and proved to them that Jesus was the Christ. Some of the Jews were persuaded along with a large number of God fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (Acts 17:1-4).

Paul loved them like a **“mother caring for her little children” (1 Thess. 2:7)**. He also loved them as a father and wrote: **“You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children” (1 Thess. 2:10-11)**. Good parents, as you know, do not abandon their children but patiently train them to be mature.

Unfortunately some unbelieving Jews rounded up some bad characters from the market place and drove Paul out of town. Paul, however, was not about to abandon these babes in Christ. Since he could not "continue to teach" them in person, he wrote them a teaching letter and sent it to them with Timothy. While all of this inspired letter is important, chapter three provides insight into why it was written: **"So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.'** (1 Thess. 3:1-13)

Note:

- Paul wanted to continue teaching the Thessalonians like mothers and fathers teach their children.
- When he couldn't be there in person, he wrote them a teaching letter and sent it with Timothy.
- In addition to the letter, Timothy would personally strengthen and encourage them.
- Paul also wanted to find out about their faith.
- He feared that the tempter might destroy their young faith and make his labor vain.
- Timothy returned to Paul with good news about their faith and love.
- Paul soon sent them a second letter.
- Both Paul and the Thessalonians had pleasant memories of each other.

- Paul prayed night and day for them.
- Paul wanted to see them again in person and supply what was lacking in their faith.
- Paul also prayed that God would make it possible for him to return to them in person.
- Paul wanted their love for one another and for everyone to increase.
- Paul also wanted the Thessalonians to be prepared to meet Jesus when He comes again!
- Paul in no way abandoned these new converts but continued to teach them all that Christ commanded.

NEW CHRISTIANS ARE LIKE NEWBORN BABES

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good' (1 Pet. 2:1-3).

A female sea turtle digs a hole in the sand and lays from 50-200 eggs. After covering these eggs her job as a mother is done and she returns to the sea. When the eggs hatch the baby turtles are on their own. They dig their way to the surface, typically at night, and then make their way to the ocean. Fueled only by the left over egg yoke, they immediately start swimming and enough of them survive for the propagation of their species.

When a mother cow gives birth her calf can usually stand and start nursing within 30 minutes. In approximately three months the calf can eat grass and survive on its own.

A human infant, by comparison, does not walk for many months and cannot survive on it's own for many years.

Perhaps we need to learn something from this! We are to study the Scriptures like a new born baby craves milk. It is not enough to merely lead someone to Christ, it is also important to continue to teach them everything that Christ commanded. Human babies are not like sea turtles or calves. They need years of loving care to survive and grow. The same is true of baby Christians.

THE GOAL IS MATURITY

The apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, established congregations to help bring every disciple to maturity in Christ. Please note: **"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.' (Eph. 4:11-16)**

Pearl S. Buck was a famous American author born in 1892. When she was 5 months old her missionary parents took her to China where she spent the first half of her life. Her novel *East Wind West Wind* earned a Pulitzer Prize in 1932. In 1938 she became the first American Nobel laureate.

Earlier, in 1921, she gave birth to a mentally retarded child named Carol. Carol was afflicted with Phenylketonuria (PKU). This an inherited autosomal recessive metabolic genetic disorder. Sadly, Carol was institutionalized for most of her life and Pearl kept her existence a secret for many years. Finally, in 1950, Pearl wrote about Carol in an article for the *Ladies Home Journal*. That article became a small book with only 62 pages. It is titled *The Child That Never Grew*. Obviously it is sad beyond description to have a child that never grows.

Can you not see how sad it must be for God to have a child that never grows? Yes! It is possible to be "born again" and never grow. Yes! It is possible to remain a spiritual infant for your entire life. An Infant cannot even feed himself and cries when his needs are not met. Some converts, as you know, are just like that. They never mature enough to feed themselves and are constantly dependent upon someone else to provide them with spiritual milk. Babies in the nursery to not ask for a job in the church and neither do spiritual infants. Judgement Day will be sad for those who were given talents by God that they buried in the ground and never used.

The cure for this problem is to merely do what Christ commanded. After someone is baptized into Christ they need to be taught everything that Christ commanded. The loving teacher will help new disciples to be weaned off of milk and learn to eat solid food. (See Hebrews 5:11-6:6). If we continue to teach them, these disciples will progress from elementary teachings to deep spiritual truth and ultimately be able to teach others.

**"NOW THAT YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, YOU WILL BE BLESSED OF YOU DO THEM"
(JN. 13:17).**