

# What is Jesus' Definition of a Disciple Embedded in the Great Commission?<sup>1</sup>

**Greg Ogden**

ORCID: 0009-0008-2748-2755

Global Discipleship Initiative

greg@globaldi.org

UDK: 27-318:27-247.4Veliko poslanje

Category: Conference paper

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32862/k.18.2.2>

## Abstract

*Any conference on discipleship must be rooted in the biblical definition of a disciple. When Jesus commands us to “make disciples,” who or what exactly are we making? What does a disciple look like? We need to look no further than the definition embedded in Jesus’ original mandate known as the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). There is a precise structure to this text which gives us the basic characteristics of a disciple. We find here a singular imperative, “make disciples.” What is often overlooked is that this central command is modified by three participles, “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” Participles are verbal adjectives (descriptive images) ending in “ing” that describe the nature of a disciple. In this presentation, I will contrast the popular definition of a Christian with the biblical definition of a disciple. Christians, as commonly understood, are those who have trusted Christ for their salvation and believe that they will be with Jesus when they die. In other words, we have, perhaps unwittingly said, “You can be Christian without being a disciple.” The “gospel” we have been proclaiming has led directly to a non-discipleship or “forgiveness only” gospel. Bill Hull and Ben Sobels assert two truths: 1. You cannot make a Christlike disciple from a non-discipleship gospel. 2. The gospel you preach determines the disciples you make. In contrast, I will note that the three descriptive participles of “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching,” when fleshed out,*

1 This article was written as part of the Zagreb Biblical Institute research project: “The Concept of Discipleship Among Evangelical Churches in Croatia.”

*contain within them Jesus' definition of a disciple. This is further underscored by the gospel Jesus proclaimed as recorded in Mark's gospel at the inception of Jesus' ministry: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mk 1:14-15).*

**Keywords:** *non-discipleship gospel, Christian vs. disciple, going, baptizing, teaching*

## Introduction

I am grateful for this opportunity to be with you as we explore together the many dimensions that the Great Commission calls us; to make disciples through biblical, theological reflection, theological traditions that shaped our understanding of disciple-making, and the many particular issues that should be addressed. This is quite a line-up of topics. I feel like I am at a buffet table with more choices than I can eat.

Just some brief autobiographical notes before I get into the topics, I have sensed that I should explore with you. I was a career pastor ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA, but I slipped out of this fold in my last two pastorates into independent, evangelical churches: one in Silicon Valley, California, and the other in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. I became laser-focused on the Great Commission when I had what I call my "ah-ha" in the Silicon Valley Church. When I arrived as pastor of the Silicon Valley church it had no formal mission statement. Steve Covey's book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, has come out where he says one of the habits of effective people is to have a personal mission statement that focuses on the destiny of our lives. It seemed everyone from individuals to businesses to churches was cranking out mission statements.

I followed suit and persuaded our elders that we needed a mission statement too. I "appointed" a small team of our elders to get to work. It was the blind leading the blind. I was not sure what the end product should look like. We created draft after draft that was placed before our council, usually with a yawn. Then after about a year and a half, we had worn them down so that finally in an exhausted state, were willing to approve whatever the next iteration we presented. This was when I had my "ah-ha" moment. It finally dawned on me that Jesus had done all the work for us when gave this mandate to his disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." I realized that every church has been given the same mission. It may look and sound a bit differently given the theological, historical, and cultural lens through which it is shaped, but still, it is fundamentally the same. It was as if the Lord said to me, "Stay focused on this mission. Don't take your eyes

off of it. Your church's effectiveness will be measured by how well you are accomplishing. If Jesus shows up to do a church audit, what will He find?"

At the beginning of my second session, I will give you some more of my journey into what has shaped my understanding of how disciples are made, but that is the focus of my second session. I thought the contribution I could make is to provide a framing of sorts for all the great topics I see we will be exploring. In essence, I am going to attempt to address from a biblical perspective two foundational questions: 1. In this session I will attempt to address the question, who or what is a disciple according to Jesus? 2. In my second session, what can we learn from Jesus' model and practice about how to make disciples? These two questions have dominated my life in ministry.

I am a practical theologian. By that I mean this content will fall less under orthodoxy but more under orthopraxy. My biblical and theological reflection must land in practice. The "how" dominates my motivation as much as the "what." Making disciples is about responding to the imperative that Jesus Himself establishes as the mission of the church. In this session, we will take a fresh look at the marching orders that Jesus gives his church. Let's turn to the last five verses of the gospel of Matthew:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:16-20, ESV).

## 1. The Setting of the Great Commission

Before we examine in detail the Great Commission properly in Matthew 28:18-20, let's set the scene in which the disciples find themselves:

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted." (Matthew 28:16-17)

Let's take these two verses a phrase at a time.

*"Now the eleven..."*

We are immediately struck that Matthew draws attention to the fact that there are eleven, not twelve disciples. Why did he include this specific number? He could

just have easily said, “Now the disciples went to Galilee” and left out their number. Yet, he chose to remind us that their number was incomplete; they had lost one. They had a traitor among them who turned Jesus into the religious authorities. He tragically took his life when he recognized that he had betrayed a most innocent man.

But does not this also cast a shadow on the eleven? They, too, were not exactly paragons of virtue. Peter was the famous denier of Jesus when he had the opportunity to stand with Jesus in Caiaphas’s courtyard while Jesus was on trial. We also know that the other ten also ran for cover and deserted their master. Is Matthew telling us from the outset that the Great Commission is going to be accomplished by flawed people? Yes! He will use you and me to carry out his mission to the ends of the earth. Yet Jesus dignifies us by calling us into this eternal enterprise.

*“Now the eleven **disciples**...”*

Again, note what Matthew does not say, “Now to the eleven *apostles*.” Matthew avoids an exclusive title and broadens it out to disciples. He was not separating them off as if this commission only applied to a select few who held the office of apostle. When Jesus promises to be with them even to the end of the age, he is looking way beyond this generation to those who would carry out this mission. He was looking to us to be followers of a great teacher, which is what a disciple is.

*“Now the eleven disciples went to **Galilee**”*

How did they know to go to Galilee? Mary Magdalene and the one known as “the other Mary” were the first ones to the tomb of Jesus on that Easter Sunday morning. They were present when an earthquake shook the ground, and watched the descent of an angel who rolled away the stone from the tomb. The angel instructed them to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that Jesus was going before them to Galilee and he would see them there. Hearing that once was not sufficient. As the two Marys were on their way to tell the disciples, the resurrected Jesus met them saying, “Greetings!” They took hold of Jesus’ feet (they must have felt where Jesus had been pierced) and they fell on their faces in worship. Jesus reinforced the angel’s message: “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (Matt 28:10).

Have we ever considered the risk of disappointment that the disciples might have experienced? Did they go with any self-doubt that Jesus would appear and wonder why they should believe these delirious women? Women, as we know in Jesus’ day, were not considered reliable witnesses. They could not even testify in a court of law. Depending upon where in Galilee they were to meet Jesus they had

multiple days of travel from Jerusalem to ponder whether this was fool's errand. Would Jesus show up? They had only the word of these delusional women.

*"...to a **mountain** to which Jesus had directed them."*

Ever since Sinai, the Lord had divine encounters with his people in the mountains. In Matthew we have the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he turned glistening white, revealing his glory. Jesus had a particular place in mind where the disciples had been directed to go. They had been there before no doubt; they knew where to go. Now a new and better Moses was there to give laser focus on what they were to be about.

*"When they saw him, they **worshipped** him, but some **doubted**."*

When they saw Jesus, we were told that their response was worship. Perhaps they thought, "It is true. There is he in glorious pulsating life in His resurrected body." We know from other descriptions that Jesus still bore the nail prints on his hands and the penetrating mark of a spear on his side. Yet here he was more alive than they had even witnessed him in his pre-resurrection state.

So powerful was Jesus' presence that they fell on their faces and worshipped him. The Greek word here for worship indicates that they didn't simply bend a knee before Jesus, but lay prostrate before him. In homage and absolute reverence, they honored Jesus as God. He receives their worship. The Great Commission was birthed in the context of worship.

Of course, we love the honesty of Matthew's report: "...they worshipped him, but some doubted." Can you worship and doubt at the same time? I certainly hope so. Dale Bruner writes this Beatitude, "Blessed are those who worship the risen Lord and who still struggle with doubt; they are the people He uses to do his mission in the world."

## **2. The Authority of Jesus**

From this setting we move into the Great Commission proper: "Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (Matt 28:18). I like to say, that every time we read these words, we need to pause and say to ourselves, "What did he say?" We should never cease to marvel over Jesus' self-acclamation.

No more astounding words have ever come out of a human being's mouth, even a resurrected human being who is God. Abraham Kuyper has famously said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over

which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" I love Dale Bruner's title for Jesus. He is the Cosmocrator, the Lord over all creation. Jesus claims executive powers over all the forces of heaven, meaning that we need not fear even demonic spiritual powers or even all the forces of the earth. Since we are in league with the King, no human powers can be ultimately overpowering. The actual word order in the Greek here places Jesus even more clearly in the center: "...was given to me all authority in heaven and on earth."

In v. 19 Jesus goes on to declare the imperative, the command that is at the heart of the Great Commission, "Therefore, go and **make disciples** of all nations." As we shall see more completely later, there is but one command in these verses, but we cannot pass over the word "therefore." Since Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, *therefore make disciples*.

### *2.1. Jesus' Authority as the Foundation to the Great Commission*

Why does Jesus announce his authority before giving us the Great Commission to make disciples? I think for at least two reasons. First and foremost, Jesus expects obedience. Jesus held up the example of the Roman centurion, a commander of 100-foot soldiers, to teach us the implications of his authority. This highly respected commander sent word to Jesus through intermediaries that his beloved servant was ill unto death. Before Jesus could arrive at his home, the centurion sent friends saying that he was not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof. The friends relayed this message from their commander:

For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed Him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." Then the men who were sent returned to the house and found the servant well (Lk 7:8-10).

Followers of Jesus are a people under authority, under new management. A disciple of Jesus submits their life to the authority, wisdom, and guidance of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus makes disciple-making paramount in their life.

The second reason that Jesus declares his authority is that we have his full backing to carry out His mission. Jesus does not only tell us what to do, but he gives us the means to carry it out. An image comes to mind to illustrate that we go under and with his authority. Let's go back to the old Western movies from which we got Clint Eastwood. There is a duly appointed sheriff in town with the authority to lock up the bad guys. At times these bad guys escape and get a head start in town. The sheriff needs help. He rounds up all available men and deputizes them by slapping a shiny badge on their vests, as a symbol of the authority of the law. The

deputized group of men goes out under the authority of the sheriff. Just so, Jesus deputizes us. We then go out, representing the unrivaled Ruler of the universe.

There is nothing that cripples our accomplishing Jesus' mission more than fear. We so easily forget that with the authority of Jesus, there is nothing to fear. Yet we are easily intimidated. This is why Jesus' last line of the Great Commission is, "I am with you always to the end of the age." Throughout Scripture, almost every time we see the promise "I am with you" or "I will be with you," it is used in the context of addressing fear. When Moses was called to confront Pharaoh, Moses shrank in fear: "'Who am I that I should go?' The Lord reassured, 'I will be with you'" (Exod 3:11-12). When Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, he objected that he was too young and inexperienced. But the Lord said: "Do not be afraid...for I am with you and will rescue you" (Jer 1:8). The prophet Isaiah, spoke words we have relied on when fear seemed insurmountable: "So do not fear, I am with you, Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa 41:10).

The Cosmocrator, the Lord of the universe, has a call for all of us, to make disciples. I am letting you in on the greatest enterprise you can imagine. You are going to lead people to me, Jesus says, all over the globe, and then build them into mature disciples.

## *2.2. Jesus' Characteristics of a Disciple*

We now come to the center of the Great Commission with a special focus on Matthew 28:19-20. We noted that Jesus, the Chief Executive Officer of the Universe, has a mission for us all. He told us what every follower of his is to be about. There is one single command in this text, make disciples. We are to stay laser-focused on making disciples as the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. C. S. Lewis captures our mission in these powerful words:

The church exists for no other purpose but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

### *2.2.1. Can You Be a Christian Without Being a Disciple?*

I think we need to acknowledge that there is considerable confusion about who or what a disciple is. Let me illustrate this confusion through a brief story. One Sunday, a pastor preached a barnburner sermon on the call to discipleship. This did not sit well with a woman in the church. [Could just have easily been a man.] The woman approached her pastor after a morning service. She said in response, "Pastor, I just want to be a Christian. I don't want to be a disciple. I like my life the



way it is. I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and I will be with him when I die. Why do I have to be a disciple?" Let's explore this short statement.

- *What distinction does this woman make?* This woman thought she was given a multiple-choice exam. Christian or disciple? I think I will choose Christian.
- *Why doesn't she want to be a disciple?* Whatever she thinks a disciple is... and that is not clear, she thinks it will disturb her way of life. She says, "I like my life the way it is." If she is a disciple, she will have to make some unspecified changes. Maybe it's the Africa thing.
- *What was her definition of a Christian?* "I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and I will be with him when I die." Her gospel: forgiveness of sin now and life forever with Jesus later. From her definition of a Christian, she asks a very logical question, "Why do I have to be a disciple?" She saw no connection between being a Christian and being a disciple. Was she right? There are millions like her around the world.
- *How did she conclude that she could be a Christian without being a disciple?* I would submit that her conclusion is consistent with the terms in which we have been preaching the gospel. In other words, **she drew this conclusion not despite the gospel we have been preaching, but precisely because of it.**

What are the usual terms in which we share the good news? I call it the *transactional* gospel because we so often communicate the gospel in *accounting* terms.

1. Because of our sin an eternal debit has been registered on our account that we cannot possibly pay off ourselves.
2. But the good news is that God sent his Son Jesus to cancel this debt: Jesus paid our debt on the cross.
3. Jesus rose from the dead as a demonstration that this debt was paid and that death had been defeated.
4. Now the transaction: If we put our faith in Jesus Christ then his credit is transferred to our account and it cancels out our debt.
5. We are then handed a receipt marked "paid in full."

Forgiveness of sin is the gospel. You are good to go.

You might say, "Well, that sounds like good news to me." Of course, it is an aspect of the good news but certainly not all of it. I call it getting in on the benefits plan. It is all about what we get from God. Dallas Willard had dubbed this "barcode Christianity." We want to make sure we get the salvation "bar code" so that we can be rung up by God's eternal scanner in the sky. The woman asks the question, "Why do I have to be a disciple?" If she had asked Jesus that question, how



might he have responded to her? Jesus in the Great Commission defines the core elements of discipleship.

Let's take a deeper dive into what is packed into Matthew 28:19-20. There is a very precise structure to the Great Commission. The main command, make disciples, is supported by three participles. In case your high school English eludes you, a participle is a verbal adjective ending in "ing." There are three action words or verbs, that describe making disciples. Therefore, you could translate the verse. 19:

“Therefore, as you are *go[ing]*,  
*Make disciples* of all nations,  
*Baptiz[ing]* them in[to] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
*Teach[ing]* them to obey all that I have commanded you.”

Three verbal adjectives [participles] flesh out what a disciple is: Disciples are *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*. We can see that disciple-making covers a wide range: (1) from initially *going* to all “people groups” to share the good news of the gospel, (2) then once someone has embraced or been embraced by Jesus, they are *baptizing* (immersing) converted people into the life of the triune God, and (3) then finally they enter into the lifelong vocation of *obeying* all that Jesus commanded. Let's look at each of these three participles as critical elements in what makes up a reproducing disciple of Jesus.

## I. “As You are Going...to All Nations”

First, *going* to all nations (peoples: *ethnes*): Dale Bruner simply says, “Move out.” From our inception, we were called to serve a missionary God. The scope of the disciple's call is to all people. Jesus came to establish a worldwide kingdom without borders. Let's highlight three things that capture a “go” mentality:

### A. *Move Out to All Nations (People Groups)*

British church historian and missiologist, Andrew Walls, has observed that Christianity is different from all the other world religions because we have continually shifted our geographical center. Islam emanates from Mecca and Medina; Buddhism is largely in the Far East (China and Tibet); Hinduism is the national religion of India and Nepal. These world religions have stayed largely geographically in the realms of their origins. Not so with Christianity.

We live at a time of the massive geographical shift of world Christianity to the Global South. We do not have time for a world survey, so let's just look at Africa.

In 1900 Christianity was still largely a Western religion with European roots. Sub-Saharan Africa was 9% Christian. By 2023 Sub-Saharan Africa had become 62% Christian and growing. If you combine African and Latin American Christianity, by 2050 only one in six Christians will be white and the Global South will be its center.

Jesus tells us to make disciples of all “nations,” which is all that from which we get “ethnic groups.” Missiologists have described these as “people groups” with their distinct language and culture. At their latest count, the Joshua Project which tracks distinct “people groups,” says that they can identify 17,453 people groups worldwide, while 7,400 are unreached. Unreached people are defined as those who do not have a church in their language or culture. The idea is that people can hear the gospel in their native tongue and within their cultural setting. A disciple has a worldwide consciousness; a sense of God’s embrace of all people groups.

### *B. Move Out by Being a Relational Link to the Gospel*

Jesus shared another version of the Great Commission in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Our job is to be witnesses and connectors to Jesus and the gospel. Be attractive followers of Jesus. I love the story that Sheldon Vanauken tells in his book, *A Severe Mercy*. Sheldon and his wife, Davy, were students at Oxford University in England in the early 1950s. They came with very negative stereotypes of Christians. In their words, Christians “were necessarily stuffy, hide-bound, or stupid—people to keep one’s distance from.” Hear Vanauken’s experience:

Yet the people we seemed to fall in with at Oxford were keen, deeply committed Christians. We liked them so much that we forgave them for it. We began, hardly knowing we were doing it, to revise our opinions, not of Christianity but of Christians... The sheer quality of the Christians we met at Oxford shattered our stereotype... The astonishing fact sank home: our own contemporaries could be at once highly intelligent, civilized, fun to be with—and Christian.

It was only a matter of time before their defenses were to be penetrated by Jesus himself.

### *C. Move Out Through Acts of Compassion and Justice*

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and so glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Sacrificial acts of mercy still command attention. Nicholas Kristoff is an editorial writer for the *New York Times*. On several occasions, he has written stories about the impact of evangelical Christians through deeds of mercy. Kristoff recounts the story of 17-year-old

Sonia Angeline and her rescue from the town garbage dump in Mozambique: after 4 days of labor pains, she was a hairsbreadth from death. Katrin Blackert, a 23-year-old volunteer with Iris Ministries, encountered her on regular visits to children at the dump. Blackert paid for a cab to get her to a medical center and saved her life. Kristoff concluded: "I'm convinced that we should celebrate the big evangelical push into Africa because the bottom line is that it will mean more orphanages, more schools, and above all, more clinics and hospitals." The first step for a disciple is to catch the "go" spirit.

## II. Baptizing into the Eternal Community of the Triune God

This leads to the second element of making disciples which is, "baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." I believe we have generally missed the mark of Jesus' intent here. At the simplest level, we turn this into a baptismal formula pronounced while touching the head or lowering someone under the waters of baptism. When we think of the significance of baptism, four truths come to mind. We think of baptism as (1) an act of public declaration of our faith; (2) a sign of inclusion in the church; (3) a cleansing from the guilt of our sin; (4) and a means of identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now that is a lot, but I still don't think it quite gets at the wonder of why Jesus includes baptizing as a central mark of our discipleship.

My eyes were opened when I read John of Damascus's description of the Trinity as perichoresis, Greek for a circle dance. Choros is a festive dance performed on occasions like weddings or banquets. Adding peri as a prefix, meaning "round-about," emphasizes the circularity of the dance. Circle dances are very common within the Jewish community. Hava Nagila comes to mind. John pictured the one God who is three persons in a dance of intimacy, equality, and unity, always deferring in love and honor to one another. The one God who is at the same time Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dances in harmonious love at the center of the universe and invites us into the dance.

Let me see if I can catch the depth of meaning here through this paraphrase: "As you are going, make disciples of all nations, *immersing them into the life of the eternal three-person community of love who exists at the center of the universe.*" Why did God create human beings in the first place? Genesis 1 sets us a flow toward the culmination of God's creative purpose. The crown jewel toward which all creation was headed was the creation of human beings, exclusively made in the image of God. God says, "Let us make man in our image, and our likeness" (Gen 1:26). When we look at the "us" and "our" of God through the greater light of the New Testament we see through Jesus that the One God is three persons. In other words, before creation, God existed as the original loving community, a being whose very essence is relationship. The image of God is relational. Michael Lloyd

writes, “It is relationships that matter most to us because we were made not only for relationships, but by Relationship. We were made in the image of God, and God is relationship.”

C. S. Lewis reminds us that if God were a solitary, singular being, he could not be a God of love. “Love is something one person has for another. If God were a single person, then before the world was made, he was not love.” To be baptized into the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is to be included in the very life of God, enveloped in his love. Being baptized gives shape to our foundational identity as believers, we are included in the Beloved.

Perhaps a homemade illustration will help us grasp this unimaginable truth. In human terms, I think of it as being invited to join a family table. Imagine [some may not have to imagine] that you were raised in a home where the family hardly ever sat down and shared a family meal. Chaos ruled the home. Finding a center of warmth was elusive. Everyone was on their own. As good fortune would have it, you became friends with someone who spoke respectfully and lovingly of their parents and had siblings they enjoyed, who truly delighted in each other. One night your friend invites you to join the family for dinner. The atmosphere around the table was nothing like you have ever experienced. A beaming father tells you what a delight it is to have you join them. A home-cooked meal is brought to the table with each family member taking their part in making sure the table is set. The conversation turns to the events of the day. They each take an interest in drawing out the others. Humor comes naturally in the form of teasing each other, yet with playfulness. There is a lightness in the air. The family lingers around the table because they enjoy each other so much. You are sitting there thinking, I didn’t even know this kind of loving family was possible. As the plates are being cleared, the mother says to you, “You are welcome to join us any time. Consider yourself a part of the family.” As you ponder your experience that night, you wonder, “How can I get adopted into this family? This is what I wanted all my life and I didn’t even know it until I saw what is possible.” Baptism fundamentally means to be embraced by this reality—we are loved and included in the heart of God. Our core identity is that we have been loved into the very life of God.

### **III. Teaching Them to Obey All of Jesus’ Commands**

Once a person responds to the gospel’s saving message in Christ and then finds their identity in the eternal community of the triune God, they enter into a life-long vocation of “being taught to obey everything that Jesus commanded.” Again, Bruner is very helpful here: He says that disciple is a schoolish word. “To disciple means to make students, bring to school, educate, work with people over time in an educative process.” This requires a training mentality and a teachable spirit.

John Ortberg has said, “No one can be a disciple of Jesus because you think you should, you have to want it.” If we follow Jesus out of some obligation, because we have to, that eventually will lead to a dry legalism. What makes for the “want to”? Dallas Willard again gets to the heart of the matter: “Unfortunately, many people read that as teaching them what they ought to do, but it’s talking about teaching them in such a way that they wouldn’t want to be doing anything else.” Philip Yancy writes: “I do not get to know God, then do his will. I get to know God by doing his will.”

I experienced this truth when I committed myself to prison ministry. Throughout my life, I have listened to people give testimony to ministry behind bars. My inner, gut response was, “God bless you for doing that; I can’t imagine doing that myself.” Frankly, it scared me to death. But because my disciple-making materials were being used in a Texas maximum-security prison, I responded to an invitation to visit. Big mistake! I like to say, “God ambushed me.”

I entered that maximum security prison in a state of anxiety, particularly when the metal doors clanged behind me. I met with and spoke to four different groups that first day in the chapel, greeting each prisoner and introducing myself as they came into the chapel. The next day I was in a room with 48 men who had done dastardly things but had made a commitment to follow Jesus. The very first question I was asked was, “Were you nervous when you came in here?” The men were aware of how intimidating they could be. I acknowledged that I was nervous. The man who asked the question said, “You didn’t seem nervous.” God’s grace. Then at the end of the session with these followers of Jesus, a man named Rocky, spoke words used by the Holy Spirit to place a call on my life. Rocky said in front of the 48 men, “We are the forgotten people, don’t forget us!” That was a Holy Spirit stab in the heart. For six and a half years every Wednesday morning, I got to see Jesus at work in the lives of transformed men. As I told them, “I come here because I see Jesus in you.” I got to see the heart of God by doing his will.

### **3. Definition of a Disciple**

How would we define what it is to be a disciple from this Great Commission text: A disciple is one who, first and foremost, submits to Jesus as the Lord of the Universe and Lord of our lives. Once this is in place disciples align themselves with Jesus’ mission of making disciples while at the same time growing into three dimensions of a disciple that Jesus highlights: (1) Disciples have a restless “go,” move out spirit. (2) Disciples find their identity in the eternal loving community of God in which they are included. (3) Finally, disciples spend the rest of their days knowing that their primary vocation is to align their lives with all that Jesus commands.

- Who or What is a Disciple? *A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, committed to the mission of Jesus, and motivated by the love of Jesus.*
- What is Discipleship? *Discipleship is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Christ to come alive in us.*
- What is Disciple-making? *Disciple-making is "an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. It also includes equipping the disciple to make disciples who make disciples."*

In our next session, we will explore the question, how did Jesus model for us how disciples are made, and why have not we followed it?

Greg Ogden

### **Kako Isus definira učenika u odlomku o Velikom poslanju?**

#### Sažetak

Svaka konferencija o učeništvu mora biti ukorijenjena u biblijskoj definiciji pojma „učenik“. Kada Isus zapovijeda da „činimo učenike“, koga ili što točno stvaramo? Kako izgleda učenik? Ne treba tražiti dalje od definicije koja je sadržana u izvornom Isusovu nalogu koji je poznat kao Veliko poslanje (Mt 28,16-20). Postoji jasno određena struktura ovoga teksta kojom se iskazuju osnovne karakteristike učenika: tekst sadrži jedan imperativ, „činite učenike“, no ono što se često previda jest to da se ova glavna zapovijed dodatno pojašnjava trima participima: „idući“, „krsteći“ i „učeći“. U ovome slučaju participi su glagolski prilozi s nastavkom „-ći“ koji govore o naravi učenika. U ovom će se izlaganju usporediti popularno razumijevanje toga što znači biti kršćanin s biblijskom definicijom pojma „učenik“. Kršćani, kako se uobičajeno razumije, oni su koji su povjerovali Kristu radi svog spasenja i vjeruju da će biti s Isusom kada umru. Drugim riječima, na taj je način možda nesvjesno rečeno: „Možete biti kršćanin, a da ne budete učenik.“ „Evandjelje“ koje je naviješteno izravno je dovelo do evandjelja koje se svodi samo na oprost grijeha tj. na „evandjelje oprosta“. Bill Hull i Ben Sobels iznose dvije istine: 1. Ne možete stvoriti učenika sličnog Kristu na temelju evandjelja koje ne sadrži učenništvo. 2. Evandjelje koje propovijedate određuje učenike koje ćete stvoriti. Nasuprot tome, bit će istaknuto da tri opisna participa, „idući“, „krsteći“ i „učeći“, kada se detaljnije razmotre, u sebi sadrže Isusovu definiciju učenika. To je

potvrđeno porukom evanđelja koje je Isus propovijedao na početku svoje službe: „A pošto Ivan bijaše predan, dođe Isus u Galileju propovijedajući evanđelje Božje i govoreći: ‘Ispunilo se vrijeme i približilo se kraljevstvo Božje. Pokajte se i vjerujte u evanđelje!’“ (Mk 1,14-15).