

Baptism and the Great Commission

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

A minister conducted many baptismal services in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The younger children, of course, would pick up on this. One Sunday, his family went to a friend's home in the country. One of the preacher's four little children went outside to play with the others. After a short while, the adults heard only silence and wondered what the children were up to. They found them behind a barn quietly playing "church." The preacher's 4-year-old daughter, Susan, was conducting the baptismal service. She held a cat over a barrel of water. Trying to be as solemn as her father, she repeated the phrase she had heard many times: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and in the hole you go!"

This is a study on the subject of baptism. I think it is needful that all of us remind ourselves why Jesus Christ instituted baptism for the Church Age saints (New Testament saints). In this study we want to investigate the background, purpose, picture, and mode for baptism. It's my prayer that God will teach us the important truths related to baptism and how we should become a disciple, or follower of Christ.

The Setting of Baptism (Great Commission)

Matthew 28:19-20

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen."

The setting for baptism is found in the Great Commission passages. This section of Scripture is sometimes called the Great Commission. For many, it might be termed "The Great Omission!" This is because many Christians are not witnessing to the lost, as they should, nor are they willing to disciple new converts. Thousands upon thousands are dying all around us and going to hell. Let's stop living for ourselves, surrender our entire lives to the Lord, live for others, share Christ with the lost, and then help them to grow after they are saved. This is what

the Great Commission is all about. Let us not forget that the Great Commission involves reaching out to the unsaved masses with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can all do this in some way. Sometimes we can speak to others about Christ directly, while other times, we can leave a tract with someone, which might be a seed or catalyst to bring them to Christ. We can also prayerfully and financially support missions.

Previously, Jesus had limited the work of evangelism to Israel (Matt. 10:1–8; 15:24), but now He sends His disciples into all the world, since Israel has officially rejected Him as their Messiah (John 1:11–12), and since a new dispensational outreach was about to begin that involved saving Gentiles and including them in a new body called the Church (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 12:13). This is a new commission for a new age. It is different than the old commission. God was now reaching out to the nations of the world.

In Matthew 28:19 the Greek verb translated “go” is actually a present participle (going). Although this is an imperative or command, Jesus is actually assuming that His followers will naturally want to go and speak to the dying nations all around them. He literally says, “As you are going.” It should be understood that you are going! It should be within the heart of every blood-washed and blood-bought believer to share his faith in Christ. Evangelism should be an automatic response of every born-again believer. Out of gratitude and love they should be willing to share their faith and testimony to others of how God saved them. God has called us to invade the nations with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are commissioned to go, and go we must! Millions today are blinded by communism, humanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, the false cults, and apostate Christianity.

John Philips said:
“Untold millions are still untold.”

The basics of the Great Commission can be summed up in two words: “Go” (vs. 19) and “Lo” (vs. 20). God has commanded us to go (“Go ye therefore”) but He has also given us the promise of His presence and power (“and lo, I am with you alway”). If “go” was the only command we were given, we would be a sorry bunch of

witnesses, which could bear no fruit, nor stand up to the great task. Thank the Lord that the word “lo” also appears in the Great Commission, which means to behold and see. What are we to behold? It’s the promise that the Lord will go with us and enable us to carry out this great task or commission. Dear friend, we must go, but we must also remember that God will go with us! What a promise. We can go forth with the Gospel message, and see souls saved, since God is on our side. We have the promise of God’s power and presence. We are on the winning team.

Jesus addressed His original disciples in the Great Commission passages to give the marching orders for the Church, a new work and people of God, which would be born on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; Eph. 3:1-11). The original disciples, who were the founders, leaders, and representatives of the Church (Eph. 2:20), were to start the evangelistic outreach of the Great Commission. However, the work of evangelism would not stop with the original band of Christ’s followers. It was designed to continue on through millions of other disciples, who embrace the same Christ and the same Gospel message, and who are willing to evangelize and train new followers of Christ.

Acts 8:4

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”

1 Thessalonians 1:8

“For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

In his Collected Essays, Englishman Augustine Birrell tells of traveling through what was then "the wild, remote parts of Lancashire." He says that the people had a reputation for being belligerent, heavy drinkers. But when Birrell visited them, he found them to be temperate, kind, and hospitable. So he asked a local miner, "How did this great change happen?" Tipping his cap solemnly as a token of respect, the worker replied, "There came a man amongst us once, and his name was John Wesley." The testimony of one man had changed an entire community.

Dearly beloved, do you have a heart for missions? Have you been going out into the highways and byways of life where lost people can be found and approached with the Gospel message? Where have you gone recently to share Christ with others? How about your neighbor? How about someone in your family? How about someone at work? No matter where we are, we should be witnesses for Jesus Christ and seek to win others to Him. The Great Commission is not an option to consider, but a command to be obeyed.

“A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify.
A never dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill;
O may it all my powers engage,
To do my Master's will.”

What are we to do as we go? What is our responsibility as Great Commission followers? Please underscore the words “teach,” “baptizing” (Matt. 28:19), and “teaching” (Matt. 28:20). These three words underscore the three primary truths related to the Great Commission. They help us understand what our own personal Christian commission is all about. Let’s state our proposition clearly.

There are three truths related to the Great Commission.

1. Making disciples (through the Gospel)

As we go out into the world we are commanded to reach people with the Gospel message so they can become a follower of Jesus Christ. The first word mentioned in the Great Commission is the word “teach” and actually means literally “to make disciples”. The idea is this. Christ’s followers were to *make* or *create* disciples (other followers of Christ) by initially teaching or proclaiming the Gospel to the lost. They were instructed to “teach all nations” (make disciples of all nations) by sharing the message of the Gospel with the unsaved masses through evangelism.

William MacDonald says:

“This does not presuppose world conversion. By preaching the gospel, the disciples were to see others become learners or followers of the Savior—from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.”

In other words, people become disciples or followers of Christ through the proclamation and presentation of the Gospel message. The result of the Gospel being preached transforms the lives of people and they become Christ’s followers.

Mark 16:15

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

In Mark’s account of the Great Commission the disciples were told to “preach” or proclaim the Gospel message to a lost and dying world. In Matthew’s record of the Great Commission, we discover that it’s this Gospel which actually “makes disciples,” or changes the lives of people (Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 1:5-7). When I share the content of the Gospel with someone else (1 Cor. 15:1-3), and they place their faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26), it’s then that they have the privilege of becoming a disciple or follower of Christ. The Gospel is what makes spiritually dead people into the disciples of Christ (Eph. 2:1-2) and sinners into saints (1 Cor. 1:2).

There is a special emphasis in each of the three different accounts of the Great Commission. In Mark’s account of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15) the Gospel is presented as the message that saves souls (“preach the gospel”). In Matthew’s account of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) the mission or purpose for sharing the Gospel is presented (“to make disciples”). In Luke’s account of the Great Commission (Luke 24:47) the manner in which men must respond to the Gospel is presented (“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations”).

In order to “teach” (make disciples) in Matthew 28:19, one must first preach (share) the Gospel to the lost (evangelism), so others can come to faith in Christ and become Christ’s followers. Matthew is speaking of the cause and effect of the Great Commission. What causes people to come to faith in Christ is the Gospel message;

however, the effect or result of this message being proclaimed is the making of disciples, or new converts that will become followers of Jesus Christ.

We have a wonderful Gospel message that makes disciples or followers of Christ out of the unsaved masses. The Gospel being preached results in changed lives or the making of disciples. Those who were once heathen and anti-God, find their lives suddenly transformed, and they possess a new desire to follow Christ and do His will. This is the marvel of grace operating in their hearts and lives. People are transformed by God's amazing grace. This never ceases to amaze me. I have witnessed men, who were cursing, contrary, and carnal in their approach to life, bow their heads in shame and repentance, in order to ask Christ's forgiveness and embrace Him for their salvation from hell.

One day several people heard a man on the street using very shocking profanity. "Get away from that fellow," shouted one of them. "The God he is cursing might split the earth and let him go down alive into Hell for his blasphemy!" This ungodly man was none other than John Bunyan, who after his conversion wrote the great Christian classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Gospel message makes disciples out of heathen people! God's Word changes lives! Let us never forget this. The saving message of the Gospel results in the lives of people being changed.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The term the Lord uses in this commissioning outreach is the word "teach" (Matt. 28:19), which involves making disciples, or seeing lives changed, through presenting the Gospel to them. A person cannot become a disciple or follower of Christ until they are first saved. In other words, a person cannot become a follower of Christ until he is first taught the Gospel message and responds to it in simple faith. So, we are called upon to initially make disciples through sharing the Gospel message. This is what Matthew is saying and this coincides with Mark's teaching on preaching the Gospel to the unsaved world.

In an eyewitness report of the great Welsh revival of 1904, G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "The horses are terribly puzzled. A manager said to me, 'The haulers are some of the very lowest. They have driven their horses by obscenity and kicks. Now they can hardly persuade the horses to start working, because there is no obscenity and no kicks.'"

The Gospel changes the lives of people forever! The converting influence of the Gospel is brought out in Matthew 28:19 when it speaks about making disciples. Sharing the Gospel message with unsaved people leads to their conversion and makes them into disciples or followers of Christ. As a result, their lives are forever changed. One thing is certain. A person can never become a disciple or follower of Christ until he is first saved. Therefore, you "make disciples" by leading them to Jesus Christ through the Gospel message, and seeing their lives changed by God's grace.

An American preacher, ministering in a country in southeast Asia, was staying with a wealthy Chinese couple, who were ardent Christians. The adult son, still residing at home, was an unbeliever, and had been living a sinful life. One evening the minister invited him to attend the service, and he agreed to come. In that meeting the young man received the Lord as his personal Savior. The next day he had cards printed in both English and Chinese which he sent to several hundred of his friends and acquaintances. The announcements read: "Wang Lee, having given his life yesterday to Jesus as Lord and Savior, wishes to inform you that he will no longer be seen in the usual places he has frequented." This new believer had taken his stand for Christ!

The Great Commission, for this age, involves seeing souls saved, enlisting them as followers of Jesus Christ, and seeing their lives changed. During his ministry John Wesley rode over 250,000 miles on horseback, a distance equal to ten circuits of the globe along the equator. He preached over 40,000 sermons! A heart for missions will keep us on our own horse today! We might get saddle sore from time to time, but we can all do our part, and be part of the answer to seeing souls saved.

Dearly beloved, let us cultivate a heart for missions and the masses which are dying and going to an everlasting hell. Hell and the damnation of sinners are still real and this frightful reality puts the spark and heart we need into missions (Rev. 20:11-15). We should want to see people saved from hell and the everlasting righteous judgment of God. If there is no hell, then there is no need for missions! However, since there is eternal punishment for the unsaved, missions is a necessity.

Matthew 25:46

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

The French infidel Voltaire cried out, "I am abandoned by God and man; I shall go to Hell!" Sir Francis Newport wailed in anguish, "Oh, that I could lie for a thousand years upon the fire that is never quenched, to purchase the favor of God and be united to Him again. But it is a fruitless wish. Millions and millions of years will bring me no nearer the end of my torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity forever and forever! Oh, the unsufferable pangs of Hell!"

2. Confirming disciples (through baptism)

Jesus next speaks about “baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19). The outward demonstration of baptism confirmed that the new converts had come to faith in Christ and that they were now willing to follow Christ as their new Lord and Master. This is the emphasis in Mark’s account of the Great Commission.

Mark 16:15-16

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Verse sixteen of this text is often misunderstood as teaching salvation by baptism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Baptism is linked together with the forgiveness of a person’s sins or salvation in three verses of the Bible (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16) simply because baptism immediately followed a person’s salvation to demonstrate they were genuinely saved. *Their baptism became a witness to the*

reality of their salvation - not the means of their salvation. If Mark would have wanted to teach this doctrine, he would have followed through by saying, “he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned.” Of course, he did not say this for it is contrary to Biblical revelation elsewhere. The Bible teaches salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8-9) – not by baptism.

What Mark is teaching is the confirmation aspect of our salvation. A person who believes and then follows the Lord in baptism confirms that they are truly saved. When Mark says they “shall be saved” he was referring to the confirmation of their salvation. A person’s willingness to identify with Jesus Christ through water baptism, which was a dangerous matter during the days of the early church (1 Cor. 15:29-30), became the outward demonstration of their genuine salvation and commitment to Christ. Their baptism did not save them; it confirmed the genuineness of one’s salvation. Mark explains that a person who is willing to enter the waters of baptism, confirms by his action, that he truly has been saved, and now wants to become a follower of Jesus Christ. There could be no mistake about it. A person is not saved by being baptized, but a person is saved when they want to be baptized, and identify with Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:38 presents the same confirming truth about baptism:
“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Repentance alone is what results in the forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:19; Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Pet. 3:9) and receiving the Holy Spirit’s baptism (“the gift of the Holy Ghost”). The only thing a person can do to be saved is repent. Peter acknowledges this when calling the people to “Repent” (Acts 2:38). Elsewhere in Scripture forgiveness of sins is based on faith alone (John 3:16, 36; Rom. 4:1-17; 11:6; Gal. 3:8-9; Eph. 2:8-9; etc.). Furthermore, Peter, the same speaker, later promised forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith alone (Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). The Scriptures do not contradict one another. The clear teaching of Scripture is that salvation and forgiveness of sins only comes through repentance and faith. Water baptism is not required to save your soul.

So, what is Acts 2:38 teaching? The remaining part of this verse is emphasizing the confirmation of a person's salvation through his baptism. Baptism was "for the remission of sins" in the sense of validating a person's repentance and forgiveness before God. The baptism became a token or testimonial that they were genuinely saved. Peter is saying that the people needed to be baptized "for the remission of sins" in a *conformational sense - not a salvation sense*.

This verse is saying the same thing as Mark 16:16 which declares that "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" or confirm that his salvation is genuine and prove to others that he is saved. There was no such thing as unbaptized believers in the early days of the Church. The new converts wanted to identify with Christ and Christianity through baptism. Therefore, when a person was willing to stick his neck out for Jesus Christ and be baptized, going against the deification of the Roman Emperors, they were confirming that their salvation was genuine and they were saved. If a person, therefore, would be baptized, they would be saved for it would be a clear indication of their genuine conversion and faith in Christ.

When a saved person is baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), they are not washing their sins away, through their baptism, but confirming what their salvation represents and means to them – the complete forgiveness, washing away, and removal of their sins. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (for the purpose of confirming your forgiveness and salvation before Christ and others).

The mention of both baptism and repentance in the same verse does not mean that both are necessary for the forgiveness of sins. I might say, "Take your keys and coat and start the car," but that does not mean taking your coat is necessary to starting the car, even though it is mentioned along with taking the keys. In a similar way, we must view repentance as the sole requirement for salvation, even though baptism follows on the heels of our repentance, as a token and testimony of one's forgiveness in God's sight, and the confirmation of his salvation.

A person is baptized "for the remission of sins" only in the sense that he confirms his repentance, salvation, and forgiveness before God.

The one (baptism) presupposes the other (repentance). A person's baptism was a definite sign marker and testimonial that they had repented of their sins before God and were now ready to break from their past sinful living. This is why repentance and baptism were linked together in some Bible passages. The passage in Acts 22:16 brings out this same truth regarding the confirming aspect of a person's salvation at the time of their baptism.

In Acts 22:16 Ananias asked Paul:

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Paul, who was already a saved brother (Acts 22:13), was about to pass through the waters of baptism, in order to confirm that Christ had already saved him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-16). When Ananias says, “be baptized, and wash away thy sins” he is once again referring to the confirmation of Paul's salvation through his baptism – not the actual removal of sins. Paul was already saved, so his baptism could not wash away his sins. However, it would serve as the confirmation and validation of his salvation. Paul was now ready and willing to identify himself with Christ and the movement of Christianity (“the way” - Acts 9:2; 22:4), and by so doing, give outward evidence and confirmation that his sins were washed away.

In addition, these words (“wash away thy sins”) may also symbolically reflect what baptism portrays. Baptism is a picture of God's inner work of washing away sin (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Peter 3:21). Therefore, at the time of Paul's baptism, he would give testimony of God's wonderful forgiveness and cleansing. Paul's baptism would also serve as a testimonial to his salvation, or what Christ had already done for him, when washing away his sins. Please note that the washing away of sins is connected with the person calling out in testimony at the time of their baptism. The early Christians gave testimony, by their baptism, what Christ had miraculously accomplished in their lives – the washing away of sins.

The new convert would call on “the name of the Lord” at the time of his baptism and give testimony that Christ had washed away his sins and that He was now his Lord and Savior. This verse is speaking of a Christian's testimonial at the time of their baptism regarding how

Christ had washed away a person's sins. Both the act of Christian baptism and the testimony of a Christian, which was shared at the time of their baptism, portrayed what Christ had already done for them in washing away all their sins. It also became the confirmation and evidence of their genuine faith in Christ and salvation. Both Acts 2:38 and 22:16 teach how Christian baptism is a witness to the *reality* of a person's salvation – not the *means* of his salvation.

In essence, Jesus was teaching in Matthew 28:19 that the salvation of people (making disciples) is to be followed by their outward baptism, which demonstrates their confirmation of salvation and commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Baptism was how newly saved people were officially enlisted as followers of Christ. Faith had allowed these believers to enter God's salvation plan which is to save the nations. However, baptism validated their salvation and demonstrated the willingness of these believers to enter God's discipleship program.

The order of salvation and baptism is important. We are to reach the unsaved masses with the Gospel message, see them saved, and then baptize them, in order to demonstrate they are now willing followers of Christ. We will say more about baptism in another section of the study.

In summary, baptism by immersion should be administered to believers only (Mark 16:15-16), as an identifying symbol of their belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and also of their testimony in relationship to their death to sin and resurrection to a new walk in life (Rom. 6:4). Those who were baptized were demonstrating that they had already been saved through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and that they now wanted to live a different way of life as followers of Jesus Christ.

3. Growing disciples (through teaching)

Here is the divine order of salvation and baptism given by Jesus. A person becomes a disciple through the presentation of Gospel message (vs. 19), but then they must be taught how to live the Christian life, after they are saved (Matt. 28:20). They must be taught so they might grow and blossom in their newfound Christian lives.

After the convert's baptism, God's mature saints are commanded to teach the new Christians the instructions of the Lord, which are needed for their daily living, as new born-babes (1 Pet. 2:2).

The second word ("teaching") in the Great Commission passage suggests the importance of providing instruction for new converts, which is necessary for their Christian growth and living. The word "teaching" actually means to follow the precepts and instructions of another. It involves sitting under the teaching and instruction of someone else in order to learn their doctrine (1 Thess. 1:6). The fact that one should "observe" what they have been taught, means the young converts should obey the new truths that are presented to them, and apply them to their own personal daily lives. Obedience is still the very best thing!

A humorous tale was told by Dr. Leon Tucker. He said that a man once promised the Lord he would sell one of his calves and give the money to missions. But he disregarded his pledge and never followed through. Every time he went to church an "inner voice" reminded him, "That calf must be sold!" Still he did nothing about it. One Sunday he decided to go to an outdoor meeting in the rural community where he lived. As he approached the gathering, the people were singing an old familiar hymn, "The Half Has Never Been Told." Since the man's conscience was still bothering him, he misunderstood the words and thought he heard, "The Calf Has Never Yet Been Sold." Running toward the group, he shouted, "Stop! Please stop singing! I know the calf has not yet been sold, but it will be tomorrow!" God is looking for our obedience and this will result in our spiritual growth and maturity.

The Great Commission is not just about seeing people saved; it's about seeing people grow. Only through consistent teaching, training, and tried-and-true obedience can a believer grow in their Christian life (Heb. 5:13). We can't leave new converts to wonder about and be eaten by the wolves! The worst thing any person could do is to abandon a baby! We would not want to leave a baby to starve and fend for itself. In a similar way, when we abandon those who are recently saved, we do them a terrible injustice. We leave them to fend for themselves and brush them aside as being unimportant. We must remember there is more to the Great Commission than just

evangelism. There is the need to help spiritual babies grow in their newfound Christian lives by teaching them the Word of God or Bible (“As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” - 1 Pet. 2:2). There is the need to disciple new converts in the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Word, so they might grow and learn how to live the Christian life.

A disciple attached himself to a teacher, identified with him, learned from him, and lived with him. He learned, not simply by listening, but also by doing. Our Lord called twelve disciples and taught them, so they might in return be able to teach others (Mark 3:13). We must do the same for those who are new converts. We must reach out to them and teach them what Jesus Christ taught His original band of followers concerning discipleship or what it means to follow Him (Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-27).

In these verses, Christ demanded surrender, sacrifice, and a special reserved love for Himself. We will study more on this later. However, one thing is certain, if a person is going to become a disciple or follower of Christ, they must learn the teachings of Christ regarding discipleship. Christ’s teachings about discipleship must be made known to the new convert, so the convert’s life and thoughts might be brought under the authority of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 7:22-23; 2 Cor. 10:5). Of course, these teachings of Christ would also include what He taught regarding the Church Age and what is relevant to the new Church dispensation (John 14-15). However, the teachings of Jesus are not only found in the gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they are also found in the epistles.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 says: “For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” Colossians 3:16 also states: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” The revelation of the New Testament epistles also came through Jesus Christ. This also makes the epistles authoritative (Acts 1:1–2). In other words, the apostles wrote the epistles under the authority of Jesus Christ; therefore, all of the New Testament teaching remains authoritative, and can be used to help disciple new converts in their Christian living. A disciple is one who has believed on Jesus Christ and confirmed his

faith by being baptized. He then remains in the fellowship of the believers, so he might be taught the truths of the faith (Acts 2:41–47). As a result, he can eventually go out and win others and teach them the same truths that will change their lives forever. This was the pattern of the New Testament Church.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

We must grow disciples by setting forth, explaining, and entrusting the Scriptures to them. This is what Paul meant when using the word “commit.” We must entrust the truth to young converts, so they will in return, present the same teaching to others. There should be a train effect among believers. We should hook up with someone who was saved before us and who is a learner of the words of Jesus Christ. Later, as we learn how to live and what God expects of us, we can allow someone to hook up to us. This is how a train is formed and it’s how the Great Commission is to work. Christians should be linked together through the instruction of others. The train continues to grow as people are saved and taught by other Christians.

Here is the Great Commission in capsule form. This is what God expects every Christian to be involved with today. First, we must evangelize, or share the Gospel message with the lost, and see people saved (make disciples). Second, we must seek to have the new converts baptized to demonstrate their willingness to follow Christ (confirm disciples). Third, we must commit the truths of Jesus Christ to the new Christians, so they can teach others (grow disciples).

In some churches, the congregation pays the pastor to preach, win the lost, and build up the saved, while the church members function as cheerleaders or spectators. This is not the way a church is built. It takes teamwork, or Christians working together, in order to see people saved and nurtured along in their Christian lives. The Church has grown numerically and spiritually through other believers obeying the Great Commission. We are all a product of the Great Commission!

Acts 1:8

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The “uttermost part of the earth” echoes the previous truth Jesus taught His disciples in the Great Commission passages. The Book of Acts picks up where the Great Commission passages of the gospel accounts left off. The disciples were instructed to go “into all the world” (Mark 16:15) and to evangelize “all nations” (Matt. 28:19) with the Gospel message. In this passage of Scripture, we see both the power for witnessing (“the Holy Spirit”) and the plan for witnessing (“uttermost part of the earth”). God promises to give us the power we need to fulfill His plan for worldwide evangelism (Matt. 28:18 – “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”). The dynamite of God’s power is unleashed in our lives through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now think of it this way. We live at the end of 2,000 years of Christian outreach. Today the Church is largely Gentile, as a result of people being saved and discipled for over 2,000 years. Because people have obeyed the Great Commission we are saved today and the true Church of Jesus Christ continues to thrive. With the announcement of the Great Commission God turned to the Gentiles to reach the nations for Jesus Christ. As the disciples of the early church expanded their Gospel outreach ministry, they would continue to witness to the Jewish people, but not exclusively. This is because of the Great Commission that God had given to them. In fact, over time the Gentiles would be given a higher priority over the Jewish people because of their stubborn rejection of Christ and the Gospel message.

Acts 13:46-47

“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

In obedience to the Great Commission we must seek to reach the nations through witnessing and missionary outreach (“unto the ends of the earth”). This was a momentous point in the history of church expansion and Gospel outreach. Paul officially declares a turning point in his ministry, which would primarily involve sharing the Gospel with the Gentile masses. This is because the Jewish people had repeatedly rejected the Gospel message.

In Paul’s ministry he sought out the Jews first in every new city (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). This was because they were his own kinsman and he loved them dearly (Rom. 9:3). Also, the original Gospel outreach, as it began to move throughout the world, would be primarily to Jewish hearers (Acts 1:8). It’s interesting that three times Paul responded to the Jewish rejection of his message by turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:25-28). These three official declarations declared that God would primarily build His New Testament Church through the Gentile masses, as the Gospel continued to be spread throughout the world.

The marching orders to take the Gospel into the entire world were given at the end of the gospel accounts in the Great Commission passages (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47). Therefore, in view of the Jews repeated rejection to the Gospel witness, it was officially declared that the Gentiles would be given the greater privilege to hear the Gospel. Because of this official declaration of Paul, the pattern of preaching to the Jews first (Romans 1:17), in the original Gospel expansion or outreach (Acts 1:8), would no longer be followed by the apostles. This is because of the stubborn rejection of Christ and the Gospel message by the Jewish people (John 1:11).

Today evangelism throughout the world must include the Jews (Mark 16:15), but the priority of evangelizing the Jews first has been historically fulfilled in the original outreach of the Gospel, and the official declaration of Paul turning to the Gentiles. Witnessing to the Jews is to be done out of preference - not necessarily precedence.

William MacDonald again writes:

“The order for the Jew first and also for the Greek was fulfilled historically during the Acts period. While we have an enduring obligation to God’s ancient people, the Jews, we are not required to

evangelize them before going to the Gentiles. Today God deals with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis, and the message and timing are the same to all.”

When the Bible speaks of the “Jews first” (Rom. 1:17) Paul was not speaking of a prescribed order of presenting the Gospel throughout the Church dispensation. Rather, he was speaking about the privilege the Jews had in hearing the Gospel first on the Day of Pentecost. It was a statement of fact that Paul was presenting - not a prescribed order to present the Gospel. The same would be true when mentioning the Gentiles first and the Jews second (Eph. 2:17). Those who heard the Gospel first were primarily Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The official opening of Gentile evangelism took place in Acts chapter 10. Today, the Gospel is to go to all men, without distinction (Romans 10:12-13). The point is this. Both Gentiles and Jews, who are saved, become part of the New Testament Church that God is building (1 Cor. 12:13).

Of course, there are some who attempt to eliminate this Great Commission from the Church Age (hyper dispensationalists). They assert that this is only a Jewish Great Commission to build a Jewish Church; however, the terms “world” (Mark 16:15) and “nations” (Matt. 28:19) would never include just the Jews. When the extreme dispensational approach keeps this passage from the present Church Age, they leave the Church without an assigned purpose from our Lord! The Great Commission is the marching orders for God’s New Testament Church!

The orders Christ gave to the original apostles, who were the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), were to be representative of His plan and purpose for the disciples that would continue to follow Christ within the Church Age. Other disciples were to pick up where the original disciples left off. They were to keep evangelizing taking the Gospel into all the earth (Acts 8:4; 1 Thess. 1:8). It’s certain that Jesus would have never expected the Gospel to be spread throughout the entire earth during the first century.

There is no reason to misinterpret the Great Commission verses as referring to only a Jewish commission for the Jews to evangelize their own people, and create what some have called a “Jewish church,”

during the early part of the book of Acts. This creates confusion. There is only one church (“one body” - Eph. 4:4). The Great Commission texts in Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47 confirm that the Gospel should be presented to “all nations” (ethnos – heathen, foreigners to Jews, Gentiles). This is not referencing the Jews, or the lost sheep of the house of Israel, as was earlier commanded of Jesus (Matt. 10:5-6), when He was offering His kingdom to His own people.

Jesus had clearly changed His program and plan, when giving the Great Commission, in order to teach that His disciples were now to go into the entire earth with the Gospel message. Israel has rejected her King and the Kingdom has been postponed (Matt. 21:43). Therefore, Jesus is telling His disciples to go into the entire world (Gentile masses) and win them to Christ (Luke 24:46-53).

I’m so glad Jesus gave this Great Commission, which extends to the Gentile populace, or else I would not be saved! I would be lost in the land of heathenism, without any ray of light or hope! I thank God for changing His dispensational plan which involved reaching out to the unsaved Gentile masses who are lost and going to hell. Let us not lose sight of what Jesus has commanded us to do.

Mark 16:15

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

This is the Great Commission! There's one thing you cannot do about missions - get rid of your responsibility. A church that is not reaching out is passing out. Be a missionary everyday. Tell the world that Jesus is the way!! God has given us marching orders!

Someone said:

“A missionary is a person who never gets used to the thud of Christless feet on their way to eternity.”

Charles Thomas Studd once commented:

“Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel bell. I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell.”

The Mode of Baptism (Immersion)

Baptizing the new converts (“baptizing them” – Matt. 28:19) was the immediate testimony of their salvation and new identification with Jesus Christ, Christians, and the Church. A disciple is one who has believed on Jesus Christ and then expresses this newfound faith by being baptized. Baptizing (baptizo) means to immerse, submerge, or overwhelm. It refers to momentary lowering a person completely under the water, then raising him up. My translation of this word goes like this: “Put them under until they bubble!” The disciples did not walk around with sprinkling cans baptizing people! They found a river and got the job done! Baptism was always done by immersion. This is the Biblical mode of baptism.

Acts 8:38-39

“And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.”

The Greek word “baptism” means to immerse. It never means to pour or sprinkle. The Greek word which means “to pour” is “cheo.” The Greek word which means “to sprinkle” is “rantidzo.” If God had wanted pouring or sprinkling to serve as the symbol for our relationship to Christ, He would have used one of those words. Instead, He used the word “baptidzo,” which in translation, means only “to immerse.”

There can be no question about the mode of baptism. Baptism was always done by immersion to portray the believer’s identification or spiritual connection or tie with Jesus Christ, which results in a person’s total forgiveness. There is no other mode seen in the New Testament Scriptures such as pouring or sprinkling. There is no Biblical support for the practice of sprinkling or pouring. Both of these practices corrupt the proper symbolism of the ordinance, which is intended to portray the believer’s complete washing (cleansing), or forgiveness of sins, and the new, victorious way of life they possess, through their union with Christ’s death and resurrection. We will see this picture in our next point.

From the absolute standard of the Bible to historic writers of unquestionable authority, it is evident that the early Christians continued to baptize in rivers, pools, and baths, until about the middle of the 3rd century. Justin Martyr says “they went with the disciples to a place where there was water.” Tertullian adds that “the candidates for baptism made a profession of faith twice, once in the church, and then again when they came to the water, and it was quite indifferent whether it were the sea, or a pool, a lake, or a river.” The point is this. True baptism was always done by immersion. This is because baptism conveyed a picture of the believer’s saving and victorious identification with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. This brings us to our next point.

The Picture of Baptism (Identification)

When Jesus spoke about “baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19), there was a picture behind this outward ceremony. It was a picture of the believer’s *identification* with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Somebody said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” The picture of baptism, a person being taken under the water and brought out of the water, beautifully portrays the saving and victorious tie, or identification, which every believer has with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The Bible teaches that water baptism, by immersion, pictures how every believer equally shares in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Since they possess this identification, or spiritual tie and union with Christ, they are not only saved (completely washed and forgiven of all their sins), but they can also live victoriously in their new relationship with Christ. This is the wonder of the ages and the Magna Charta of Christian living!

Romans 6:1-4 links Spirit baptism with water baptism:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Romans chapter six is undoubtedly speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, since it's through Spirit baptism (not water baptism) a believer is spiritually linked to Jesus Christ for salvation and victory, as portrayed in these verses. The Holy Spirit immerses us in Christ, or spiritually joins us to Christ, so we can claim our victory (vv. 6, 11-13). Only the baptism of the Holy Spirit can save us and provide us with victory for living the Christian life. However, water baptism portrays this saving and sanctifying work that the Holy Spirit has done for us. In Romans chapter six, Paul explains Spirit baptism, in the words of water baptism. This is because Spirit baptism pictures water baptism. The Holy Spirit has baptized, or placed us in Christ, and our water baptism represents this saving and sanctifying transaction. The two types of baptism (Spirit and water baptism) work harmoniously together. This can be seen even on the Day of Pentecost when the new converts went through the ritual of water baptism in view of the Holy Spirit's new baptizing work, which "added" (Acts 2:41) these believers to the Church, the newly formed body of Christ.

The adding procedure was not speaking about adding these new Christians to the local church membership of the organized Baptist church in Jerusalem, but to the new organism of the Church, which Jesus Christ had just formed and founded (Matt. 16:18). The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit would baptize or immerse people into the New Testament Church by adding them to Christ's body ("added unto the Lord" - Acts 5:14; 11:24) - not the local church membership. This means that through the new baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, people were brought into a spiritual tie or partnership with Christ, where they could share in the benefits of His death and resurrection.

Two baptisms took place on the Day of Pentecost, Spirit and water baptism, and both of them were baptism by immersion.

Acts 2:41

"Then they that gladly received his word (salvation of their souls) were baptized (water baptism): and the same day there were added (Spirit baptism) unto them (the disciples who were already saved) about three thousand souls."

Peter is declaring what took place on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit performed a spiritual immersion, by placing every believer

into a new dynamic and living relationship with Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3 - "baptized into Jesus Christ"). Each Christian became a member of Christ's body (the Church - 1 Cor. 12:13) and were thoroughly and completely immersed in His death, burial, and resurrection, as the epistles outline (Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27).

The New Testament Church, which began on the Day of Pentecost, is said to function in a new relationship to Christ, which is comparable to a head and body analogy (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Every member of the Church is spiritually tied or linked to Jesus Christ through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit and this spiritual baptism brings them into a new living union and partnership with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 explains it this way:

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (new Testament Church), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (the saving blessings and benefits of the Holy Spirit)."

Spirit baptism (the real baptism) immerses us in Christ allowing us to take part in Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, as outlined in Romans chapter six. However, our water baptism (the picture of Spirit baptism) beautifully portrays what the Holy Spirit has already accomplished for every believer. Our water baptism speaks of our identification with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has saved us and given us new life in Christ by bringing us into a spiritual union or partnership with Christ. As a result, what Christ had done for us through His death and resurrection, can now be applied and appropriated to our life. This application of Christ's salvation and sanctification can be ours through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our water baptism portrays two pictures.

1. It portrays the picture of our salvation.

Our spiritual union, or partnership with Christ's death, assures us that His payment for sin has been applied to our lives, and that we are now redeemed (1 Cor. 1:30). Our immersion or union with Christ's burial and resurrection reassures us that our sins have been washed

away, that we are completely forgiven of all our sins, and now possess eternal life, since we have shared in Christ's resurrection life, which is eternal (Rom. 6:23). The resurrection is the reassurance that God the Father has accepted His Son's sacrifice and is now able to grant us forgiveness and eternal life through Christ (Rom. 4:25; John 11:25-26).

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead, who spiritually immerses us in Christ or identifies us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, allowing us to take part of the saving benefits of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 8:2 – "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"). Without His baptizing work, or work of spiritual immersion in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2), we could not be saved. Our water baptism pictures this complete spiritual immersion that we possess in Christ's death and resurrection, which provides us with salvation, cleansing from all sin, and eternal life.

Colossians 2:11-13 explains it this way:

"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."

These verses are once again speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, since it's the Holy Spirit's baptism that provides us with the spiritual operation we need, to save our souls. We are buried and risen with Christ through the operation of God (vs. 12). This speaks of God's salvation which comes to us through the baptism of the Holy Spirit – not our water baptism. Every believer has gone through a spiritual operation, when they were saved, which is explained as "the circumcision of Christ" (vs. 11) and "the operation of God" (vs. 12). In this saving operation, the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are applied to our lives.

God must perform a spiritual operation on me if I am going to be saved! This operation comes about through the work of the Holy Spirit, who immerses us, or brings us into a spiritual union with Jesus

Christ's death and resurrection. Our burial with Christ ("Buried with him in baptism" – vs. 12) presupposes our death with Christ and our resurrection with Christ ("risen with him" – vs. 12 and "quicken together with him" – vs. 13) completes the picture of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ, through the Spirit's work of spiritual immersion, or this important operation that has spiritually joined us to Christ, resulting in the application of Christ's death and resurrection to our lives.

During this saving operation, the old person we used to be, under the power of sin and the flesh was put to death ("putting off the body of the sins of the flesh" – vs. 11) and we became a new person in Christ, since we now share His life and victory ("And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him" – vs. 13). This is what it means to be born again. We actually share Christ's life in an ongoing spiritual union. We are made alive spiritually (Eph. 2:1) because the Holy Spirit has brought us into this new living relationship with Jesus Christ, who has risen from the dead. What a glorious saving transaction this is!

The spiritual operation that took place at the time of our salvation was the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which was an operation that spiritually immersed us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6), causing us to become spiritually alive with Jesus Christ ("quicken together with him" – Col. 2:13). Through the operation of the Holy Spirit's baptism, which brought us into this new spiritual partnership with Christ, we have been forgiven ("forgiven you all trespasses" – vs. 13). At Paul's baptism he was to declare how God had washed his sins away (Acts 22:16) since this is the picture that baptism presents – the complete removal or washing away of our sins through Christ's finished work.

Behind the backdrop of Spirit baptism is water baptism. Spirit baptism, or immersion into Jesus Christ, is the only baptism that saves us (Eph. 4:5), and water baptism becomes the picture of this glorious saving transaction. Because the Holy Spirit brings us into a spiritual union with Jesus Christ we become a co-partner or co-sharer in the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. In short, since we are linked to Christ, His death and resurrection can now save us from hell through the finished work of His death and resurrection.

This is why the mode of baptism is very important. Only immersion or being submerged paints the picture of the believer being “in Christ” (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:2), or totally surrounded by Jesus Christ, and entering into the full and complete saving provision of His death, burial, and resurrection. When we are taken underneath the water, and become completely buried by the water, this pictures our union in Christ’s death and burial, which at the time of our salvation, resulted in Christ’s death and payment for sin being applied to our lives. When we come out of the water, this pictures our resurrection union with Jesus Christ, which provides the promise of eternal spiritual life to every believing sinner.

Water baptism is the representation (picture) of the real thing (salvation’s cleansing) or what Christ has already done for us. Baptism pictures a person’s inner washing, or cleansing from sin, which occurs at the time of salvation, through the believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Eph. 5:26, Titus 3:5). Baptism is a picture of God’s inner work of the washing away of sin in view of the believer’s identification with Christ’s saving work.

1 Corinthians 6:11 declares:

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

1 Corinthians 6:11 explains our forgiveness in terms of cleansing. This washing was the spiritual operation that took place when we were saved. *Baptism is an outward demonstration of an inward work of grace.* At the very moment we believed on Christ for salvation, God washes all of our sins away forever (Col. 1:14; 2:13; Rev. 1:5). Baptism by immersion (submersion) illustrates this glorious and wonderful truth of complete spiritual cleansing or the total washing away of all our sins forever. This work is accomplished through our identification or union with Jesus Christ. Since we are vitally united to Christ, His full saving work is applied to our lives.

Our water baptism portrays, in picture form, the cleansing and salvation we have received through Christ. Peter reminds us of this blessed noonday truth. Let us not forget the beautiful picture that is being portrayed by every baptism.

1 Peter 3:20-21

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

In Noah's day, the ark was lifted up by the water, and this act of God saved Noah and his family. Peter now says, in a similar way, our water baptism saves us. However, Peter was speaking of the *picture* of what baptism represents, since he says, "The like figure" (meaning by picture). Many fail to see this, who have put their confidence or trust in their water baptism, to save them. It's not water baptism that saves us, but what baptism represents, which saves us – Christ's death on our behalf.

The expression "The like figure" (in picture form) relates back to what Peter started to talk about ("Christ also hath once suffered for sins"). This means that our water baptism looks back to the time when Christ (our ark) was judged for our sins (by God's flood of divine judgment), so we could be cleansed from all of our sins. Peter says our water baptism portrays the picture of how Christ died on the cross and was baptized, or immersed with God's judgment and wrath, in our place. Jesus was baptized with God's judgment (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50), so we don't have to be judged (John 3:18).

God's flood of judgment upon Christ (our ark) is what saves us. Just as the water lifted the ark out of the water in Noah's day, and saved Noah and his family, so the flood of God's wrath and judgment came upon Christ, so we could be lifted out of our sinful state and saved from hell. We are saved, not by our own water baptism, but by Christ's baptism to death at Calvary. This is what our baptism portrays. God's judgment, which was poured upon Christ on the cross, was likened to a baptism (Matthew 20:22; Luke 12:50). Baptism is a picture of what Christ has done for us.

Christ bore all of our sins and has taken God's baptism of judgment upon Himself, so He could cleanse us from our sins. Baptism saves us pictorially. The picture or "like figure" of what baptism represents

(Christ's judgment for our sins) is what actually saves us. Coupled with His death is the truth of Christ's resurrection ("by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" – 1 Pet. 3:21) since the resurrection is part of the Gospel message. There can be no salvation without Christ's resurrection. The baptism of Christ's suffering cannot save us if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Our baptism reminds us of the cleansing we have received through Christ's finished work - His death and resurrection.

2. It portrays the picture of our sanctification.

In 1776, the Second Continental Congress signed a very important document known as the Declaration of Independence. Of far greater significance for the Christian, however, is his "Declaration of Independence" that he has from sin. The second picture of what baptism portrays or represents is our victory and new life in Christ.

Our baptism pictures our victorious union or partnership we share with Jesus Christ (Roman 6:1-13). When I am taken underneath the water, and become completely buried by the water, this pictures my spiritual union, or partnership in Christ's death and burial (Rom. 6:1-4), which results in my death and burial to the old way of living (Rom. 6:6). When I rise out of the water, it sends the picture that I have a spiritual union with the risen Christ. As a result, I can now experience a victorious, new way of life, as I draw upon the power of Jesus Christ ("even so we also should walk in newness" - Rom. 6:4).

Romans chapter six primarily deals with the sanctification or life of victory and holiness a believer can possess through their spiritual union with Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6:6 puts it like this:

"Knowing this, that our old man (the old person under sin's power) is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin (the body controlled by sin) might be destroyed (no longer control our lives), that henceforth we should not serve sin."

The Holy Spirit's baptism of Roman's chapter six, which is the true baptism that sanctifies us, is pictured by water baptism. Christian baptism portrays how every believer shares a new relationship with

Jesus Christ, which frees him from the power of sin, and the old way of living. Dearly beloved, we share in Christ's victory over sin and can claim this victory today in view of our spiritual union with Christ's resurrection power (Phil. 3:10).

“O victory in Jesus,
My Savior, forever.
He sought me and bought me
With His redeeming blood;
He loved me ere I knew Him
And all my love is due Him,
He plunged me to victory,
Beneath the cleansing flood.”

Only baptism by immersion pictures our union (partnership) with the death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ. Therefore, the mode of baptism is important. Being totally immersed in the water and brought out of the water is the only picture that portrays the message of our complete washing, or cleansing in Christ, and the eternal life we have through His resurrection from the dead (John 11:25-26). In addition, immersion is the only picture that portrays our total victory over sin, which we have in Christ, since He has defeated sin through His death, passed through death, and is now risen again as the great Victor at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:20-23). The Bible says we share this victory with Christ, through His death and resurrection from the grave, and can claim this victory today in view of our union (partnership) with Christ.

David Moss declares:

“Pouring and sprinkling does not properly fulfill the symbolism associated with baptism. Neither can properly illustrate being placed into the body of Christ, nor participating in His death, burial and resurrection. Immersion is the only mode of baptism that fulfills this testimony and communicates the truth of our relationship with Christ.”

If we want to be obedient to what God tells us to do, and present the right picture and message concerning baptism (our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ), then we will submit to the ordinance of baptism by immersion. Immersion is the only Biblical way to be baptized, since it is the only picture that portrays our complete

forgiveness (washing) and victory (transformation), which we have through Christ's resurrection power.

A farmer went on a trip. While he was gone, one of his horses died. He asked his neighbor to bury the horse. The neighbor had been trying to teach the farmer the truth about baptism by immersion. The farmer only believed in sprinkling, so the neighbor thought he would teach him a lesson. Well, when the farmer got back from his vacation he found the dead horse lying in his back yard with a few handfuls of dirt sprinkled over his body. The horse was beginning to stink and bloat. Immediately, the farmer went over to the neighbor and asked why he didn't bury the horse.

The neighbor smiled and said, "I sprinkled him to remind you that there is a difference between sprinkling, and burial, so I can once again share with you what the Bible says, 'We are buried with him by baptism'" (Rom. 6:4). The farmer got the message and was baptized by immersion. He understood that baptism was always to picture a person's death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ or the complete forgiveness and victory they possess through Him.

The Bible does not say we are "sprinkled with him by baptism." This would suggest that Christ's work is not fully complete and that we do not have God's full saving and sanctifying work accomplished on our behalf. The Bible says we are totally immersed in Christ and share in the complete and full benefits of His saving and transforming ministry. This is what our water baptism teaches us. It reminds us that the Holy Spirit has brought our lives into a new saving and dynamic living relationship with Jesus Christ, so we can live differently and possess a new way of life.

"New Life in Christ, abundant and free,
Forever gone there's a bright new dawn
For in Christ I have found new life!"

The Command of Baptism (Obedience)

Please notice that baptism is not an option for Christians! It is a command of our Lord ("baptizing them" – Matt. 28:19). This is

something we must do. To not be baptized is disobedience. In the New Testament we read about Christians being baptized immediately after they were saved. Throughout the book of Acts, baptism is shown in the closest possible association with conversion. The three thousand souls converted at Pentecost were immediately baptized (Acts 2:41). As soon as the Ethiopian believed in Christ, he stopped his chariot, so he could be baptized (Acts 8:38). As soon as Paul received his sight back, following his conversion, he was baptized (Acts 9:18).

When Cornelius and his household were saved, Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48). As unbelievers in Corinth were being won to Jesus Christ, they were also being baptized (Acts 18:8). This means that the normal pattern was for believers, who were saved, to be baptized in obedience to Christ's command. Have you been baptized? If not, you need to follow the Lord's command in order to please Christ and identify with Him and Christianity. Baptism was instituted by our Lord as an ordinance for believers to follow. It was not an option but a command!

We must once again understand that baptism is not necessary for salvation (John 4:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:14-16; Luke 23:43; John 19:30); however, it is necessary for obedience! It was commanded in the Great Commission and practiced in the book of Acts and epistles (1 Cor. 1:14-17). Think of this. A person may go to heaven unbaptized but he will be unbaptized for all eternity! Baptism is something we can do right now, while we are living on earth, in order to please Christ. We won't be able to do it in Heaven. Obey Christ's command now, so that you can be rewarded in eternity, and be glad that you obeyed Him. Baptism is your first step of obedience.

Some of the first commands we gave our children were not to touch the things on the coffee table. They were to learn obedience from the very start of their childhood days. The same is true about a new convert to Christ. Their first command is to be baptized. They must learn obedience to Jesus Christ from the very inception of their salvation and new life. Baptism is the first command to be obeyed. If you disobey Jesus Christ and refuse to be baptized, then you will be living in open defiance and disobedience to Jesus Christ's command. God wants you to get started right and obeying Christ's ordinance of

baptism is the first step to a new life of surrender and obedience to Jesus Christ. First things first!

The Name of Baptism (Trinity)

Matthew 28:19

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

What name is to be associated with a person’s baptism? It’s the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From the very beginning, the Church has practiced baptism in the name of the Trinity. The fact that baptism was done, while mentioning all three names of the Godhead, speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity. People say the word trinity is not found in the Bible but neither are the words omniscient and omnipresent. However, we know from a study of doctrine that God is all these things. Therefore, it’s equally true that God is also a trinity in His eternal being and existence. This formula is a strong affirmation of Trinitarianism which is the Biblical doctrine that teaches there is only one God that exists in three persons. In giving this formula, Jesus associates Himself with the Father and the Holy Spirit, placing Himself on an equal plain with them.

Calling out the name of the Trinity at a person’s baptism reveals two things:

1. It reveals the believer is identified with the Godhead.

The act of baptism associates a believer with the person of Jesus Christ and with the Triune God. These words are a rich and comprehensive statement of the wonderful union that believers have with the whole Godhead. When the name of the Trinity is sounded out at a believer’s baptism, it tells the story that a believer is now identified with God. In believer’s baptism, Christians publicly identify themselves with the Triune Godhead. They acknowledge that God is their Father (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 1:2), that Jesus Christ is their Lord or Master (Rom. 14:8; 1 Cor. 7:22), and that the Holy Spirit is the One who indwells, empowers, and teaches them (John 14:20, 26).

2. It reveals the Godhead was involved in our salvation.

The whole triune God was involved in the plan of our salvation. Our baptism is a reminder of this. How wonderful this is! Our baptism gives testimony to how the Godhead has saved us and given us new life. In respect to salvation: The Father planned it (Eph. 1:4), the Son supplied it (2 Cor. 5:21), and the Spirit applied it to our lives (John 3:5-8)! Without the Godhead, we would be lost and going to hell. Glory to the Father, Glory to the Son, Glory to the Holy Spirit, Glory to the three in one!

The use of the singular word “name” indicates that every member of the Godhead shares the same existence as the one true God. The idea of “name” signifies unity among the members of the Godhead. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons vehemently oppose the doctrine of the Trinity (God is three in one and one in three). This is because they reject the doctrinal truth that Jesus Christ is the only true God which has come in the flesh to save mankind. When we are baptized, we give account to the deity of Jesus Christ, and the saving work of God on our behalf. We demonstrate that the Trinity, or all three members of the Godhead, were involved in the glorious work and plan of our salvation.

William Pettingill used to say:

“One in three and three in One and the One in the middle died for me.”

The single use of the word “name” (not names) also indicated that the baptism (immersion) was done only once (not three times). As the new converts were baptized, the formula was repeated one time in the “name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

Several years ago at our annual fair ministry, a lady wanted to argue with me that a person needed to be baptized three times forward, in order to be truly baptized. She was adamant about it. If a person did not go under the water three times they were not truly baptized. I shared with this lady how we should never place our church traditions above what the Bible actually says concerning the mode of baptism or the way baptism was carried out. The singular word (“name”) signifies that each person of the Godhead shares the same existence

and being, as the one true God. Therefore, we are to baptize a convert only once, while spelling out the singular “name” of the one triune God, or the Trinitarian oneness of the Godhead. Three immersions are not heresy; they simply are not necessary.

The Reason for Baptism (Testimony)

We need to focus on the word “baptizing” once again (Matt. 28:19). What is the reason for Jesus establishing the ordinance of baptism? Why were the believers being baptized? The answer is two-fold.

1. It was a testimony of faith and repentance.

Christian baptism was a testimony of a person’s newfound faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 8:34-38) and their repentance (Acts 2:37-38). Let us not miss this important point. Believers who were saved, immediately found a body of water in which to be baptized, in order to indicate they had placed their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, and had repented of all their sins.

Acts 16:30-34

“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”
Baptism followed a believer’s faith in Christ, since it was an outward demonstration, or visible token and testimony of their newfound faith in Christ. The same is true about repentance.

Luke 24:47

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

This Great Commission passage emphasizes the person’s need for repentance. Thus, repentance and baptism have a connection in the Great Commission passages. A person’s baptism becomes the

testimony or confirmation of his genuine repentance and willingness to break from sin. This is why both were joined together in the same verses.

Acts 2:38

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

We have dealt with this verse already. A person’s baptism does not save them, but becomes the token or testimonial that his sins are already forgiven. The one (baptism) pre-supposes the other (repentance). They are joined together to indicate that a person’s baptism confirms the genuineness of his repentance and forgiveness before the Lord. A person is baptized “for the remission of sins” only in the sense that he confirms his repentance, salvation, and forgiveness before God (Mark 16:16). *He is baptized “for the remission of sins” in a conformational sense - not a salvation sense.* In other words, a person openly demonstrates and confirms the genuineness of their repentance and salvation on the basis of their baptism.

2. It was a testimony of discipleship.

The ordinance of baptism was established by Christ to also testify of a person’s desire to follow Jesus Christ. The ordinance of baptism was established to allow Christians to publicly identify with the movement of Christianity and Christ. Christian baptism is a ceremony by which a new believer publicly declares himself to be a follower, or disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Great Commission passage included baptism with the command to “teach” or make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19). Baptism became an outward act of identification with Christ, a visible, public testimony that one belonged to Him. The call of Christ is not only a call to salvation; it is a call to obedience after one is saved. What baptism signifies is our willingness to follow Jesus Christ and obey Him.

“Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus!
Anywhere, everywhere,
I will follow on!”

Is this your heart's desire and ambition? It should be, since Christ has saved you from hell, and given you new life. For this reason, every Christian should be ready and willing to obey Christ's command and be baptized. Your willingness to be baptized indicates your desire to do what Jesus says and follow His commands. It indicates that you want to become a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. Have you been acting and living like a follower of Christ, or have you been following the world, the flesh, and the devil in some particular way?

Please note the connection between the words "baptizing" and then "teaching them to observe all things I have commanded" in the Great Commission passage (Matt. 28:19). This indicates that those who were baptized were ready and willing to follow the commands of Jesus Christ. They were willing to become his disciples or followers. As we have already explained, the Great Commission goes beyond evangelism. It is not enough to simply make converts and let them fend for themselves. They must be taught to *obey* the commandments of Jesus Christ regarding discipleship, as found in the Gospel accounts, and the rest of the New Testament epistles. The essence of discipleship is becoming like the Master and this is brought about by systematic teaching and submission to Christ's authority and Word.

A key word associated with baptism is discipleship. Judaism and the Law had ended and the new movement of Christianity was under way in the book of Acts. Within the book of Acts, the early church is seen practicing the Great Commission which involves baptizing new converts. These converts were willing to become a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ and identify with the new movement of Christianity, which was God's new work.

Acts 10:47-48

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

Acts 19:5

"When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

This baptism formula (“in the name of the Lord Jesus”) does not mean that the formula of the Great Commission was abandoned during the Acts record. There is no evidence that the writer wanted to give a new formula - a “Jesus only” baptism. In Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48 and 19:5 we see the name of Jesus singled out and associated with baptism to indicate the authority Christ had over the lives of those being baptized. Singling out the name of Christ in the Acts record is not given as a different formula for baptism; rather, Christ’s name is mentioned alone to indicate that the people were surrendering their lives totally to Jesus Christ.

The emphasis in water baptism is absolute surrender to Christ. In fact, at the time of their baptism, the converts would call out and give verbal testimony of the Lordship of Christ over their lives, and their willingness to become followers, or disciples of Jesus Christ. We see this testimonial in Paul’s baptism (“calling on the name of the Lord” - Acts 22:16) and perhaps Timothy’s baptism (“and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” – 1 Tim. 6:12).

The new converts bore public witness that they were the property of Jesus, and would give evidence of this by calling on His name, at the time of their baptism. Those baptized were identifying themselves with Christ, Christianity, and the new movement of God! Baptism was a way to demonstrate a person’s discipleship, or desire to follow Christ, and give loyal allegiance to the Lord and the cause of Christianity. This is why, at the time of a person’s baptism, they confessed the Lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives.

“Now I belong to Jesus,
Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone,
But for eternity.”

This is the message that we are portraying by our baptism. I wonder if you can say this today? Are you fully surrendered to Him or are you holding back? Have you taken the easy road? If you have already been baptized and are holding back, then your baptism is speaking volumes against you. This is because baptism stands for a person’s identification with Christ in discipleship and surrender.

“All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said:

“If you desire Christ for a perpetual guest, give him all the keys of your heart; let not one cabinet be locked up from him; give him the range of every room and the key of every chamber.”

Let Jesus Christ control your life and surrender totally to Him. New converts need to be taught that they should be baptized as soon as possible, not to seal or confirm their salvation, but to make public testimony of their salvation, through their identification with the Lord, and their willingness to follow Him. The call of Christ to discipleship is one of obedience and the first public act of obedience is our baptism. Baptism is the first command that we must observe, and the first act of obedience of the child of God.

If we are going to become a follower of Christ, we need to begin by obeying His first command! It should be the first mark of obedience that leads to a whole life of obedience and commitment to the Lord. When the believer submits to baptism, they are testifying of their desire to obey the Lord in every area of their lives, and make Him Lord of all! Is Jesus Christ Lord of your life? Is He Lord in your family, Lord in your marriage, and Lord in your daily living?

Since Jesus spoke about making disciples or followers of Christ out of new converts, and teaching them “to observe all things I have commanded” in the Great Commission passage (Matt. 28:19), it’s

necessary to teach new converts what Christ actually taught, regarding the basic tenants of discipleship.

Luke 9:23

“And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Luke 14:26-27

“If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (follower).”

These are the very first passages that need to be taught to young converts. If they are going to become a disciple, or follower of Christ, they must learn what Jesus taught about discipleship, or following Him. New converts must be presented with these truths that Jesus taught about discipleship. These passages explain what it means to be identified with Christ and follow Him. These verses present the true reason for baptism! Christian baptism signifies that new believers are publicly declaring themselves to be followers or disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are telling the story that they want to place themselves under the Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. They are saying they want to make Jesus Lord of their lives and give Him first place in their lives.

Baptism became an outward act of identification with Christ, a visible, public testimony that one was willing to surrender his life to Jesus Christ and follow Him. This is why baptism and following the commands of Christ are linked together in the Great Commission passage. When we pass through the waters in obedience to Christ’s command we are identifying ourselves as one of Christ’s followers who is fully surrendered and yielded to Him.

This is why you shouldn’t pass through the waters of baptism without understanding the true reason and message behind baptism. When we come to the waters, we must remember there is to be absolute surrender and sacrifice to the Lord. We are to die to ourselves, before we come to the waters of baptism, and give our lives completely to Him.

John 12:24 records the words of Jesus:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

When the will of God crosses the will of man, somebody has to die! Of course, the person who must die to their own dreams, ambitions, self, sins, and goals is the Christian who wants to become a follower of Christ. Following Christ means an immediate death to self and personal ambitions. It means one must dedicate themselves fully to Jesus Christ and surrender his will and goals to Christ.

A man was about to be baptized when he suddenly remembered that he had his wallet in his back pocket. He said, “Preacher, wait until I take my wallet out of my pocket, and then I’ll be ready to be baptized.” The Preacher said, “Keep it in your pocket. I’ve found that many Christian wallets need to be baptized along with the person entering the water.”

The preacher’s point was this. When we enter the waters of baptism, we are signifying that we are willing to give ourselves and substance entirely to the Lord and His cause. We are not going to hold anything back. We are going to sell out for Jesus!

Since Jesus spoke of the importance of discipleship in the Great Commission passage, or becoming a follower of Christ, it’s important to understand what it means to follow Christ. A person cannot become a follower of Christ unless they know how to follow Him.

Jesus spoke of discipleship in four ways:

1. Superior love toward Christ (Luke 14:26)

“If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (follower).”

It’s obvious that Jesus is using the word “hate” in a comparative sense, not a bad ethical sense, since Jesus said elsewhere that we

were to even love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). The point of comparison is this. We must love Jesus more than anybody or anything else in life. He must be our first love and preeminent love. Are you in love with Jesus Christ today? One woman told her Christian fiancée that she would marry him with only one stipulation or condition. She could never love him more than Jesus Christ! Jesus first, others second, and you last! Our problem today is that we don't love the Lord, as we should – first!

Revelation 2:4 says:

“Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

Many times we love other people, more than Jesus, and what He wants us to do. That is why we follow their worldly ways and become sucked into the system of the world (1 John 2:15 – “Love not the world”). When we love others more than Jesus Christ, we give in to peer pressure, what people think is right, what they want us to do, how they think, and how they want us to live and act. As a follower of Jesus Christ, we are to love Him more than anyone else, or anything else in life. First love for Jesus Christ means absolute loyalty to Him. We will not put the opinions and ideas of others before Christ or the things in this world before the Lord. We will keep Him first in our hearts, goals, ambitions, and lives.

A little girl stayed for dinner at the home of her first-grade friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli, and the mother asked if she liked it. The child replied very politely, "Oh, yes, I love it." But when the bowl of broccoli was passed, she declined to take any. The hostess said, "I thought you said you loved broccoli." The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes, ma'am, I do, but not enough to eat it!"

Sometimes we think that we love Jesus, but not enough to really become His dedicated follower, and sold out for Him. We think we love Jesus, but not enough to say “no” to the crowd, and “yes” to Him. We think we love Jesus but not enough to put Him first in our marriage, family, and life.

John 21:15, “So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”

Many times we love the fish more than the Master. We love the world's goods that fill our belly instead of lovingly giving ourselves for the life of the Master. Jesus is constantly reminding us that He deserves our love and loyalty above all else.

“In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil, and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
Christian, love me more than these.”

2. Surrender to Christ (Luke 9:23)

“And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Christ said a follower of His must learn to "deny himself." This is not an advertisement for Visa or MasterCard. When people deny themselves, they surrender to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2). This is the problem with many Christians today. They are not willing to deny themselves of those things that get in their way of following Christ wholeheartedly and completely. They really love themselves more than Jesus Christ. They also love their own sins, plans, ideas, goals, ambitions, and dreams more than Jesus and what He wants them to do. The positive confession movement, which concludes a Christian should follow his dreams, goals, and be able to think into existence whatever he wants out of life, runs contrary to Christ's teaching on discipleship. The wealth, health, and self gospel runs contrary to Biblical revelation and is a false view of Christian living and Christ's call to discipleship.

Surrender is when we deny ourselves of self-living, self-interests, selfish goals, selfish sins, and give up everything to follow Christ. Do we really have this attitude and ambition in life?

“I surrender all, I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour, I surrender all,

Someone wrote:

“We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, ‘I give up, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.’”

William Booth once said:
“God shall have all there is of William Booth.”

3. Sacrifice for Christ (Luke 9:23)

Luke 9:23

“And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Jesus also said in Luke 14:27:

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

The “cross” speaks of personal sacrifice or the sacrificial way of living. Following Christ is a sacrifice that will cost you something in life - your time, talents, treasure, and even torment (agony, suffering) for the cause of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:12

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

The cross, or sacrificial life of discipleship, may involve the pathway of rejection, shame, suffering, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, denial, hatred, insults, persecution, mental agony, and even death for Christ’s sake. In short, the cross-way-of-life speaks of the willingness to sacrifice our lives for Jesus Christ and experience hardship for Him.

“Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
And there’s a cross for me.”

Two examples are given of the cross-life (sacrificial life):

- a. Contractor – must prepare for building (consider the cost)

Luke 14:28

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? “

- b. Conqueror or military leader – must prepare for battle (consider the consequences)

Luke 14:31

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?”

These illustrations that Jesus gave remind us that discipleship or following Jesus Christ will cost us something. When we surrender to Jesus' call of discipleship, we must consider what it will cost us, and what the ultimate consequences might be in serving the Lord – shame, ridicule, mockery, hardships, and even death. The *cross* life or the *sacrificial* life of following Jesus Christ always costs us something. Many want to serve the Lord in their own way, their own time, and on their own terms.

If serving the Lord costs them too much time or energy, or if serving the Lord conflicts with their sports, hobbies, or favorite TV programs, then they do not want to really serve the Lord, and commit to Him, or His way for their lives. Many Christians today pleasure themselves instead of please the Lord. The cross life is not the “me” life! It is a life of sacrifice to Jesus Christ. In short, Jesus wants everything! Are you willing to sacrifice your time, talents, and treasure? Are you willing to experience hardship and ridicule for Christ? The cross life is the sacrificial life.

Never forget this: The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience. We miss God's true blessing when we fail to walk in obedience to Him.

“Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve,
To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labor and not to ask for any reward
Save that of knowing that we do your will.”

4. Submission to Christ (Luke 9:24)

When Jesus said “follow me,” everyone understood what He meant. The new converts were to submit to His lordship over their lives and obediently follow His commands and sayings. Christ’s words, “and follow me,” point to the submissive obedience that is involved in discipleship. This is the fourth life-changing truth that is associated with real discipleship. When a person is a true disciple, or follower of Christ, they will submit to His commands and follow Him. Following Christ means a person will make new plans and develop new priorities that will enable him to effectively obey Christ. He will reshape and remold his life in a way that will conform to Christ’s standards.

Jesus said, “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19). As Jesus called His disciples, He told each one of them to follow Him. “Follow me” (John 1:43; Matt. 9:9). Any questions? What part of this don’t we understand? His words still come ringing across the pages of the Bible and make their way into our hearts today. Christ is calling us to follow Him in the place where He positioned us in society. This means we should obey the Lord completely and wholeheartedly. Let’s set the record straight and not mince words. Following Christ is obeying Christ!

“Follow Me, follow Me.
I’m the way, the truth, the life
Come follow Me.’
Like a choir of silver bells so clearly ringing,
Is the Savior’s voice, ‘Come follow Me.’”

Real discipleship involves total submission or willing obedience to what Christ commands us to do. We must remember that love is obedience!

Jesus said in John 14:15:
“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Someone has remarked:
“Don’t throw God the bone of your love unless there is the meat of obedience on it.”

The marks of true discipleship are these: superior love for Christ, surrender to Christ, sacrifice for Christ, and submission to Christ. Anything less than this is not true discipleship according to what Jesus said. Jesus Christ does not want self-centeredness and half-hearted devotion. He wants us to offer ourselves completely to Him (Rom. 12:1-2). Following Jesus' call to discipleship means that we will not be conformed to the world and our wants, our loves, our desires, our plans and our ways, but to His ways and will over our lives!!

In the Great Commission passage (Matt. 28:19-20), Jesus linked baptism with discipleship, or following His commands. If one entered the waters of baptism, they were demonstrating their willingness to become a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Those early Christians that were baptized were identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ. By this outward ceremony, they were demonstrating their willingness to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, love Him more than anything else in life, and take up their cross and follow Him, as He commanded. They were willing and ready to become loyal disciples or followers of Jesus Christ!

This is the reason why early New Testament believers were baptized and why you should be baptized today. Baptism is an ordinance designed to demonstrate how Christians are willing to follow the commands of Jesus Christ and place themselves under His total authority. How about you? Are you willing to surrender, submit, supremely love, and sacrifice your life for Jesus Christ? The first step of obedience, within your Christian life, is your baptism. When you obey the Lord in baptism, you are indicating that you are ready to follow Jesus Christ and live for Him.

The closing words of the hymn, "Take my Life and Let It Be" should be our heart's desire and devotion to Christ. Baptism represents this desire and devotion to the Lord.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.
Take my will and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart; it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love; my Lord I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.
Ever, only, all for Thee.”