

Making Disciples, Obedience, and Believer's Baptism

(Matthew 18-20)

WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Jesus possesses *all* authority in heaven, and on earth. Christ's followers should take the Gospel to everyone everywhere and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe *all* of Christ's commands—remembering that He is with them always, even to the end of the age.

1.) The universal authority or perpetual power of Jesus affirms His divinity; Jesus is God (28:18)

- Jesus has divine authority to forgive sins and to save His people; this authority is God's alone (Matt. 1:1, 17, 21; 2:2; 7:29; 8:9; 9:6–8; 10:1; 11:27; 21:23).
- His power is superior to and over all other authorities, whether spiritual, demonic, or otherwise. See Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 1:15–23. Jesus declares He has authority over everything. Believers do not need to fear Satan or anyone else while engaged in His service.
- His resurrection proves this authority, even over death.
- Claiming that Jesus is your personal Lord and Savior and saying that you believe the Gospel is hypocrisy if it does not include a recognition of His authority over you in every area of your life.
- Jesus told his disciples, “You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14). If we continually refuse to obey Jesus, we are not truly His friends. Worse, we may not be Christians.
- Jesus' authority extends to the work we are called to do, including what is demanded by the Great Commission (28:18-20). Because we are under Jesus' authority, we are to take His Gospel to the world and “make disciples” of the nations (v. 19).¹
- Because of this authority, Jesus has the right to issue His followers their “marching orders,” but He also has the ability to help them carry out those orders [by the power of the Holy Spirit].²

2.) The ongoing program and pledged presence of Jesus (28:19–20)

- Jesus commissions His disciples, even as He pledged to be with them forever—spiritually, not physically—to empower them for their future mission (Holy Spirit, our Helper will come; Jn. 14:26).

- Jesus' command in v.19 is to make disciples, not to blindly “go.” His focus is the task of every believer to make disciples capable of making other disciples of Christ (wherever they may be).
- Making disciples involves baptizing them and then teaching them obedience to all of Jesus' commandments. The first declares a once-and-for-all public witness. The second is a life-long, always incomplete, task. All who wish to become part of God's family must now come to Him through faith in Jesus and grow in their knowledge of, and relationship with, Christ.
- The word Baptize means to immerse; Sprinkling or pouring is not obedient to what Jesus directs his disciples to do in v. 19.
- “Them” refers to those made disciples. Thus, baptism is only for believers. Babies do not count. You cannot make a baby a disciple. A baby does not have the mental or spiritual capacity to grasp discipleship. Proper baptism is a believer's baptism.
- Jesus' disciples baptize in trinity the name of the *Son*, as well as the name of the *Father* and the *Holy Spirit* (v. 19). Placing Jesus on the same level with the Father and Spirit makes more explicit what is implicit in Acts' “baptism in Jesus' name” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; compare 22:16)—Jesus is divine (Mt 1:23).³
- Untaught believers do not serve well and do not honor God well. Churches today are filled with members ignorant of spiritual truths because they're untaught in the Scripture. Teaching “what I have commanded you” implies proper doctrine. Christ-like conduct is not ‘choosing what you like.’ Christ's doctrines objectively matter.
- His promise: Christ's Spirit remains with us (v. 20). Moses did not travel without God's presence (Ex. 33:15). Christ's presence encourages our service. He does not leave us alone. Where He goes, we follow, knowing we are not alone.
- APPLICATION: The Lord is risen! Jesus calls His people (all believers) to follow in believers' baptism and become disciple-makers. He will be with them irrespective of their success or failure. V.18–20 pair with 1:23 to frame Matthew's Gospel with references to Immanuel—*God with us*. In Jesus, God remains with us for now and eternity! What more do we need to persevere in Christian living? We must go out and obey his commission.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 647.

² Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 431.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 28:16–20.