

**Contributions.**

**The Commission vs. Denominationalism.**

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The great commission given by our Lord to his Apostles, to disciple all the nations, is surrounded by the grandest events that mark the world's history, and is placed amid a setting of gospel facts unequalled for sublimity and importance in the whole Bible. Indeed, through the commission was developed the gospel system of salvation, and revealed to man the way of life in Christ Jesus. Its connection with all the gospel facts is so intimate, that it cannot be separated from them, and together they form the centre group of the whole gospel system. It is highly important, therefore, that the relation of these facts and truths to each other should be understood, in order to a clear comprehension of the commission. I opine that the want of a correct understanding right here has been the blunder of the sectarian world. This is too plainly seen in the numerous theories and mischievous practices of denominationalism, that clash with the plain, simple truths of the grand commission of Jesus Christ.

And now that we may get these before us in their logical order, let us read the whole commission, according to the new revision, as given by the four Evangelists.

MATTHEW'S record (xxviii. 18-20), reads: "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, all authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

MARK testifies: "And he said unto them, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." (Ch. xvi. 15-18).

LUKE records: "Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures; and he said unto them: Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." (Ch. xxiv. 45-49.)

JOHN says: "Jesus therefore said to them again, peace be unto you. As my Father hath sent me even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Spirit; whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (Ch. xx. 21-23.)

At first sight these four records seem to differ somewhat, but a careful analysis of the commission will show that there is a perfect harmony of ideas expressed, and will give a more correct view of the logical order and connection of its various parts.

1. The first in order, as well as in importance, is the supreme authority and divinity of Jesus himself, as the

following will show. Matthew's statement is: "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth." "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations," "Teaching them to observe all things whatever I command you." "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Mark records: "Go ye preach the gospel to the whole creation." "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned." "In my name shall they cast out demons," etc. Luke expresses the same idea, thus: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, unto all the nations." "And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you." John testifies: "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep."

2. This announcement is followed with the command to the apostles, authorizing them to preach the gospel and teach the nations to accept his reign. Thus Matt., "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, etc." Mark: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." While Luke's record is, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations," etc. "Ye are witnesses of these things." And in Acts, i. 8, "And ye shall be my witnesses, unto the uttermost parts of the earth." And John utters the same in, "Even so send I you."

3. The command to "Go preach," is accompanied with the promise of divine power, the Holy Spirit, and the Saviour's presence; thus, Matt., "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." In Mark, it is stated, "And these signs shall follow them that believe, in Thy name shall they cast out demons, speak with new tongues, lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Luke records, "I send forth the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." In Acts, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father," etc. "But ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence." "But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." (Acts i. 4, 5, 8.) While John simply says: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Spirit."

4. Their Mission was universal: "Make disciples of all the nations" (Matt.). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark). "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations" (Luke). "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John). Thus, through the proclamation of the gospel of peace they were to conquer the nations for Jesus Christ, for all time, "Even unto the end of the world."

5. The gospel they were to proclaim, consists of "Facts, precepts, or duties, and promises." The facts are three in number, (1) the death of Jesus, (2) his burial and (3) his resurrection; as tersely given by the Apostle in 1 Cor. xv. 1-4. Luke gives these three facts: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day." The precepts or duties commanded are, (1) "Faith in the Christ, (2) Repentance, and (3) Baptism." Mark gives the first and last of these: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Luke gives the second; "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name." And Mat-

thew mentions the last, and completing act of obedience in the process of turning to the Lord, the other two being understood, thus: "And make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name," etc. The promises are likewise three, (1) "Remission of sins (2) Heirship (3) Everlasting life." The first of these is contained in the words "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And in Luke's statement, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name." While John expresses the same idea in the words, "whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them." The promise of heirship is found in the language of Matthew, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It will be readily seen, that heirship, the relation expressed by "into the name," etc., is also the reception of the Holy Spirit, and that the one cannot be without the other, so Paul says, Gal. iv. 6, "And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And that this is "The Spirit of adoption" (Romans viii. 15), so in Acts ii. 38, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." But further, the possession of heirship secured the gift of Eternal Life. "Baptizing them into the name" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brings the taught into the relationship of children of God, to whom are given "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." But again, "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). And in still closer connection with the giving of the commission is the statement of John (xx. 31), "But these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name." Now, all this is implied in the statement in Mark, xvi. 16, "But he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Disbelief is the complete rejection of Jesus Christ. It is the want of faith, repentance, confession, baptism, and Christian life, and in the state of condemnation there is neither forgiveness nor eternal life, for "He that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii. 36.) In the first part of this verse, namely, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life," we have the opposite of disbelief given in Mark. Hence the promise of eternal life to all who are believers, as opposed to the disbelieving in Mark xvi. 16, is closely implied. The promises, then, of the gospel they were commanded to preach, are, pardon of past sins, heirship and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The gospel embraces, therefore, facts for our belief, precepts for our obedience, and promises for our enjoyment.

6. We notice next an item of vast importance in the commission, namely, the teaching and nourishing of the church in all things that pertain to the proper development and growth in spiritual life. This is contained in the following: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matthew); "Feed my lambs, . . . Tend my sheep," (John). Upon the faithful observance of the "all things" commanded, depends the final promise, eternal life.

7. The commission closes with a solemn pronouncement of condemnation against all who disbelieve and reject the authority of God's exalted Son, thus: "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark); "Whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John). In the execution of the commission by the Apostles, all this was fully carried

out on Pentecost and subsequently, as an appeal to the Acts of the Apostles will show. Those various items in their historical order are: (1) The Apostles fully qualified for their work, as the witnesses of Christ (ii. 4, 32) "They well understood that their work in making disciples must begin with teaching men concerning the gospel, hence, (2) they with the clearest arguments prove the divine claim of Jesus of Nazareth, and proclaim his supreme authority; "Being, therefore, by the right hand of God exalted, . . . he hath poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens, but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (ii. 33-36).

(3) The facts, precepts and promises of the gospel are all sustained: "Jesus of Nazareth, . . . ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay; whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death" (ii. 22-24). "He," David, "foreseeing this, spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in Hades nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up," etc. (ii. 31, 32). Thus, the facts were proclaimed. The precepts and duties were enforced. "To those whose belief of these facts led them to cry out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins." And in this language, "Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ," the demand is made that Israel shall accept Jesus as "both Lord and Christ." It is equivalent to "believe in Jesus of Nazareth as both Lord and Christ." So everywhere, in the fulfillment of their commission, faith, repentance and baptism were taught and practised by the Apostles.

(4) The promises of the gospel were given to the obedient; thus, in the command to "Repent and be baptized," these gracious results are offered for their enjoyment: "Unto the remission of your sins;" and, "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (ii. 38). In this, "The Spirit of adoption was promised;" the obedient "were added unto them;" and the Lord added to them "day those that were saved" (ii. 41, 47). "And believers were the more added to the Lord" (ii. 41). In this way they became "heirs of God," as was contemplated in the commission, in baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Also the gospel was preached as the system of life. Applying the prophecy of David, the Apostle says: "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life" (ii. 28); and they were to speak to the people "All the words of this life" (v. 20), and they rejoiced that God had granted to the Gentiles "Repentance unto life" (vi. 18), and charged the Jews with rejecting the gospel, and thereby judging themselves "Unworthy of eternal life," (xiii. 46). (5) As the commission contains the whole world in its scope, so the Apostle announced the gospel to be for Jew and Gentile, "For to you," said Peter, "is the promise and to your children, and to them that are afar off," etc. (ii. 39).

6. The instruction of the church and the observance of the "All things," is thus recorded, "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ii. 42). Again "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in

the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God" (xiv. 22).

7. They proclaimed the judgments of God upon unbelieving and disobedient: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord come, that great and notable day" (ii. 20). Also, that Christ must be obeyed, and the disobedient "shall be utterly destroyed from among the people" (iii. 23). Again 'tis "He who is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead" (x. 42), and, that "He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent; inasmuch as he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (xvii. 30, 31). Here then we have the scope of the grand commission as given to the Apostles, and to the church, and with what fidelity this has been carried out by the professed church, in theory and practice, is to be judged from the creeds of denominationalism, unless their adherents have done better than the teaching of their creeds would lead them to do.

**On Vanity.**

The powerful influence of the gospel does not confer new intellectual powers, or new moral and spiritual susceptibilities when we believe and obey it, but illumines them with the glorious light of heaven and directs them to a proper exercise, and influences them with pure and holy emotions. This is especially true in regard to our sentiments, which, in such a large measure, determine our character.

The love of approbation will often lead the man and woman of the world to say and do anything, right or wrong, if they can only get approbation and applause. Vanity becomes the ruling passion of life. A line of conduct that will secure the approval of God, is the legitimate result of a renewed nature; and speaking and doing all things, "Not as pleasing men but God, who trieth our hearts."

Now, while it is becoming and lovely for "Every one to please his neighbor for his good to edification," it is unbecoming and highly offensive to our God and Saviour, either to sanction error or to conform to human expedients for the sake of securing the friendship of our fellow men, or of procuring their approbation.

Vanity is so strong a passion in many natures that it will often assert itself in the Christian's heart, and it is only by earnest prayer and diligent watchfulness that a victory over its impulses can be obtained.

Without being uncharitable, we are compelled to judge that many who have known and obeyed the simple truth of the gospel, and, for a while, have appreciated its inviolable sanctity, impelled by their vain desires for distinction and outward show, have united themselves with popular religious bodies and floated carelessly along the stream of ease and formalism to death and judgment.

We have known others so far carried away by vain desires, that they are constantly seeking the patronage of large churches and the adulation of popular ministers; feeling themselves highly honored if they are recognized as orthodox, or invited to unite with them in their unscriptural modes of making converts.

Surely, if our position is right, based upon apostolic teaching and precedent, we need no human patronage, for "one is our master, even Christ;" and we can have no higher honor than that which comes from Him; we need no other recognition but His; and we are sure that we can have no higher reward than that which He will bestow; and may it, dear brethren, be our joy to hear from Him, when life is ended, these blessed words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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