

The mission of the church (3): baptize and teach (Matthew 28:19b–20a)

The Lord Jesus Christ declared the mission of the church: “Go and make disciples of all nations.” He specified as well the manner in which this was to be done, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Only when you understand and obey fully, are you fulfilling the mission He has given.

1. *Baptize them*

a. *What is the significance of the in-the-name-of phrase?*

- It distinguishes Christian water baptism from other baptisms.
- It helps explain the sense of baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ found in Acts.
- It points to the Trinitarian nature of God and hence the deity of Jesus Christ.

The deity of Jesus was the big hurdle for the Jews. The disciples had struggled with it (John 14:8–10) and Peter focused on it in his Pentecost sermon. This was probably in his mind when he called upon them to repent (change their mind about Jesus) and be baptized. John the Baptist had prepared the way and being baptized in the name of Jesus acknowledged Jesus as the pre-existent, pre-eminent One who was coming, and who would take away the sin of the world (cf. Mark 1:4; John 1:29–30).

b. *How does baptizing relate to discipleship?*

- Baptism is a disciple’s opportunity to confess Jesus is Lord (cf. Romans 10:9–10).
- The symbolism of baptism portrays things that happen in the true disciple’s life, such as washing (of sin), turning from sin and turning to Christ.
- By baptizing the believer the church accepts the believer as a fellow disciple (cf. Acts 10:1–11:18; s.a. 1 Corinthians 1:14–17).

We hope and pray that proclaiming Christ will result in some believing. Those believing are responsible to be baptized and the church is responsible to baptize as part of making disciples.

2. *Teach them to observe all which Jesus commanded*

a. *Teach them*

- Teaching goes beyond seeking a confession of faith, just as the apostle Paul taught and instructed to teach (Acts 20:27, 31; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2).
- Paul continued “teaching” even when absent by sending letters and workers.

b. *Teach them to observe*

- “Observe” or “obey” is more than knowing, it is acting upon what is commanded.
- A disciple of Jesus submits to His authoritative instructions. Jesus had expressed it earlier in terms of loving Him, if you love Him, you will keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23–24).
- A major contribution to the growth of the early church was the consistent, markedly different behavior of early Christians.

c. *Teach them to observe all which Jesus commanded*

- This is in contrast to obeying the law which could not be kept (Acts 15:10, 28) and whose function as a guardian is past (Galatians 3:24a–25; 4:9, 19).
- All which Jesus commanded is not limited to the Gospel records (John 16:12–13), but continues in the rest of the New Testament. The so-called “doctrinal” sections of the letters form the necessary basis for the exhortations which follow (cf. Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 2:6; 3:1). Even knowledge of prophecy is for holy living now (2 Peter 3:11).
- All which Jesus commanded is relevant until the end of the age when considered in light of Jesus’ closing promise (Matthew 28:20b).

A true Christian is also a disciple of Jesus Christ who loves Christ and keeps His commandments. To make disciples requires proclaiming Christ, baptizing those who believe, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. This is the church’s mission. Don’t confuse it with the results which are in God’s hands alone.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- If you have never professed your faith in Christ through baptism, what is the reason?
- How would you explain from Scripture to a new believer the purpose of baptism?
- Some Christians suggest determining their action by asking “what would Jesus do”. Is this wise or not? Why?
- What is required of you to do all which Jesus commanded?