

Trinity Sunday (Pentecost I): Matthew 28:16-20: The Great Commission

1. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. We must constantly teach and confess the true doctrine of the Trinity for thus God has revealed Himself as the saving God. Furthermore, many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian.
2. Jesus had appeared to the disciples three times after His resurrection, twice in Jerusalem (Jn. 20:19-29) and once at the sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21:1-23). Mt. 28:16-20 is the fourth recorded appearance. This passage is parallel to Mk. 16:15-18 and very likely also I Cor. 15:6. Sound, Biblical scholars are agreed on that. It likely happened shortly before the Ascension at Bethany, east of Jerusalem (Lk. 24:50). Don't believe the modern scholars who claim that Mt. 28 and Lk. 24 denote two traditions which confuse the Great Commission and the Ascension.
3. Vs. 16: for δὲ AV, LB, NIV, NKJV have "then". NASB has "but". JB "meanwhile". RSV is best: "now". It is simply introducing a narrative. Three times Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee after His resurrection, Mt. 26:32; 28:7,10. The references in Mt. 28 seem to indicate that more than the eleven is meant. This harmonizes well with I Cor. 15:6, though Mt. 28:16 mentions only the eleven. The disciples knew that they were to go to Galilee. On which occasion did Jesus designate the mountain? We do not know. But the text says that He did. When Jesus was tempted by Satan (Mt. 4:8), the latter took Him to a very high mountain. Already then, also according to His human nature, Jesus had all authority over all things, not only on earth but also in heaven. Satan did not have that authority, but pretended to have and give it. He plainly was trying to divert Jesus from the route of suffering and wanted Jesus to worship (προσκυνέω). It is remarkable that this very verb is used in the following verse.
4. Vs. 17: ἰδόντες very likely means that Jesus suddenly appeared to them. The Reformed deny the communication of divine attributes to Jesus' human nature. That's why Hendriksen suggests, at this point, that Jesus came walking up the mountain. He admits that he cannot prove it. And, we must admit that we cannot prove that ἰδόντες means that Jesus suddenly appeared, but it is the best explanation in view of the two appearances in Jn. 20. The seeing resulted in worship. On the disciples worshipping Jesus before the resurrection, compare Matthew 14:33. The disciples were deeply impressed. The point is that they now fully believe that this man is truly God. οὐ δὲ "but some". This can mean only "some of the eleven". Lutheran commentators are agreed that this does not mean that they doubted His identity. Ylvisaker: "They had seen Jesus, undoubtedly, on earlier occasions, but this appearance was also so sudden and unforeseen. The others, who did not doubt, worshipped the Lord. The doubters very likely joined them subsequently. Jesus removed their misgivings, unquestionably, by His testimony." Bengel quotes Leo who said: "They doubted, in order that we should not doubt." Fahling enlarges on this thought: "The disciples did not doubt the resurrection of Jesus, but the doubt seems to have concerned the identity of Him who stood before them. The doubt of the disciples is rather a testimony to the truth of the inspired record. The disciples were not credulous, and the very fact that Jesus had to remove their doubts proves beyond a doubt that He truly rose from the dead. As Jesus came closer to them, however, He removed all fear and uncertainty." And Lenski: "The very fact that the disciples were not in the least credulous and quick to believe, but had to have all doubts completely and thoroughly removed, is proof of the most convincing kind that Jesus DID arise and he DID appear to his disciples as is recorded in the inspired record."
5. Vs. 18: προσελθὼν denotes an act of Jesus to take away their doubts. He does not condemn or scold them. Before we proceed we must note Mt. 11:27: "All things have been given to Me by My Father."

The word "Me" must denote Jesus' human nature for, as true God, Jesus already had all things. Mt. 11:27 was spoken before the resurrection. From conception the human nature of Jesus had all things, had authority over all things. But, during the state of humiliation, the human nature did not always and fully make use of all of this. In Mt. 28:18 μοι can denote nothing but His human nature. Here the heresy of Reformed theology comes out plainly. Hendriksen says: "When he says 'To me has been given' we naturally interpret this to mean that he is referring to a gift he has received as Resurrected Mediator. One might add: 'as a reward upon his accomplished mediatorial work, the atonement which he rendered.'" The Epitome and Solid Declaration of the *Formula of Concord* quote Mt. 28:18 eight times concerning the communication of attributes in the person of Christ. We quote several pertinent passages: "After his resurrection he laid aside completely the form of a slave (not the human nature) and was established in the full use, revelation, and manifestation of his divine majesty. Thus he entered into his glory in such a way that now not only as God, but also as man, he knows all things, can do all things, is present to all creatures, and had all things in heaven and on earth and under the earth beneath his feet and in his hands, as he himself testifies 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" (Tappert 489.16). "From the moment that the deity and the humanity were united in one person this man, Mary's son, is and is called the almighty and everlasting God, who by virtue of the exchange of qualities has eternal power and has created and preserved everything because he is one person with the deity and is true God. Mt. 11:27; 28:18." (Tappert 608.85) μοι must denote the human nature of Christ. Note that Jesus uses the word ἐξουσία which means "bestowed authority". AV and AAT translate "power". All others have "authority". The point we are making is that Jesus' human nature did not have inherent but rather bestowed authority, but authority it is. The prepositional phrase "in heaven and on earth" is adjectival, telling us what kind of authority, not where it is. This sentence is purest Gospel. All powers, be they good or evil, whether on earth or in heaven, are subject to the human nature of Christ. He has, once and for all, conquered all forces and powers of evil. That is purest Gospel and should not be forgotten.

6. Vs. 19: οὖν, "therefore" "in view of Who I Am and what I've done." Behind Jesus' command lies His full authority. The main verb is the imperative μαθητεύσατε, preceded by the imperitival πορευθέντες and followed by the two participles, βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες, both of which denote means or manner. Jesus commands them to go. The mere "going" is not mission work but mission work cannot be done unless one goes. With this one participle Jesus sends the Church to the four corners of the globe. μαθητεύσατε is an effective aorist imperative which means "make disciples". In vs. 16 it was said that "the disciples went" out of obedience to Jesus' command. In vs. 19 the Church is told "to go and make disciples". Through the means of grace the Church is to do for all men what Jesus had done for the eleven. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη "all the nations" which implies that Christ truly died for all. Jesus makes no exceptions, for He died for all. We must insist that "all nations" includes children. βαπτίζοντες occurs first but does not mean that, in all cases, the Church baptizes before it teaches. On Pentecost Peter taught before he baptized. This order is frequent in the Book of Acts. αὐτοῖς refers back to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. Grammar would demand αὐτὰ, but Jesus individualizes and makes it personal by saying αὐτοῖς which covers men, women and children. εἰς means "in" not "into". τὸ ὄνομα denotes revelation, the man-ward side of God. Note that ὄνομα is singular, not plural. There are not three revelations but only one. Note that τοῦ occurs three times, once each with each member of the Trinity. This is the clearest statement of the Trinity in Scripture. There are clearly three persons, but only ONE revelation. The so-called charismatics claim two revelations, one at baptism and another later. But ὄνομα is singular. Scripture knows but one revelation of the Triune God, IN THE MEANS OF GRACE, nowhere else. Baptism is a work of God which reveals the saving Trinity to the sinner. Lenski quotes a pertinent paragraph from Rohnert: "By baptism God gives himself to us: the Father becomes our Father and adopts us as his children (Gal. 3:16-27; Jn. 1:12.13; I Jn. 3:11); the Son becomes our Redeemer, for we are baptized in union with

his death and cleansed by his blood to be his own (Eph. 5:26) and have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27; I Cor. 12:12,13), so that his righteousness is our glorious dress (Mt. 22:11; Is. 61:10), and we are members of his body (Eph. 5:30; I Cor. 12:13; Jn. 15:4); the Holy Spirit becomes our Comforter and the earnest of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14; II Cor. 11:22), we become His temple in which together with the Father and the Son he dwells (I Cor. 3:10). In this way we assume A NEW RELATION TO GOD by means of this sacrament of regeneration, our heart and our spirit being renewed and pursuing a new direction through the joint operation of the three divine persons." The Reformed emasculate baptism of all that it truly is. We quote from Hendriksen: "Not every person who presents himself as a candidate for church membership should immediately be accorded all the rights and privileges pertaining to such membership. . . . The context makes very clear that Jesus is here speaking about those who are old enough to be considered the objects of preaching. He is not here speaking about infants. . . . Not as if the rite of baptism as such brings a person into vital union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . baptism too must be regarded as a sign and a seal of the righteousness of Christ accepted by faith. . . . The one who submits to it (baptism), if sincere, is proclaiming that he has broken with the world and has been brought into union with the Triune God, to whom he intends to devote his life." For Hendriksen, and all Reformed people, baptism is merely a rite, a sign, a seal, a proclamation, an act of obedience, limited to adults. What underlies this heresy? They claim that the Holy Spirit works immediately, not through the means of grace. They insist that faith is a conscious work of man. But read Titus 3:5-7 in all its simplicity. And also Gal. 3:26,27. Is Mt. 28:19 the institution of baptism? Didn't the Baptist and Jesus' disciples baptize before? Yes, but that was for Jews only and came to an end. It forgave sins but was not for all nations. Here in Mt. 28:19, in the name and revelation of the Triune God, Jesus commands that ALL NATIONS be baptized. In that sense it is the institution of baptism. The three ecumenical creeds are based on this verse. All is a matter of faith. We know the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier, only by the revelation of God, through Jesus, in the means of grace.

7. Vs. 20: διδάσκοντες occurs as the second participle but that does not mean that, in all cases, the Church baptizes before it teaches. Here Jesus gives us Christian liberty. Ylvisaker quotes Kuebel: "The proper method is obviously to instruct first and then to baptize, in a place where a Christian church is being established, that is, on a mission field. But where a church is already organized with its blessed influence on the youth and old age, baptism should precede and instruction follow. In the former case, adult baptism will be the rule, in the latter, infant baptism." τηρεῖν means to attend diligently to, guard, conserve, carefully reflect upon, observe, keep. LB, TEV and NIV translate "to obey all the commands". It is much much more than that. Jesus is speaking not merely of Law but of Gospel as well. How much does πάντα cover? The whole Bible, of course. The whole Bible is God's Word. Now we come to the final sentence in this text. καὶ ἴδοθ' is variously translated "and lo" "and be sure of this" "and remember" "and surely" "and know" "and be assured". ἴδοθ' informs us that this is important, and it truly is. ἐγὼ is emphatic "I myself", Jesus according to both natures, divine and human. "With you am" reminds us immediately of Mt. 1:23, Immanuel, "God with us". All mere human relationships are intermittent and, sooner or later, come to an end. Upon graduation, college students, dear to each other, often weep. Eventually dear children leave home. Eventually every marriage, no matter how good, comes to an end. But the presence of the God-man with the believer is constant, never ending. Purest Gospel. Read Is. 43:1,2. πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, each and every day, just a day at a time, but every day, all day. What Gospel! How long? Until the consummation of the age. The word αἰών is more than "world" because it includes both time and dimension.