



BEACON

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The Great Commission (Part 2)

Doug Post

In part one of our study, we compared the four accounts of the Great Commission, considering the Lord's command to His apostles, to teach others "to observe all that I commanded you." Therefore, the Great Commission was given to the apostles, and the disciples they made were to continue the cycle of making disciples in the same manner. We make disciples by baptizing and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded, because He has all authority.

Each of the four accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) presents a distinct view of the same event. Mathew and Mark speak of baptism, while Luke speaks of repentance. John speaks of Jesus promising His apostles the Holy Spirit and their forgiving and retaining of sins. However, Mark elaborates more on the concept of receiving the Spirit. He writes:

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord

working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen (Mark 16:15-20).

While the Holy Spirit is not directly mentioned, *signs* are. Of course, signs are provided by the Holy Spirit as He is the source of gifts (Luke 11:13; Mat. 7:11; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Heb. 2:3-4). *Signs* refer to the supernatural ability given to the first century Christians as promised by the prophet Joel to those first century Christians:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved (Acts 2:17-21).

Joel promised two things: Miraculous endowment and Salvation.

This is precisely the point of Mark's Great Commission account, wherein we find both salvation and supernatural ability or *signs*. Now, when it comes to Mark 16:15-20, we teach verses 15 and 16 as being applicable for us today, but we

do not teach that verses 17-20 are relevant as well. This is also the point of Acts 2:38: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**’ ” or “**the Holy Spirit’s gift**.”

Mark speaks of **salvation** as the result of believing and being baptized. Peter speaks of the **forgiveness of sins** because of repentance and baptism. **Salvation** and **forgiveness of sins** are synonymous. Mark speaks of **signs** following those who believe and are baptized. Peter speaks

of those receiving the **Holy Spirit’s gift** after repenting and being baptized. Receiving “**signs**” and receiving “**the Holy Spirit’s gift**” are synonymous. Therefore, since we do not teach Mark 16:17-20 and “**signs following**,” then why would we teach Acts 2:38 (b) the reception of the **Holy Spirit’s gift**? We do not teach that *signs* occur today because miracles have ceased. Since that is true, why would we then teach a modern-day reception of the Holy Spirit’s gift?

Irving, TX

Paul’s Speech in Athens in the Light of History and Archaeology

B. C. Goodpasture

The apostle Paul was a marvelous man. He was resourceful and versatile. His was the greatest constructive mind of the apostolic church. The way he dealt with the enemies of Christianity was admirable. It is significant that he always struck the enemy at the point where he was strongest. In Corinth, the center of vice commercialized in the name of religion, he planted a church; in Ephesus, the stronghold of magical superstition, he founded a congregation, one of the “seven candlesticks” of the Revelation (Rev. 1:20); and in Athens, the citadel of heathen learning and philosophy, he delivered the masterful address under consideration. Luke, the writer of Acts, was as remarkable in his sphere as was Paul in his. The light thrown on the Mars’ Hill speech of the great apostle enables us better to appreciate the difficulties under which Paul spoke and the exactness with which Luke wrote.

The Idolatry of Athens

The Athenians had a far-known reputation as idol worshippers. Their idolatry attracted the attention of travelers, philosophers, and poets. Lucian said, “At Athens, on every side, there are altars, victims, temples, and festivals.” Livy, the Roman historian, testifies, “Athens was full of the images

of gods and men, adorned with every variety of material, and with all the skill of art.” Josephus wrote, “All men say that the Athenians are the most religious of all the Grecians.” Sophocles, the tragic poet of Greece, declared, “The city of Athens goes beyond all in worshiping and reverencing the gods.” Pausanias, the traveler, and Baedeker of Greece, who visited Athens about fifty years after Paul was there, said, “At Athens it is easier to find a god than a man.” From such descriptions of Athenian idolatry, we can understand how Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16).

Hearing and Telling the News

In Acts 17:21, we read: “Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” Demosthenes, the greatest orator of Greece, and perhaps of the world, asks, “Is it your sole ambition to wander through the public places, each inquiring of the other, ‘What new advices?’ ” Theophrastus, the philosopher, said, “The Athenian lover of the marvelous greets his acquaintance with, ‘Whence came you? What say you? Have you any fresh news?’ ” Plutarch, the well-known Greek biographer, wrote, “These

busybodies intrude themselves into the high courts of justice, the tribunals, the market places, and public assemblies. 'What news?' saith one of them; 'How now?' " Thus, it will be observed that the sacred writer's estimate of the Athenians agrees perfectly with that of their own countrymen.

The Altar to the Unknown God

Paul said: "I found also an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23). Lucian said, "I swear by the unknown God at Athens... We have found out the unknown God at Athens, and worshiped him with our hands stretched up to heaven." Philostratus remarked, "And this at Athens, where there are even altars to the unknown God." Once more Pausanias wrote, "At Athens there are altars of gods which are called the unknown ones." Barton, in his book, *Archeology and the Bible*, says:

In Acts 17:23 it is stated that Paul saw in Athens an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. In the year 1909 an altar was discovered in the sacred precinct and temple of Demeter at Pergamos in Asia Minor, the home of one of the seven churches of the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:12, f.), which bore a mutilated inscription; This inscription, in the judgment of several impartial epigraphists, should be restored as follows:

To unknown gods,
Capito,
torch bearer.

This is not only a confirmation of the statement of Acts 17:23, but of Pausanias and Philostratus that altars to unknown gods existed (439).

The Poets

Paul quoted the poets, "certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). On this point, Cobern, in his great work, *The New Archaeological Discoveries*, comments:

The apostle further complements his audience by quoting a hymn of Cleanthes, the Stoic philosopher, who had once been a teacher in

Athens. The passage from which he quotes is the most beautiful in the entire hymn:

"O God, most glorious, called by many a name,
Nature's great King, through endless years the same;
Omnipotence, who by thy just decree
Controllest all, hale Zeus, for unto thee
Behooves thy creatures in all lands to call.
We are thy children, we alone, of all,
On earth's broad ways that wander to and fro,
Bearing thy image wheresoever we go:
Wherefore with songs of praise I will thy power forth show" (490-491).

The following passage from Aratus contains the quotation,

Let us begin from Jove. Let every mortal raise
His grateful voice to tune Jove's endless praise.
Jove fills the heaven, the earth, the sea, the air;
We feel his spirit moving here and everywhere.
AND WE HIS OFFSPRING ARE (Lamb, 8).

Finally, I deem comment on these quotations unnecessary; and for lack of space, I have purposely omitted the particular work of the authorities quoted. If anyone has the desire and the time to look up the references, I shall be glad to furnish them.

Works Cited

- Barton, George A. *Archeology and the Bible*. Philadelphia, PA: American Sunday-School Union, 1916.
<<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43070/43070-h/43070-h.htm>>.
- Cobern, Camden M. *The New Archeological Discoveries*. New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1917.
- Lamb, John, *The Phenomena and Diosemeia of Aratus*. London: John W. Parker, 1748.

Deceased

"If all our wishes were gratified, how poor we should be."

Author Unknown

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"Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself. I mean, do not be disturbed because of your imperfections, and always rise bravely from a fall."

Francis de Sales, Deceased

Sick

Remember in your prayers:

Bill & Peggy Crowe

Nancy Travis

Linda Worley

Carla Burleson

Bill & Pam Busch

Linda Parks

Sheila Myrick

Please Remember

July 29

Fifth Wednesday Singing at 7:00 p.m., in the auditorium.

Defender and Beacon

Available Via Email

Send your email address to:

bellviewcoc@gmail.com

Weekly Services

Sunday

Bible Classes for all ages — 9:00 a.m.

Morning Worship Service — 10:00 a.m.

Afternoon Worship Service — 1:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Classes for all ages — 7:00 p.m.

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