

All Authority

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen (Matthew 28:16-20).

The familiarity of these words of Jesus (known as the Great Commission) can easily lull one into saying, “Yes, I know all that.” As biblical Christians, we must beware of the fallacy of the familiar.¹ The first thing that should startle us (in our modern mindset) about this passage is that Jesus “designated a mountain.” Mountains are a familiar imagery in Scripture in that they denote sovereignty, majesty, exaltation, and power (Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:9; 25:6; Ezekiel 17:22; 20:40; Daniel 2:35; Micah 4:1; Zechariah 4:7). It is from this mountain height, with the vast expanse of the heavens above and the great panorama of the earth spread beneath that the resurrected Jesus announced, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Second, this phrase should jar our Scriptural memory. Where have we seen this before? We have seen it in Daniel 7:13-14. I quote it in full (note the words *italicized*):

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then *to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom*, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.²

Notice this same theme echoed in the response of Jesus to Caiaphas, the high priest, answering in the affirmative that He is the Christ³:

It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).⁴

What is the authority that was given to Jesus, the Christ? First, this authority was given to Jesus on the basis of both His plenary work on the Cross and His resultant bodily resurrection. In the Cross, Jesus vanquished both sin and its master, Satan (John 12:31; I John 3:8; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). His resurrection provides the foundation for imputing His righteousness to the repentant, believing sinner (Romans 4:23-25). It is in His ascension that He has received authority. Daniel 7 defines this authority as dominion, glory, and a kingdom *that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him*. The word authority, in the Greek, means “the right to act based upon the virtue of the position one holds.”⁵ It means to “rule over a jurisdiction.” It is on account of this authority that

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Jesus commissions His disciples to “go therefore.”

What are the realms that are under the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus Christ? Much of modern Christianity embraces a belief that Jesus has jurisdiction *only* over the forgiveness of sins, the individual Christian, the family, the local church, and heaven to come. The rest, whether it be broader social concerns, educational issues, medicine, science, economics, business, art, the media, or civil government is under the authority of someone else, not the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶ This belief does not accord with the words of Jesus for He declared that His Father, the Ancient of Days, had given Him *universal* authority; i.e., an all-encompassing authority that extends to the entire created realm; i.e., the jurisdiction of *heaven and the earth*, all things visible and invisible (cf. Colossians 1:15-17). It is this same authority that Christ imparts to His disciples, as His ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20)⁷, for the fulfillment of His commission. Not only does Christ appoint His disciples as His ambassadors, He promises that His presence (in the person of the Holy Spirit) shall be with them, in the midst of opposition and tribulation (Acts 14:22; Revelation 1:9), even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20; cf. John 14-16).

What is Christ’s commission to His disciples? He orders His followers to make disciples⁸ of all nations⁹, baptizing them in the name of the triune God, teaching them to observe all of His commandments.¹⁰ That this commission will be successful in time and history (before the end of the age) is pledged by the word of God (cf. Psalm 22:17; 72:11; 86:9; Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:9; 25:6-8; 49:6; 52:13-15; 60:1-3; Daniel 2:35, 44-45; 7:13-14; Habakkuk 2:14; Malachi 1:11; Matthew 12:20-21; 13:31-33; Romans 1:5; 16:25-27; Hebrews 1:10; 10:13; Revelation 11:15).¹¹ The modern churchman truncates this glorious goal of the Gospel by narrowing Christ’s jurisdiction to individual salvation, family issues, church life, and heaven to come (important and foundational as these are). In this curtailment of this glorious goal of the Gospel, the modern churchman has curtailed the authority of the Christ thus making his salt “tasteless” (Matthew 5:13). By mangling both the universal authority of the Christ and His commission to disciple the nations in favor of declaring a feeble alternative (an attempt to “pluck” a few from the burning flames of hell), the modern churchman yields fruit that does not remain (John 15:16). As a result, the modern church is full of mere “professors of faith.” It is replete with half-committed “Christians” and embraces an enervated Christianity that surrenders before the gates of Hell.¹²

The scope of God’s redemptive plan includes the individual, the family, the church, and heaven to come, but this is not the goal of God’s salvation in Christ. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is universal; it encompasses heaven and earth (eternity and time; the world to come and this world). *The goal of God’s salvation in Christ is the redemption of nations*¹³(i.e., the families of the earth), that they should be “fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakes of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6) to the “glory of His grace.” God’s aim is saved and disciplined nations that walk in the light of His blood-brought New Jerusalem, a Jerusalem that has already come in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 21:24; Hebrews 12:22-24). It is to this end that the Sovereign Christ shakes the nations with the Gospel, the sword from His mouth, so that the nations may receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:25-28; Revelation 19:11-21). Amen.

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Endnotes:

¹ The “fallacy of the familiar” means that by becoming “too accustomed” to certain Scripture passages, we lose their true meaning and impact.

² There is a school of interpretive thought that believes this passage refers to the *Second* Advent of Christ. According to Matthew 28, this passage in Daniel refers to the enthronement of the Christ at His *First* Advent. The picture of the Lion/Lamb (the One who is worthy) coming before the throne to open the scroll (containing God’s lamentations, woes, and judgments) also explains the ramifications of the First Advent, not the Second Advent (Revelation 5; cf. Ezekiel 2:3-10 for an explanation of the contents of the scroll).

³ Remember, Christ is not a name; it is a title. It means “the anointed one.”

⁴ Note that Jesus said that Caiaphas (i.e., “you”) personally will see this demonstration of power (see Acts 4:1-7 for the fulfillment of this prophetic word).

⁵ The Greek word for power (used in Matthew 26:64 and in Acts 1:8) means “mighty or miraculous work.”

⁶ Some state that these areas are arenas of neutrality (where Christ’s word is of no account). The more perverse nuances of this belief actually affirm that these spheres are under the authority of Satan. Contra this position, the Bible declares that in the post-resurrection age of Christ’s dominion, Satan, although still alive, is a defeated foe; his realm is “coming to nothing” (I Corinthians 2:6; Matthew 12:29; Revelation 20:1-3; I John 2:8). His only realm of authority (even that authority is given to him by God) is over the world of unbelief; i.e., the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (cf. I John 2:15-16). This is the “world” that lies under the sway of the wicked one (I John 5:18-19). And, this is the world that Christ came to save (John 3:16-17; 4:42; I John 2:1-2; 4:14). Satan’s realm “comes to nothing” when God, through the word of the Gospel, transfers sinners out of it and translates them into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13).

⁷ A Gospel ambassador is a person of distinguished and privileged rank appointed and accredited by the sovereign Christ as “representative in residence” of His everlasting kingdom in the midst of the temporal kingdoms of this world. A Gospel ambassador is not just a representative of Christ’s kingdom; he presses Christ’s crown rights to the kingdoms of this world by word and by deed. He effectively announces that “the kingdoms of this world have been purchased at Calvary’s Cross and are thereby owned by the one, true sovereign – the King of kings and the Lord of lords” (Revelation 1:4-6).

⁸ Discipling the nations presupposes a declaration of the Gospel to individuals in the nations (cf. Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47).

⁹ Do not associate the word “nation” with “political units” like the nation of Japan, Germany, or France. Nations (or Gentiles), in the Greek, is “ethne.” We get the English word ethnic from this word. It incorporates a multitude bound by the same manners, customs, and other distinctive features. The word speaks not so much of isolated individuals as such, but of groups of individuals united together by a common bond, as in a culture or society. The family is the rootstock of such bonds. The Lord Jesus Christ commissions us to disciple these groups, or, using more precise biblical language, the “families of the earth” (cf. Genesis 12:3; Psalm 22:27). This emphasis provides us with a key to unlocking the

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door of biblical evangelism. The focus of our evangelistic efforts should not be the individual alone, but the individual in the context of family and its socio-cultural labors and relations (cf. Acts 16:14-15, 29-34). This evangelistic and instructive thrust will produce fruit that remains (John 15:16).

¹⁰ Baptizing and teaching are part of the discipling process.

¹¹ That all nations and all kings (leaders of nations) shall serve the Lord is not to be understood in terms that every individual in these groups will be saved (cf. Revelation 20:11-15). The word “all” in these passages speaks of a great or substantial majority without distinction (cf. Matthew 8:11; Revelation 7:9).

¹² In Bible times, the gate of a city is where its elders met to adjudicate legal matters. The gates of Hell refer to the jurisdiction or authority of Hell. These gates will surrender to Christ’s church *only when she embraces the empowered authority of her Lord* (cf. Matthew 16:18).

¹³ It is also significant to note that Jesus gave this commission to His disciples on a mountain in the region of Galilee. This region was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles [ethnon in the Greek]” (cf. Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:12-16).