

Chapter Sixteen

“We’re on a mission from God.”

OUR GREAT COMMISSION Part 1

“Jesus Christ Is Authorized”

Matthew 28.16-20

Matthew chapter 28 contains the account of the Lord Jesus Christ’s eighth post-resurrection appearance to His disciples:

- 16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.
- 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.
- 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
- 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
- 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

All of the other times the eleven had seen their risen Lord they had seen Him in the vicinity of Jerusalem. But on this occasion, they went to the considerable trouble of traveling to Galilee, and up a mountain, to see Him. Why did they go to all that trouble?

“Jesus had appointed them.”

These men had spent the better part of 3½ years learning to obey the Lord Jesus Christ without doubting, so they were becoming accustomed to following His directions without question. The verb Matthew uses to describe the risen Lord’s directive to His disciples is τάσσω, meaning “to assign, to order, and in the middle voice as we have here, to appoint by one’s

own authority.”¹ So, what we have by the selection of this word is a glimpse of what’s coming, the showcasing of the awesome authority that is wielded by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The question is what mountain, since the Greek New Testament makes clear that a specific mountain was their destination. Though we are not told which mountain (which is to say that *we* are not told, though the *disciples* certainly were told), it seems, at least, plausible that it was the same mountain on which the Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured, and His glory shone forth for the three apostles who were with Him to see. What better setting could there have been for the imparting of the Great Commission than the same locale where three of them had seen Him transfigured? Or perhaps this incredible meeting took place where He taught the Sermon on the Mount. That would be far more convenient for most of the disciples, since it was so close to Capernaum. Wherever the meeting took place, it would forever change the lives of those in attendance.

But why, verse 17, did some worship Him when they initially saw Him, while others doubted at first? There are several possible explanations. Those who worshiped Him were no doubt convinced that He had risen and had been previously convinced of His resurrection in Jerusalem. What do the doubts of some disciples imply? Two possibilities: *First*, some were convinced their Lord Jesus had risen from the dead but did not recognize Him from afar, and their doubt was not that He had risen but about whom they were seeing.² Or, and this I suggest as more likely, some who had gathered for this meeting had not yet seen the risen Savior and still harbored doubts related to His resurrection. Perhaps this was not doubt that He was raised from the dead but doubts about how they should act around Him. Those who are of this second opinion think that this is the occasion when the Lord Jesus Christ was seen by more than 500 brethren at once, as was mentioned by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 15.6, where he wrote,

¹ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 87.

² John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition Of The Old And New Testaments, Vol 7* (Paris, Arkansas: the Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., reprinted 2006), page 375.

“After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.”

This encounter the disciples had with the risen Savior was unique in several respects: *First*, it seems that this was the only post-resurrection appearance that He announced ahead of time, telling His disciples where to meet Him.³ *Second*, it seems that this was the only post-resurrection appearance that occurred outside of the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. *Third*, it seems this was the only post-resurrection appearance that might be considered a public event, since so many people were there, though they were likely all believers. Fourth, this was the most significant post-resurrection appearance because the Great Commission is most fully presented on this occasion.

The focus of this chapter is Matthew 28.18:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

Some saw the Lord Jesus and worshiped; others saw the Lord Jesus and doubted, and the risen Savior came to them. He approached them all. Then He spoke to them. I want to focus on what He first said to them. We will consider what He said to them in verses 19 and 20 in subsequent chapters.

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

Matthew has already painted this dispatching of these men and women to the mountain in Galilee in authoritative terms. He did so when he described this assembly of people as the result of an appointment, as an authoritative assignment, using the word *τάσσω* that I explained above.

Keeping in mind that the word translated “power” in this verse, *ἐξουσία*, refers to the right to control or command, authority, absolute power,⁴ consider four aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ’s authority:

³ Matthew 28.7, 10

⁴ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pages 352-353.

First, WE CONSIDER THE POWER OF CHRIST'S NATURE

The very thought of my Lord's nature should humble me. But because much confusion and dishonor are shown to God the Father in these last days, I feel compelled to emphasize doctrines that exalt both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father. In seeking to accomplish that task, I am provoked to humility by a consideration of the nature of my Lord. The following is presented for your reflection:

B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and theologian par excellence, wrote "The modern cry: 'Less creed and more liberty,' is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and means more heresy."⁵ In his work *Interpretation of the English Bible*, he wrote,

"A church with a little creed is a church with a little life."⁶

"Very solemnly I would warn the reader against any teaching that decries doctrines, or which would reduce the creed of the church into two or three articles. We are entitled to no liberty in these matters. It is a positive and very hurtful sin to magnify liberty at the expense of doctrine. A creed is what we believe. A confession of faith is a declaration of what we believe. The church must both believe and declare. The longest creed of history is more valuable and less hurtful than the shortest... The standard is the Holy Scriptures."⁷

"Again I solemnly warn the reader against all who depreciate creeds, or who reduce them to a minimum of entrance qualifications in to the Church."⁸

⁵ B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation Of The English Bible: Colossians, Ephesians and Hebrews*, (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, reprinted 2001), page 140.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pages 146-147

⁸ Ibid., page 150.

I present Carroll's words so that you will see the value not only of God's infallible Word on the subject but also the value of ancient creeds and confessions on the subject of Christ's nature, so that we can ponder what Christians have always believed about the nature of this One we bow before as Savior.

First, *The Apostle's Creed*, well known to many and dating from 400 AD:⁹

"I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of the saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."^{10 11}

Less well known than *The Apostle's Creed*, but even older is *The Nicene Creed*.¹² Adopted by the *Nicene Council*, which met in 325 AD to deal with the Arian heresy that denied Christ's deity:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the

⁹ Philip Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church, Volume I*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., originally published 1858; this printing, third edition, revised 1890), pages 464-465.

¹⁰ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Vol I*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), pages 204-207.

¹¹ The word "catholic" in ancient creeds refers not to the Roman Church, but to the Christian faith being universal in its scope and application.

¹² *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996), page 1210.

Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and rose again the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.”¹³

Finally, consider *The Athanasian Creed*, which is ascribed to Athanasius, who lived from 293 to 373 AD, and who battled against the Arian heresy and upheld the deity of Christ:¹⁴

“Whoever wills to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith, which except everyone shall have kept whole and undefiled without doubt he will perish eternally. Now the catholic faith is that we worship One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is One, the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit; the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal,

¹³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed> 2/7/2018

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Athanasius> 2/7/2018

the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet not three eternals but one eternal, as also not three infinites, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one infinite. So, likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet not three almighties but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God; and yet not three Gods but one God. So the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there be three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father not three Fathers, one Son not three Sons, and Holy Spirit not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped. He, therefore, who wills to be in a state of salvation, let him think thus of the Trinity. But it is necessary to eternal salvation that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The right faith therefore is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man. He is God of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, and He is man of the substance of His mother born in the world; perfect God, perfect man subsisting of a reasoning soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man yet He is not two but one Christ; one however not by conversion of the Godhead in the flesh, but by taking of the Manhood in God; one altogether not by confusion of substance but by unity of Person. For as the reasoning soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one

Christ. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life eternal, and they who indeed have done evil into eternal fire. This is the catholic faith, which except a man shall have believed faithfully and firmly he cannot be in a state of salvation.”¹⁵

Why have I set these creeds before you? I presented these ancient creeds to you for four reasons: *First*, because they are ancient statements of what Christians believed the Word of God taught about our Lord Jesus Christ. *Second*, because it is good for us to be reminded that ours is a historical faith, and not something new conjured up by charlatans over the last century or two that has been supposedly hidden for millennia. *Third*, because I am convinced that many contemporary Christians have departed from the faith that is reflected in these ancient creeds, as we will see in subsequent chapters. And *finally*, because we need to be reminded afresh and anew Who our Savior is and by what authority He commands that we must obey.

The Lord Jesus Christ possesses the very nature of God because He is God. Therefore, consider and ponder the authority He has by His nature and essence. Does He have the right to command? Yes. Do we have the duty, the obligation, and the responsibility to obey? Yes.

Next, WE CONSIDER THE NATURE OF CHRIST’S POWER

Do not think I am playing word games with you, for I am assuredly not. My first main point was a reminder of the power of Christ’s nature. And by nature, I referred to Christ’s deity, to His Godness, to His divinity. By such a nature, He is rightly seen to possess astonishing and infinite authority. But if you read Matthew 28.18 carefully, you will see that the Lord Jesus Christ does not speak there by the power He possesses naturally as a result of

¹⁵ <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>

His essence. Rather, He speaks with an authority *given* to Him. You may think that is a distinction without a difference, but it's not.

The Lord Jesus Christ clearly shows us in our text that He was not speaking by His authority. He has great authority, as we have seen, but in our text, He is not wielding His power but that of Another. He is most assuredly declaring here that the authority by which He speaks to His disciples is an authority, is the power that has been *given* to Him. But who *would* give the Lord Jesus such power? Who *could* give the Lord Jesus such power? Remembering that by power we mean authority, this power is given to Jesus Christ by His Father. And the Bible speaks to this matter in several places. Malachi 1.6 shows that God the Father has authority over the Son of God by their father/son relationship:

“A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where is mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear?”

Revelation 13.8 shows how far back God authorized His Son to act on His behalf when the Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

The Father's authority over His Son has been recognized Bible doctrine since at least the time of the Latin Father, Augustine.¹⁶ Following is a portion of what Augustine wrote on the matter:

“For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son. In the light of this we can now perceive that *the Son is not just said to have been sent because the Word became flesh, but that he was sent in order for the Word to become flesh*, and by his bodily presence to do all that was written. That is, we should understand that *it was not just the man who the Word became that was sent, but that the Word was sent to become man*. For he *was not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that was not equal to the Father*, but in virtue of the Son being from the Father, not the Father being from the

¹⁶ Bruce Ware, “Tampering With The Trinity” Part 2, *Reformation Today*, #181, May-June 2001, page 27.

Son.”¹⁷

Why is this important? This is important because it establishes that being functionally subordinate does not mean one is inferior. Jesus Christ is subordinate to the Father and has been throughout all eternity, while remaining equal to Him in nature, essence, and might. Thus, it is not only godly to be humble and subordinate to one with legitimate authority over you, but it is also Godlike. So we see the Lord Jesus Christ’s authority in a new light, in a much more humble and submissive light. Thus, the power by which our glorious Lord Jesus acted, and continues to act, is delegated. In turn, He delegates that same power, that same delegated authority of the Father, to others.

Third, WE CONSIDER THE EXTENT OF CHRIST’S POWER

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

This power that Jesus Christ has been given by the Father, how far and to what bounds does it reach? As high as the highest heavens. And down to earth. In heaven, Christ’s authority extends to the Holy Spirit, and to dispatch the Spirit of God to work on the lost and in the saved, and to the angels, who minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation.¹⁸ And on earth, Christ’s authority extends to His power to gather a bride from all nations. A. T. Robertson, commenting on this verse, writes:

“It is the sublimist (sic) of all spectacles to see the Risen Christ without money or army or state charging this band of five hundred men and women with world conquest and bringing them to believe it possible and to undertake it with serious passion and power. Pentecost is still to come, but dynamic faith rules on this mountain in Galilee.”¹⁹

¹⁷ St Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans Edmund Hill, vol. 5 of *The Works of St. Augustine* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991) IV. 27 (italics added).

¹⁸ John 16.7; Hebrews 1.14.

¹⁹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol I*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930), page 244.

Finally, WE CONSIDER THE DURATION OF CHRIST'S POWER

Let us keep in mind that our focus is upon the delegated authority by which the Lord Jesus Christ undertook His saving mission on behalf of God the Father, not His authority springing from His divine nature. For how long will the Lord Jesus submit to His Father and wield the authority the Father delegated to Him? Will there come a day when the Lord Jesus no longer submits to His Father, when He is no longer subordinate to the Father?

“Consider Paul’s discussion of the consummation of Christ’s reconciling work in a day yet future. He writes, ‘For he [the Father] ‘has put everything under his [Christ’s] feet’. Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor 15:27-28). Because Christ was commissioned in eternity past to come, in time and in history, to carry out the will of his Father, when this work is completed, Christ will place himself in the very position he had with the Father previously. While possessing again the full glory of the Father (John 17:5), he will put himself in subjection to the Father (1 Cor 15:28). The relation of the Father and Son in eternity past, in Christ’s historic and incarnate life, and in eternity future, then, is the same. Christ is fully equal in essence with the Father yet subordinate in role. Scripture clearly upholds these truths, and we in the Church should likewise do the same.”²⁰

I appealed to ancient creeds at the beginning of this chapter to show that our understanding of what God’s Word says about the Lord Jesus Christ, His nature, and His authority is firmly rooted in Scripture as it was understood 1,700 years ago, and since then. Sadly, today, there is a departure from the positions described by the ancient creeds. Many evangelicals and

²⁰ Ware, page 30.

Pentecostals, and too many Baptists, are no longer orthodox Trinitarians. As well, many who claim to be Trinitarians are beginning to slip in their understanding of the Trinity.²¹

What does it matter whether Jesus Christ wields His authority or authority given to Him by the Father? And why is it significant at all that the Lord Jesus submits to God the Father throughout all eternity or almost throughout all eternity? The implications of our Lord's words in our text are far-reaching, extending not only to the internal relationship that each member of the Trinity is One with the Other, but also with respect to you and me, our marriages, our service to God and Christ, and our willingness to yield to the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

But for this chapter and those that follow, the implications of our Lord's words have directly to do with our Great Commission and the authority of which Jesus Christ spoke and by which a Church acts.

Four conclusions are properly and directly drawn from our text and those considerations of our text that I have rehearsed with you. In light of the power of Christ's nature and the nature, extent, and duration of Christ's power, there are four truths we benefit from acknowledging:

First, IT IS GOD-LIKE TO SUBMIT TO GOD THE FATHER

How can submitting to God the Father be God-like? That doing God's will is God-like? That obeying God is God-like? The Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of the living God, is God, and He submits to God the Father. In John 8.29 Jesus Christ said regarding obedience to God the Father,

“I do always those things that please him.”

So, if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Son, finds no fault with always obeying His Father and *always* seeking to please and submit to Him, then what is your problem with submitting to God?

Do you think yourself to be superior to the Son of God, greater than the Lord Jesus Christ, more important than the Second Person of the Triune Godhead? If you do, you are arrogant to the point of risking insanity. If not,

²¹ My sermon on this issue, *The Ancient Heresy of Modalism Returns*, is available upon request from ClassicalBaptist.Press.

then there is no logical, reasonable, or rational basis for why you should not immediately commit yourself to do God's will as you understand it.

Next, IT IS GOD-LIKE TO SUBMIT TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Spirit of God submits to the Lord Jesus Christ. Is not the Spirit of God dispatched at the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ? Does the Apostle Paul not refer to Him as the Spirit of Christ?²² Why so? Because, as the Lord Jesus Christ submits to the Father, so the Spirit of God submits to the Son of God. What's wrong with living for Christ? What's wrong with serving Christ? What's wrong with seeking to advance Christ's cause? What's wrong with working to exalt Christ, to lift Him up, and to magnify Him? The Spirit of God does precisely that in His ministry, does He not? The Spirit of God does not speak of Himself (John 16.13), but speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. And through human instrumentalities, the Spirit of God's message is "he must increase, but I *must* decrease."²³

So, why can't we do that? We are not better than the Spirit of God, are we? He is God, remember, coequal with the Father and the Son. He speaks not of Himself, as so many people do; He does not promote His reputation, as so many people do; He does not draw attention to His accomplishments, as so many people do. We are challenged to find a credible reason not to live for Christ, not to serve Christ, not to lift up the Savior, and not to exalt Him. The Spirit of God doesn't think such efforts are beneath His dignity. He doesn't think such activity is beneath Him.

Third, IT IS CHILD OF GOD-LIKE TO SUBMIT TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Romans 8.14 declares,

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

There is a great deal of confusion regarding what it is to be led by the Spirit

²² Romans 8.9.

²³ John 3.30.

of God, and much clarification is needed. But the fact remains that those who are sons of God, those who are Christians, those who are God's children are led by the Spirit of God.²⁴

That said, what do those who are led by the Spirit of God do? The Holy Spirit leads them. That is, they do what the Holy Spirit wants them to do, rather than what the god of this world or the flesh wants them to do. To be sure, yielding to the Spirit of God may seem superficial and simplistic to some. However, it is a profound and sublime truth that follows the Lord Jesus Christ's subjugation to God the Father, His eternal submission to the Father, and the Spirit's obedience to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Believers, by all rights, by all that is reasonable and logical, ought to obey God, ought to obey the Son of God, and ought to obey the Spirit of God.

By what preposterous stretch of logic does a human being who pretends to think and reason and who expects to be taken as an intelligent and responsible person refuse to serve God, refuse to serve Christ, and refuse to submit to the Spirit of God? If Jesus Christ can submit to the Father, being coequal, and if the Spirit can submit to the Son, being coequal, why can a creature formed by the Triune God not see the reasonableness, wisdom, and propriety of bowing before God and giving Him your all?

Finally, OUR COMMISSION IS AUTHORIZED BY THE ONE TO WHOM ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

We have not yet really begun to consider our Great Commission. In this chapter, we have dealt with the Lord Jesus Christ's authority given to Him by His Father and how that authority affects His followers. But in subsequent chapters, it will be important for you to remember what we have dealt with here: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, the captain of our salvation, has Himself been duly authorized by the Father with

“all power... in heaven and in earth.”

²⁴ My sermon on this issue, *Led By The Spirit Of God*, is available upon request from ClassicalBaptist.Press.

Why do Churches exist? What is their mission? By what authority do Church members say what they say and do what they do? What should our attitude be toward those who would stop us or impede us in any way? Whenever we do what we do as a Church, let us always remember that our commission was given to us by the One to whom God the Father gave His power. Let that fact determine not only what we do and how we do it, but also the tenacity and determination that drive us to obedience.

I once watched a ridiculous movie on television titled “The Blues Brothers.” In the movie, the character played by Dan Aykroyd, named Elwood, was a not-too-bright fellow who explained his actions over and over by saying, “We’re on a mission from God.” They were not on a mission from God, but we are. And the fact that we are on a mission from God should never be far from our minds and hearts.