

## CHURCH AND FAMILY—PARTNERS IN DISCIPLESHIP

Tito Lyro

For centuries Christians have quoted Matthew 28:16-20 as the Great Commission to evangelize the world. While it does call us to evangelism, it is not the only call issued there. If evangelism is the only thing we see in Mathew 28:16-20, then we are missing the discipleship boat. In our Savior's Great Commission, evangelism is just the beginning of the story. The whole story is about making disciples. Look at Matthew 28:19-20. It says, "Go [better translated '*having gone*' perhaps meaning '*after you leave this place*'] therefore and make disciples [only finite verb of the Greek sentence; thus, main verb] of all the nations,<sup>1</sup> baptizing<sup>2</sup> them in [Greek *into*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching<sup>3</sup> them to observe<sup>4</sup> all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen."<sup>5</sup> As you see, the Great Commission is not a call to gather thousands of people into a stadium in order to tell them that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives and then send them on their merry way. No, the Great Commission is a command to make followers of Christ through the teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ assigned the job of making disciples to His Church. However, the Church cannot disciple the world and neglect to disciple the ones of the household of faith. In other words, a Christian cannot disciple the world without discipling his own family. Thus, the church and the family need to work as partners in discipleship. However, before discussing how the local church and the family can work together in discipling adults and children, I would like to talk about the power of discipleship and what is involved in discipleship.

As the disciples left that mountain in Galilee and later on were baptized by the Holy Spirit, they went from 'Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth'<sup>6</sup> fulfilling the commission given to them. These twelve men (including Paul) were not necessarily the smartest, wealthiest, or most important men in the world. As a matter of fact, most of them were very common people: a hated tax-collector (Matthew), two quick-tempered brothers (John and James, the Sons of Thunder), a couple of fishermen (Peter and Andrew), a right wing extremist (Simon the Zealot), and a doubter (Thomas). Yet, this group of ordinary men "turned the world upside down"<sup>7</sup> by teaching the nations to observe all that Jesus had commanded them. They went from house to house ministering the Word of God to the people of God.<sup>8</sup> The spreading of Christianity that we see in the book of Acts is due, in part, to the power of biblical discipleship. We too must realize that biblical discipleship is powerful. We must realize that our Sovereign Lord, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, has chosen to use ordinary men to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry"<sup>9</sup> through their discipling of God's people.

Discipleship is only powerful, however, if done properly. According to Matthew 28:19-20, there are two actions involved in making disciples: baptizing and teaching. When our Lord says we are to baptize in order to make disciples, He is not in any way teaching that baptism saves a person. Rather, He is referring to the place of evangelism in discipleship. Notice that in the original language verse 20 reads, "baptizing them into<sup>10</sup> the name of the Father..." Thus,

what our Lord is saying is that we are to bring those who are going to be disciples into fellowship with the Triune God. In this passage, then, baptism is used to represent (not to cause) the salvation of those that will be discipled. The other aspect of discipleship according Matthew 28:20 is teaching. The content of this teaching is to be everything Jesus has commanded us. Since Jesus is the very Word and Revealer of God, all things that he has commanded us include not what is recorded in the gospels, but the whole counsel of God. Therefore, intrinsic to discipleship is the systematic teaching of God's Word.

Now, there is one question that still needs to be answered: who should be making disciples? We all would agree that the church should be discipling its people. However, if we stop here, we have demonstrated that we fail to see the covenantal aspect of discipleship. It is easy to understand that the local church, through its session, is supposed to disciple its people. Everybody expects the church to train the people of God through preaching, teaching, Bible studies, ladies fellowship, and a myriad of other ministries. All these expectations are proper. However, we cannot forget that a church is made of families, and that the family needs to be involved in its own discipleship. The key, then, for biblical discipleship is to find the proper balance between the family and the local church where they are working together toward the common goal of glorifying and enjoying God. This can be done by training the husband/fathers (single mothers too!) on how to minister to their family and by coordinating the ministry at home with the ministry at church.

Training the husbands/fathers<sup>11</sup> is the first step toward covenantal discipleship. Christian men need to understand that they are the spiritual leaders in the home. The Bible portrays the husband as the high priest for his family.<sup>12</sup> He is the one who should lead the family in performing all spiritual duties. Therefore, he is the one who should lead the family in discipleship. Yet, it has been my experience that the men in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are not fulfilling their leadership duty in the area of discipleship. There are two reasons why Christian men have been derelict of their spiritual duties. One is ignorance of what they are supposed to do and the other is their capitulating to the pressures of society.<sup>13</sup> In either case thorough training on what the Bible requires of a Christian man would go a long way in correcting their thinking. This training should be done from the pulpit,<sup>14</sup> but should also include Bible study in smaller settings. A good place to start this training would be with a study of Ephesians 5:25-33 where Paul describes the responsibilities of the husband to his wife. Then, the study would logically flow into chapter 6 with the father's responsibility to raise his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to training the family leaders, the church can work together with the family toward the common goal of discipleship by coordinating what goes on at church with what goes on at home. A good way to start would be by letting the families in the church know ahead of time what next week's sermon's topic will be, including the text.<sup>16</sup> Then, the husband/father could prepare his family for worship on the next Lord's Day by going over the passage(s) during family worship/devotions. Also, giving a detailed outline of the Sunday School lesson and of the sermons to the congregation would help the spiritual leader in the home to review with his family what was studied and preached on the Lord's Day. Another simple thing that can be done to coordinate efforts in discipling the family is having a written, church wide prayer list. You might think that this is too simple of an idea. Yet, if you are trying to teach your 5 year old

daughter that she should be praying for others as well as for herself, the prayer list gives you a concrete tool to show her that other people have needs too.

Besides training the family leaders and coordinating efforts, the church can help the family in discipleship by assigning homework. For example, at my church we have a Wednesday evening program for elementary school age children called Kids Club. Every Wednesday the kids take home a list of things that they need to do that includes memorizing Scripture, doing chores around the house, praying for special needs, and witnessing to the neighbors. The parents are also required to work with the children on that homework. So, the homework helps the family to focus on one area that they can work together.

These practical suggestions should be used to help the church and the family to work together in fulfilling the commission that our Lord has given them. Through a biblical practice of discipleship, the Church will be blessed. More important yet, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified.

---

<sup>1</sup> The covenantal promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed comes to mind here – Gen. 12:3.

<sup>2</sup> One of the requirements for making disciples.

<sup>3</sup> Second requirement for making disciples.

<sup>4</sup> This is the content of the teaching.

<sup>5</sup> All Scriptures are from the The Holy Bible, New King James Version, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 17:6.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:46.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly εἰς is used instead of the expected ἐν.

<sup>11</sup> I will be referring to husbands/fathers because they are the spiritual leader of the family. However, the number of single mothers in the church is increase and will continue to increase due to the society we live in. It is important that we don't neglect them when it comes to training single mothers in the area of family discipleship.

<sup>12</sup> The high-priesthood of the husband/father is well depicted in Job's offering sacrifices on behalf of his children – Job 1:5.

<sup>13</sup> Society dictates that man and woman are equal in roles. Thus, neither male nor female is the stated leader of the family. Christian men have bought into this idea because it is convenient. It relieves them from their God-assigned responsibility and gives them more time for football.

<sup>14</sup> This implies that the leaders of the church are thoroughly convinced of the scriptural teaching on this subject.

<sup>15</sup> Remember that, somehow, we have to minister to the single mothers also in this area.

<sup>16</sup> This would also help pastor to stay on track and not procrastinate.