

Contrasting Missiological Positions in Regard to Matthew 28:20

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Southern Baptist missiologists have formed two distinct camps in regard to Matthew 28:20. Both groups respect each other as they disagree, and both groups realize that those with whom they disagree have good intentions. This missiological divide, however, is quite serious in regard to its effects on strategies and priorities at the International Mission Board (IMB). Both groups recognize the urgency of world evangelization. The two groups, however, take different missiological positions because of their different interpretations of the Great Commission.

The Two Positions Summarized

The Minimal Discipleship Position

Missiologists holding this position emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit and the Bible in the lives of new believers. They deemphasize the role of the mature believer in teaching new believers, and they believe that new believers can serve as pastors under certain circumstances. The primary role of the missionary is viewed as evangelism; thorough discipleship is not emphasized. They see Matthew 28:20 primarily as a command for new believers to be obedient to what little they may know. Missiologists holding this position emphasize speed over thoroughness in missions.

The Thorough Discipleship Position

Missiologists holding this position emphasize the role of the mature believer in teaching new believers. While believing that the Holy Spirit and the Bible are essential for discipleship, they believe that a mature believer should thoroughly teach new believers the whole counsel of God's Word until they are beyond the spiritual baby stage of Christianity. They believe that new believers should not serve as pastors. The key roles of the missionary are viewed as evangelism and thorough discipleship. They see Matthew 28:20 as a command to be both obedient and well-versed in the doctrines of Christianity. Missiologists holding this position emphasize thoroughness over speed in missions.

Examples of the Minimal Discipleship Position

Jerry Rankin (Past President of the IMB) on Discipleship:

Also a part of the task of making disciples is teaching obedience to what Jesus commanded, how one is to live as one who identifies with the Christ life. As a new missionary I was perplexed by this responsibility, stated by Jesus as, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” Upon leading a new group to accept Christ and be baptized, I would wonder how in the world I could teach them everything that Jesus taught. They had no background whatsoever to understand the Christian life. What is the first priority? What should I teach them first? I tried to outline all the lessons for a new Christian, the things that Jesus taught, and realized it would take years. I finally realized what Jesus was saying was to teach them obedience. I gave them Bibles and instructed them to read them, believe what it said and do what it taught, and that took care of it.¹

The above quote describes Rankin’s view of discipleship of new Christians. He also explained his view of how new believers can lead churches and the training needed for them to do so:

In places where it is possible to live among the people—or at least visit the area periodically—the missionary follows a four-step approach of modeling, assisting, watching, and leaving. He may lead the first group of believers for a few weeks, but will lead in such a way that a local leader can assume that responsibility. After receiving encouragement, training, and assistance for a short time, the local leader can imitate the method and pass on the training to other lay pastors and evangelists. . . .

On Paul’s first missionary journey he spent only two or three weeks in each city proclaiming the gospel. . . . They ordained or set apart these relatively new believers to lead the churches. They didn’t select these men as elders because they had confidence in them, but because they had confidence in the Lord, in whom they had trusted for guidance. . . .

As the movement expands, it is imperative to set up training programs and extension centers of basic theological education. . . . This is a high priority of the IMB, and more than one hundred twenty thousand grass-roots leaders participated in training modules and courses in 2003.

However, the continuing growth of the movement cannot

¹Jerry Rankin, *The Challenge of Great Commission Obedience: Motivational Messages for Contemporary Missionaries* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 16-17.

be sustained simply by the conscientious training of leaders. It is dependent on these leaders training others in what is called “just in time training.” A primary church leader does not need all the curriculum of what might be taught in seminary to pastor the church; he needs to be equipped for what he needs at the time. If you have ever seen a row of ducklings following the mother duck in a single file you may not have realized they are not all following the mother; each one is following the duck in front of him. By giving leaders the training they need in a way they can pass it on to others immediately as they acquire it, a long educational process that delays effective evangelism and church growth is eliminated. Many missionaries across the world are calling this “T4T” or “training for trainers.”²

Steve Smith (Past Affinity Group Leader at the IMB) on Discipleship:

A second role of the Spirit is that of Helper or Teacher. Unfortunately, much of the discipleship methodology people use depends heavily on them being the teacher, discipler or trainer. They assume this pattern from looking at the life of Christ who spent so much time with the twelve apostles. This model of discipleship is elevated over Paul’s model of discipleship. *Unfortunately, this means that many people are using a pre-Pentecost rather than a post-Pentecost model. . . .*

But this neglects a critical teaching about the Spirit. After the Spirit has come, our physical presence is not nearly as essential. Personal involvement is *not unimportant*. But we need a discipleship process more akin to post-Pentecost that depends less on human intervention. It is a model that takes the great risk of depending on the presence of the Spirit in the life of the new believer. This is the essential nature of the priesthood of the believer.

Paul the apostle provides a good example of a post-Pentecost discipleship model. Jesus intensely disciplined only 12, probably because the Spirit had not been given yet. However, post-Pentecost, because every new believer had the indwelling Spirit, disciples could mature much more rapidly and pass on this discipleship to others more quickly. . . . He trusted the Spirit to be their Teacher, not Paul.³

²Rankin, *To the Ends of the Earth: Churches Fulfilling the Great Commission* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2005), 93-94. See Jeff Brawner’s critique of the duckling discipleship method in “An Examination of Nine Key Issues Concerning CPM,” *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 6 (Spring 2007): 4-5.

³Steve Smith, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 77-78. A well-conceived part of T4T training is the three-part meeting design that includes pastoral care, worship, accountability, casting vision, lesson content, practice, goal

Smith also explained his view that new believers can serve as pastors:

One of the most common objections to CPMs is that fairly new believers are developed as leaders of groups and churches. This seems to contradict what Paul says about the qualifications of overseers. . . .

Paul actually gives *two* lists of qualifications for church leaders (elders or overseers) in his epistles—Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Both lists are important, but they are appropriate for completely different contexts.

In Titus, Paul and Titus had just completed a church-planting trip to the island of Crete. . . . Remember that *all of the believers* are young in their faith at this point. Out of this group, Paul gives Titus clear guidelines for the type of men to pick. **Therefore, the list given in Titus 1 is the list to use in *NEW CHURCH* situations.**

Contrast this with the list in 1 Timothy 3. . . . The church and this CPM are mature, probably 10-15 years old! **Therefore, the list given in 1 Timothy 3 is the list to use for *MATURE CHURCH* situations. . . .**

A second major difference between the two lists is that Paul removes the prohibition (“not a new convert”) for the Cretan situation. Why? Because all he had were new converts, just like Acts 14:23! . . .

The only way leaders can faithfully lead their churches and keep them within doctrinal purity and moral uprightness is by helping them value Scripture as their authority and obey whatever it says.⁴

David Garrison (Global Strategist for Evangelical Advance at the IMB) on Discipleship:

How can I possibly disciple others if I don't know their language? Once again, the global spread of English can help. But more important is an improved definition of discipleship.

setting, and prayer (*T4T*, 106). Smith notes that “T4T groups are usually becoming churches by the 4th or 5th session” (*T4T*, 226).

⁴Ibid., 265-72. Cretan Jews had been exposed to the Gospel at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Some of these Cretan Jews mentioned in Acts 2:11 probably became Christians and later returned to Crete. They would have adequate time to mature in the years between the events on the day of Pentecost and the situation described in the epistle to Titus. Also, in Titus 1:9 Paul said that candidates for overseer/elder/pastor on Crete should be able “to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.” This description cannot apply to new Christians; the Bible describes spiritual babes as being “blown around by every wind of teaching” (Eph 4:14). Thus, Titus was dealing with some mature Christians, not just new converts, on Crete.

Among Church Planting Movement practitioners, discipleship is increasingly being described as *teaching others to love Jesus as much as you do*.

Following the 222 principle of walking with a new believer there is no reason why anyone can't do this kind of discipleship. Walking with a new believer, listening to his testimony, praying with him, and expanding his vision for reaching a lost world—these are some of the many simple ways that you can help to disciple a new believer in the direction of a Church Planting Movement. . . .

Church Planting Movements are rapidly multiplying movements of people. People can multiply truth or error. The secret to keeping them on track is not to slow them down long enough to indoctrinate all of their leaders before they are allowed to reproduce. The secret to keeping them on track is to build fidelity to Scripture into the DNA of the earliest reproducing church models.⁵

Garrison discussed the use of new believers as pastors:

Those who are reluctant to transfer this kind of authority quickly point to Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 3:6 where Paul advises young Timothy that a bishop "must not be a recent convert..." However, Timothy's church was already well established enough to reference several generations of believers (see 2 Timothy 2:2). In such an environment it was natural for Paul to delegate church oversight to those who had been closest to the original message delivered by the apostles, but *nowhere* does Paul place church authority in the hands of outsiders.

When a new church is started, Paul does not hesitate to appoint local leaders right away. In Acts 14:23, immediately after winning converts in Lystra, Iconium, and Asia Minor's Antioch "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." Likewise, he urges Titus to appoint elders, local men with families whom everyone knew, for every town of Crete.

Meeting with the Church Planting Movement taskforce we posed the question, "When do you pass the torch to new leaders?"

Their unanimous response was, "In a Church Planting Movement you begin with the torch in their hand."⁶

⁵David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 265-69.

⁶Ibid., 187-88.

Examples of the Thorough Discipleship Position

David Sills (A. P. and Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Cultural Anthropology; Director of Global Strategic Initiatives and Intercultural Programs at Southern Baptist Seminary) on Discipleship:

In recent years, mission agencies and missionaries have increasingly shifted away from teaching and discipleship toward an emphasis on evangelism and church planting—some to the exclusion of any other field activity. While evangelism and church planting are essential components of a missions program, deep discipleship, pastoral preparation, and leadership training must be priorities as well. . . .

This understanding that the most pressing need is simply to reach UPGs and then continue to the next one results in a strategy to reach, preach to, and leave as many people groups as possible and as fast as possible. Discipleship, leadership training, and pastoral preparation are unfortunately relegated to a lower level of ministry that is not really considered missions. Some missionaries even consider any effort expended in such areas an impediment that slows down the “most important work” and is therefore the enemy of that which is essential.

This new understanding of the task of international missions is so common today that many consider it to be normative. Since the prevalence of this methodology has been growing for well over a decade, we are now seeing its consequences and ramifications. The most frequent consequence is that churches left in the wake of such efforts either fall apart rapidly and disappear or degenerate into dysfunctional gatherings with unbiblical doctrine and practice.⁷

Sills discussed the extent of discipleship and gave a warning about minimal discipleship:

Believers and their leaders must be taught sound doctrine based on the whole counsel of the Word of God if they are to live godly lives, avoid error, and survive the onslaughts of spiritual warfare. Centuries of animism and world religions have saturated the worldviews and cultures of people groups and blinded them to a biblical understanding of life. Many new believers try to understand God and what Christ has done for them against the backdrop of their former beliefs, resulting in syncretism and heresy. Their traditional understanding of reality does not evaporate

⁷M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 11-12.

upon praying a prayer. . . .

The common argument that it is sufficient for new believers to have only the Bible and the Holy Spirit, who will lead them into all truth (John 16:13), takes Jesus' words out of context. Jesus did not mean that we should not have to disciple and teach; that would be a direct contradiction to many other admonitions in the Bible that command us to do so. Jesus meant that the Holy Spirit would reveal truths in the New Testament writings yet to come. . . .

Even in the USA, there are many believers who have the Holy Spirit and Bibles but have unfortunately imagined and embraced heresy. How much more of a danger is it to abandon those who have indicated an interest in Christ but are steeped in cultures with false religions!⁸

Frank Schattner (OMF Missionary) on Discipleship and the IMB:

It appears a significant number among the IMB have a limited view of discipleship and leadership development, particularly as it relates to people groups coming to Christ with no previous knowledge of God and the Bible. I have observed that a significant percentage of IMB missionaries are not experienced in working directly with new believers. Thus, when some communicate that missionaries should move on quickly, the idea does not ring true with more traditional missionaries who have good understanding of language and culture because of their working closely with the local believers at the grassroots level.⁹

Like Sills, Schattner stressed the need for worldview shift in new converts:

Typically, IMB people preferred to direct people back to the Bible. In a pioneering situation, particularly when working with tribal people, what if there is no Bible? What do you do? Again missionaries associated with the Jonathan ministry seemed to have a better perspective. They were very dubious about having a movement without regeneration taking place. In other words, little worldview shift meant little transformation. They pointed out "that you could have a movement, but in the end what would you really have? You certainly would not have a church" (Interviewee 3, personal communication, December 2010).¹⁰

⁸Ibid., 50-51.

⁹Frank Schattner, "Sustainability within Church Planting Movements in East Asia," (D.Miss. diss., Biola University, 2013), 140.

¹⁰Ibid., 152-153.

Daniel Daesoon Kim (Director of Chiang Mai Theological Seminary) on Discipleship:

The term “Unreached People Groups” has been well embraced as the top headline of missions since 1974, when Ralph Winter presented “The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism” at the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization.

I propose, however, that today, thirty-five years later, the highest priority of the Church of Jesus Christ is discipling Undisciplined People Groups (UdPGs), not just reaching UPGs. The urgent task of discipling every people group has not changed since Christ’s command in Matthew 28:19-20.

Fulfilling the Great Commission is only a fantasy if the Church does not focus on making disciples as its highest priority. Mere numerical growth without solid discipleship does not please God. . . .

UdPGs exist in unreached, less-reached, and reached areas of the world. Signs of a lack of solid discipling are evident in recent church history.¹¹

Kim emphasized the need to follow the example of Jesus as a disciple-maker:

Matthew’s Gospel distinctly portrays Jesus as the disciple-making missionary. . . .His last and most heart-gripping command was to make disciples, not just converts who pray a prayer after raising their hands to accept Christ. . . .

Our son’s birth took nine months from conception to delivery, but rearing him has taken us more than eighteen years. Likewise, discipling a person generally takes much longer than leading a person to Christ. Because church nurturing through solid discipleship demands much more time and commitment than church planting through evangelism, very few are willing to engage in it. . . .

. . . .But if Jesus, the disciple-maker, spent three years discipling, how much more time does the Church need? . . .

So what kind of long-termers should local churches send? Churches should vigilantly screen to select qualified missionary candidates, not just those who have a mission calling and a heart for cross-cultural missions. They need to send people who have already proved to be effective and fruitful in discipling those in their home churches who speak their own language.¹²

¹¹Daniel Daesoon Kim, “An Urgent Plea Concerning Undisciplined People Groups: A Thai Perspective,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (January 2011): 70-71.

¹²*Ibid.*, 72-73.

Obviously, the thorough discipleship position calls for missionaries and pastors who have been thoroughly disciplined themselves so that they will be able thoroughly to disciple new believers.

How Selected Southern Baptist Scholars Have Interpreted Matthew 28:20 in the Past

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gives the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came near and said to them, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”¹³ The portion of the passage in dispute is “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” Many missiologists who hold the minimal discipleship position believe that this portion simply means to teach new believers that they should obey whatever biblical commands that they know or will know. In contrast, many missiologists who hold the thorough discipleship position believe that this portion means to teach new believers all the doctrines taught by Jesus to His disciples.

Southern Baptist scholars in the past have generally taken the thorough discipleship position. Southern Baptists’ best-known Greek scholar, the late A. T. Robertson, commented on this portion of the Great Commission: “Christians have been slow to realize the full value of what we now call religious education. . . . Some react too far and actually put education in the place of conversion or regeneration. That is to miss the mark. But teaching is part, a weighty part, of the work of Christians.”¹⁴ Of course, religious education involves more than telling new Christians to read their Bibles and obey what the Bible says. Religious education entails a program designed to teach them Christian doctrines.

Lee Rutland Scarborough, a former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who was the first person to serve as chair of evangelism there, discussed the Great Commission: “In Christ’s commission he commanded two kinds of teaching. . . . The one wins the faith, the affections, and the spiritual loyalty to Christ as Redeemer and Lord. The other wins the whole man to Christ’s doctrines, program, and world plans, and grows the soul up into the stature of Christ Jesus.”¹⁵ Scarborough explained his view of evangelism:

¹³I have used the HCSB throughout this article, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1930), 245-46.

¹⁵L. R. Scarborough, *With Christ after the Lost: A Search for Souls* (Nashville, Broadman, 1952), 67.

True evangelism is more than winning souls to accept Christ as Saviour. This is one of its tasks, its first great one. But there follows an important and far-reaching task of conserving this victory and utilizing the newly-saved soul in effective service in Christ's kingdom. . . . The evangelism that stops at public profession is lopsided, wasteful, incomplete. It should go on to teach, to train, and to develop, and utilize the talents and powers of the new convert. This educational phase of evangelism is transcendently important and should receive the careful attention of all the forces engaged in the promotion of Christ's kingdom.

Modern evangelism finds here its greatest leakage and waste. Much of modern evangelism leaves its spiritual children orphans, homeless and motherless. Churches often let the new "babes in Christ" go without a mother's protecting arms, warm heart, love, and food, until they become backsliders and spiritual driftwood. Such neglect of spiritual children is unpardonable and sinful. . . . A new convert is entitled to knowledge of all that Christ wants him to do, and to training for his service.¹⁶

Notice that Scarborough mentioned that Christians should teach new converts *all* that Christ wants them to do.

John Milburn Price was the first head of the religious education department at Southwestern Baptist Seminary. He gave his interpretation of the Great Commission: "And he commanded these disciples to go to the ends of the earth, make disciples (enlist in the school of Christ), baptize them (a teaching ordinance), and then teach them all the things he had commanded (Matt. 28:19-20)."¹⁷ Thus, his interpretation is that Christians are to do more than just teach new believers to obey whatever biblical commands they know or will know. They are to teach new believers all the doctrines taught by Christ to his disciples.

Walter Thomas Conner taught theology at Southwestern Baptist Seminary from 1910 to 1949. Using references from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he stressed that deep discipleship of new believers is necessary:

Those who have emphasized evangelism have seemed at times to forget that conversion was only the beginning of the Christian life. They have forgotten that the new convert who is today rejoicing in his new experience and walking on the delectable mountains may tomorrow be a prisoner in the castle of doubt or even floundering in the Slough of Despond. They have forgotten that old habits of sin must often be conquered and that the whole emotional, intellectual, and volitional life of the convert, with all his social relations and activities, needs to be

¹⁶Ibid., 107-08.

¹⁷J. M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1946), 16.

brought into captivity to Christ.¹⁸

Worldview change results from teaching new believers. All elements of their lives are rearranged under Christ's lordship as they are taught his commands.

The Key Exegetical Issue: The Participle of Means

In Greek, the portion of the verse in dispute is διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν (“teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you”).¹⁹ The Greek word διδάσκοντες (“teaching”) is one of two participles of means in the Great Commission (the other being βαπτίζοντες), and as Terry Wilder says, the two participles “define the action of the main verb ‘make disciples.’”²⁰ Thus, Christians make disciples by baptizing new converts and teaching them.

Southern Baptists believe that non-Christians become Christians by surrendering their lives to Christ in repentance and faith. The current confession of faith for Southern Baptists states, “Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour. Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.”²¹ Saving repentance and faith involve the commitment to be obedient to the Lord’s commands. This commitment happens at the moment of justification before physical baptism occurs. Some people, however, believe in baptismal regeneration (i.e., that physical baptism is necessary for becoming a Christian). Some people who believe in baptismal regeneration view βαπτίζοντες as a participle of means in the sense that baptism is a means of making Christians rather than making disciples. Southern Baptists, however, do not believe that physical baptism is a means of making Christians. To be consistent, Southern Baptists should view both participles (baptizing and teaching) as referring to what should happen after a non-Christian becomes a Christian. The new Christians made a commitment to be obedient at the moment they became Christians. Thus, the phrase “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” must mean more than instructing a person to be obedient to the Lord’s commands—commands which the person may not know yet; rather, it must mean that mature Christians should thoroughly teach new believers the whole counsel of God’s Word.

In Acts 14:21, Luke used two Greek participles; he used “evangelized” (εὐαγγελισάμενοι) alongside the word for “made disciples” (μαθητεύσαντες): “After they had evangelized that town and made many disciples, they returned

¹⁸W. T. Conner, *Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman, 1937), 247.

¹⁹*The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (United Bible Societies, USA, 1983).

²⁰Terry L. Wilder, “A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 5-6.

²¹Article IV in Baptist Faith & Message, 2000.

to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch.” Southern Baptists must understand that in order to make disciples, Christians must evangelize. Stressing the command to teach the whole counsel of God’s Word does not detract from the urgent need for evangelism. Evangelism is the first step in the process of making disciples. Christians are to go, evangelize, baptize, and thoroughly teach new converts.

The *Baptist Faith & Message* (2000) addresses the process of sanctification: “Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.”²² God uses Christians to evangelize, and he also uses them to teach the whole counsel of his Word. Unfortunately, many Southern Baptists have neglected the discipleship process. Southern Baptists have become famous for “dipping them and then dropping them.”

An oft-heard story (origin unknown) illustrates the folly of neglecting spiritual babies. Imagine that your wife just gave birth to a healthy baby boy. The two of you happily drive home with the baby securely fastened in the car. When you enter the house, you immediately take him upstairs and place him in his new baby bed. As you are about to turn and leave the room, you lean over the bed and say, “Little Johnnie, whenever you get hungry, come and join us downstairs at the dinner table. We have a plate for you there with a fork, knife, and spoon.” This story seems ridiculous. Obviously, the baby cannot feed himself; he needs special care until he is mature. Unfortunately, this scenario plays itself out spiritually in many churches and on many mission fields. New believers (baby Christians) need thorough discipleship; they are not yet self-feeders. They need special care. The Great Commission demands this type of discipleship.

What Should Be Taught

How do mature Christians teach new converts “everything” commanded by Jesus? What should they teach first? Which commands should be taught? This task requires mature discernment. Robert Thomas commented on Jesus’ early command to preach only to the Jews:

Quite obviously, the command of Matt 10:5-6 no longer applies because of a change that came in Jesus’ ministry. Therefore, Jesus’ intention was for “all that I commanded you” of Matthew 28:20 to be understood in light of the change that came in His teaching. . . .

The true intention of Jesus must not have been for the disciples to teach the precise words He taught them, but that they should use discernment in interpreting what and how to teach. They needed to recall the historical context and the theological

²²Ibid.

circumstances of His teachings and to make appropriate judgments as to how some of His commandments fit new circumstances such as going to all nations rather than just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.²³

Of course, spiritually mature Southern Baptists should teach the basic doctrines described in the *Baptist Faith & Message* to all new believers. An obvious example of the need for discernment in the selection of what to teach first and how to teach it involves the case of a Muslim man with four wives who becomes a Christian. This situation is rare in some parts of the world, but mature Christians elsewhere must sometimes deal with such situations involving new Christians. The absolute truths taught by Jesus about marriage and divorce must be taught to the new Christians without compromise.

Mature Christians must utilize the entire Bible as they teach new converts: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Craig Blomberg commented on Matthew 28:20a: "If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus' commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part."²⁴ Bible translation work is essential for groups without Bibles; merely giving them some biblical stories is inadequate. Every people group needs the entire Bible translated into its own language. In the case of an oral group, if no written language exists, one must be created, and both literacy work and translation work must be done.

The Need to Rediscover Thorough Discipleship

In the past, many missionaries used a thorough discipleship process. Dub Jackson appreciated both evangelism and discipleship. Jackson is the originator of the concept of partnership missions. During World War II, 1943 -1946, Dub flew bombing missions on a B-24 bomber, and also served as Operations Officer for the 7th Fighter Squadron as a pilot in America's fastest fighter, the Lockheed P-38. After fighting against the Japanese during the war, he served as a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB) missionary to the Japanese. Dub's most amazing and effective partnership campaign was in April 1963 in which 549 Americans went to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Singapore at the nationals' invitation, and they witnessed more than 45,000 people praying to receive the Lord during the six weeks of the campaign. About 25,000 of them were Japanese. Through partnership missions as a FMB missionary and as leader

²³Robert L. Thomas, "The Great Commission: What to Teach," *Master's Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 8.

²⁴Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 433.

of World Evangelism Foundation, Dub led one hundred nationwide campaigns in more than fifty countries with more than 500,000 people praying to receive the Lord. The author made the following comments and asked Dub a question about leadership training:

During the early part of your missionary career in Japan, you taught the Bible to new converts on Saturdays in Asahigawa. You also invited Bob Culpepper, a seminary professor in Fukuoka, to teach the cardinal doctrines of the Baptist faith to new converts in Asahigawa. During the last decade, some IMB leaders have said that new converts can serve as pastors. How do you feel about new converts serving as pastors?²⁵

Dub gave the following answer:

I had a lot of confidence in the salvation of our new converts overseas but would never ask them to lead in areas they were not experienced in. Their testimonies were powerful but their wisdom concerning a Baptist church depended on the leadership of an experienced pastor or missionary.

I have no doubt that the joy and enthusiasm of a new convert would draw many to the Kingdom, but their lack of wisdom would be a barrier to growing a great church. I would not trade their new love and excitement for all the rules and good plans for growing a great church nor would I want to place them where they would soon be in areas unknown to them!²⁶

God is not finished with Southern Baptists. In order to be what God wants them to be, however, Southern Baptists must not only emphasize numbers in terms of attendance, baptisms, and new church starts; they must also emphasize movement from the baby stage of Christianity to maturity. The Bible gives characteristics of these stages in places such as 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, Ephesians 4:14-15, and Hebrews 5:12-14. These spiritual characteristics are recognizable, and thus stages of spiritual growth can be identified. Unfortunately, many Christians have bought into the concept of “microwave Christianity” in America. Even worse, signs of microwave Christianity abound overseas. This mindset must change. Missionaries must not become so enamored with the latest cutting-edge missionary methodology that they lose sight of the biblical command faithfully to make disciples, even though it may be somewhat time-consuming. David Platt, the new president of the International Mission Board, understands that discipleship takes time:

²⁵Mike Morris, e-mail message to W. H. “Dub” Jackson, May 31, 2014.

²⁶W. H. “Dub” Jackson, e-mail message to Mike Morris, June 2, 2014 (used by permission).

Making disciples is not an easy process. It is trying. It is messy. It is slow, tedious, even painful at times. It is all these things because it is relational. Jesus has not given us an effortless step-by-step formula for impacting nations for his glory. . . .

. . . Disciple making involves identifying with a community of believers who show love to one another and share life with one another as we live together for the glory of God. . . .

Going and baptizing are both crucial to disciple making. But they imply the need for something else just as crucial: teaching. . . . In our relationships with one another in the body of Christ, we are to be continually teaching one another the Word of Christ. . . .

Making disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching people the Word of Christ and then enabling them to do the same thing in other people's lives—this is the plan God has for each of us to impact nations for the glory of Christ.

This plan seems so counterintuitive to our way of thinking. In a culture where bigger is always better and flashy is always more effective, Jesus beckons each of us to plainly, humbly, and quietly focus our lives on people. The reality is, you can't share life like this with masses and multitudes. Jesus didn't. He spent three years with twelve guys. If the Son of God thought it necessary to focus his life on a small group of men, we are fooling ourselves to think we can mass-produce disciples today. God's design for taking the gospel to the world is a slow, intentional, simple process that involves every one of his people sacrificing every facet of their lives to multiply the life of Christ in others.²⁷

Let us pray that Platt's understanding of the time required for disciple making spreads widely among all present and future IMB missionaries.

²⁷David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 93-104.