

# THE GREAT COMMISSION VS. THE GREAT SUGGESTION

## Did God say, “Go!” or not?

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
[Matthew 28.19, King James Bible]

So **wherever you go**, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
[Matthew 28.19, God's Word Translation]

**Having gone**, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them -- to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
[Matthew 28.19, Young's Literal Translation]

**Thesis:** The participle **πορευθέντες** (go/going) in Matthew 28.19 should be translated as an imperative (a command: go!) and not as a participle (going, after going, as you go, while going, having gone, etc.).

**Consequences:** To turn **πορευθέντες** into an adverbial participle (“while going,” “after going,” “as you go,” etc.) is, as Daniel Wallace has stated, to turn the Great Commission into the Great Suggestion!

### Introduction:

Is “go” in the Great Commission of Matthew 28.19 a command or not? And, more importantly, so what? So what if it's translated as a command (go!) or a participle (having gone, etc.)? Does it make any difference? Yes, it does! It makes all the difference in the world between just “casual evangelism” and “intentional evangelism.” Therefore, it merits some careful attention and study.

It seems to be very common among preachers to refer to the Greek behind Matthew 28.19-20, to point out that the word usually translated as “go” is a participle (a verbal adjective; in English participles usually end in “-ing”), and to say that it should therefore be translated as “going,” “while going,” “after going,” “as you go,” or “having gone.” In the past several years I have been trying to grow in my understanding of the Mission God has given Christians and in my knowledge about how we are to go about practically fulfilling that Mission. This has led me to read some books and to listen to various sermons and lectures on the subject. This issue of the translation of “go” in Matthew 28.19 seems to come up quite a lot, especially among those who desire to motivate their listeners to evangelize “as they go.”

I have heard an evangelist that I highly esteem say that the participle should be translated “going” or “as you go,” and he did so with the intention of making the point that we all should be evangelizing all day, every day, “as we go” about life. I have heard pastors that I respect and love do the same thing. Also, one of my favorite interlinear Bibles, compiled by a man holding to the preservation of the inspired Scriptures in the Textus Receptus and King James Bible, presents this literal translation of Matthew 28.19: “Having gone, then, disciple all nations...”

It is not my intention to point out any one individual in this article; I am not looking to “name names.” What I would like to do, though, is present a brief study on the issue of the imperatives (commands) and the participles (the “-ing” verbal adjectives) of the Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20 because this issue is central to our lives as Christians. Are we specifically commanded to intentionally go (a command!) and evangelize? Or are we simply to go on about our lives and evangelize “as we are going” (a participle)?

There is a short bibliography at the end of this article and it contains the main works that I leaned on (in addition to the Bible) to complete this study. Most of the material presented is what I was required to read, study, and learn for some of my language work during for my Masters of Divinity degree. For the sake of simplicity, and since there are only a few books in the bibliography, I decided not to use footnotes but rather brief parenthetical references to the author and page number. Here is the outline of the study that follows:

1. What does the Greek behind Matthew 28.19-20 say?
2. What does the Greek behind Matthew 28.19-20 mean?
3. Comparing Scripture with Scripture: An Easier Way to Understand the Great Commission
4. Applying the Knowledge: Why Is All This Important?
5. Conclusion: “Go” Is a Command!

## What does the Greek behind Matthew 28.19-20 say?

Most Greek texts are identical in the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28.19-20. The only difference is the omission of the word “Amen” in the Westcott and Hort Greek Texts and versions based on the same (e.g., NA27, USB4, etc.). For our purposes here, this omission is not relevant, so I will not be mentioning it further. Here is the text in question, from the Trinitarian Bible Society's Greek Text (it matches all the other Greek texts, both Textus Receptus and “critical,” that I checked):

19 Πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτούς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος·

20 διδάσκοντες αὐτούς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ, ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.

Here is a literal rendering based on a word-for-word equivalent translation (or as close as one can get). Bear in mind that this is word-for-word; we are not yet taking into account any specific grammatical constructs. This is simply an effort to see the words which are in question in order to begin to analyze them. I put the participles (the “-ing” verbal adjectives) in blue and the imperative (the command) in red.

19 Πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες  
(after) going therefore teach/make disciples! all the nations, (while) baptizing

αὐτούς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος·  
them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;

20 διδάσκοντες αὐτούς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ, ἐγὼ  
(while) teaching them to keep all (things) whatsoever I commanded you; and behold I

μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.  
with you I am all the days until the completion of the age. Amen.

**Three participles.** There are three participles in this passage and they are all easy to identify by their “participle morpheme” (a combination of letters [ντ] that singles out a word as a participle, something like the “-ing” combination in English that often lets you know you are looking at a participle).

1. **πορευθέντες** - This is the word in question, but let's make some simple observations about the word before working out all the details. The stem of the word is **πορευ** and it means, basically, “to go.” The **θε** that follows the stem is another key letter combination that lets us know the word is an aorist passive (but deponent, so even though it is passive in form it will be active in meaning). All “aorist” means is “undefined,” so the word just conveys the fact that an action occurred without giving much more information about its aspect (if it is a continuous action, for example). The **ες** on the end let's us know that it refers to a masculine plural subject (you, y'all, ye). Dr. Bill Mounce states in his beginning grammar that one may use the word “after” in the translation of an aorist participle if the context so indicates (Mounce, p. 259). This would mean that we could translate **πορευθέντες** (taking nothing else into consideration except the word itself, ignoring context and other grammatical constructions) as “going” or “after going.”
2. **βαπτίζοντες** - The stem of this participle is **βαπτιδ** (baptize) and it is a present active participle that can be translated as “baptizing” or “while baptizing” (for an explanation of the “while,” see Mounce, pp. 251-52).
3. **διδάσκοντες** - The stem of this participle is **διδάσκ** and it is also a present active participle. It means “teaching” or “while teaching.”

**One imperative.** There is only one verb in Matthew 28.19-20 that is conjugated as an imperative (a command): **μαθητεύσατε**. The **σα**, two letters from the end of the word, indicates that the word is an aorist (its aspect is undefined; not necessarily punctiliar nor continuous). Because there is no augment on the front of the word (the augment in Greek is a prefix of **ε̅** indicating past time), we know it cannot be an aorist indicative (past tense). Looking at the **τε** at the end of the word provides the final clue that it is indeed an imperative, second person plural (equivalent to the English “you/y'all/ye”).

**Stopping short.** This is as far as we can go, for the most part, with an analysis of the words only, and if we stopped here (as many do), we would end up with something like this for a translation:

*“After going, make disciples... baptizing them... teaching them...”*

And this, frankly, is the danger that arises with a superficial use of “original language tools” that are easily accessible (even free) today. If one were to only look up the Greek words in order to define them without taking into account other grammatical constructs, the immediate context, and the overall context (i.e., comparing Scripture with Scripture), he could very easily end up twisting the Word of God. Languages are much more complex than simple word forms and dictionary (lexicon) definitions. Biblical Greek is no different except that it can be even more difficult to grasp and understand because it is a dead language; no one speaks Koine (biblical) Greek today.

Here is the question we need to ask: Should that first participle (**πορευθέντες**) be translated as a participle (“going” or “after going”) or as an imperative (a command: “Go!”)? A quick comparison of Bible translations seems to indicate the latter (and the beginning or intermediate student of the Greek New Testament should take into account that the many and learned scholars who worked on these translations chose to translate the participle not as “going” but rather as the command to “Go!”). In the following verses the participle in question, translated as an imperative, is in blue except where it is translated as a participle rather than an imperative (i.e., the exceptions are placed in red).

- **King James Version (KJV):** **Go** ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
- **New International Version (NIV):** Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **New American Standard Bible (NASB):** **Go** therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- **The Message (MSG):** **Go out** and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Amplified Bible (AMP):** **Go** then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **New Living Translation (NLT):** Therefore, **go** and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- **English Standard Version (ESV):** **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.
- **Contemporary English Version (CEV):** **Go** to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- **New King James Version (NKJV):** **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.
- **New Century Version (NCV):** So **go** and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- **God’s Word Translation (GW):** So **wherever you go**, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

- **21st Century King James Version (KJ21):** **Go** ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
- **American Standard Version (ASV):** **Go** ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Young's Literal Translation (YLT):** **Having gone**, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them -- to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Darby Translation (DARBY):** **Go** [therefore] and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB):** **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.
- **New International Reader's Version (NIRV):** So **you must go** and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Wycliffe New Testament (WYC):** Therefore **go** ye, and teach all folks, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
- **Worldwide English (New Testament) (WE):** So **go** and make disciples in all countries. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- **New International Version - UK (NIVUK):** Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Today's New International Version (TNIV):** Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- **Reina-Valera 1960 (RVR1960):** Por tanto, **id**, y haced discípulos a todas las naciones, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo.
- **Nueva Versión Internacional (NVI):** Por tanto, **vayan** y hagan discípulos de todas las \*naciones, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.
- **Reina-Valera 1995 (RVR1995):** Por tanto, **id** y haced discípulos a todas las naciones, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.
- **Castilian (CST):** Por tanto, **id** y haced discípulos entre todas las naciones, bautizadlos en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.
- **Reina-Valera Antigua (RVA):** Por tanto, **id**, y doctrinad á todos los Gentiles, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo.
- **Biblia en Lenguaje Sencillo (BLS):** Ustedes **vayan** y hagan más discípulos míos en todos los países de la tierra. Bautícenlos en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.
- **La Biblia de las Américas (LBLA):** **Id**, pues, y haced discípulos de todas las naciones, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.

Which should it be, a participle (going, after going, wherever you go, having gone) or an imperative (go!), and why? The discussion that follows presents the reasoning behind why this first participle (**πορευθέντες**) in the Great Commission of Matthew 28.19 should be translated as an imperative, a command, exactly as the verb which follows (teach! make disciples!). Why is that? Because the grammatical construction of the phrase requires it and the context (grammatical, biblical, and historical) demands it.

### What does the Greek behind Matthew 28.19-20 mean?

Daniel Wallace (Greek scholar and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary) is emphatic in stating that the first participle (**πορευθέντες**) in the Great Commission of Matthew 29.19 must be translated as an imperative because it is an *attendant circumstance participle* (Wallace, p. 640). He says, “To turn **πορευθέντες** into an adverbial participle [“while going,” “after going,” “as you go,” etc.] is to turn the Great Commission into the Great

Suggestion!” (Wallace, p. 645). His explanation, though a bit technical, is extremely thorough and should be understood by all who would desire to understand the Great Commission in the Greek texts.

**What is an “attendant circumstance participle”?** An attendant circumstance participle (ACP) is a participle that in some way “piggy-backs” on the mood (indicative, subjunctive, imperative, etc.) of the main verb in a sentence (in our passage the main verb is **μαθητεύσατε** which is in the imperative mood, meaning “teach!” or “make disciples!”). Wallace indicates that the ACP, since it takes on the mood of the main verb, should be translated as if it were a verb itself, and not a participle. Because of its close grammatical relationship with the main verb (they are “tightly tied together,” so much so that the participle takes on characteristics of the verb), the ACP cannot exist without the main verb and should be translated as a finite (“normal”) verb that is connected with the main finite verb by the use of the word *and* (Wallace, p. 640).

In short, the ACP *never* stands alone and will *always* be related to a finite verb in the sentence. The ACP, as well as the main verb, should be translated as a finite verb and it should derive its mood from the mood of the main verb. If the main verb, therefore, is an imperative (teach! make disciples!) then the ACP must also be translated as such (go!).

Wallace gives five features of an ACP that must (generally speaking, because there are always exceptions to rules in languages) all be present in order for a participle to be considered attendant circumstance (Wallace, p. 642). A quick comparison of his list with the first participle (**πορευθέντες**) in the Great Commission of Matthew 28.19 shows clearly that **πορευθέντες** is indeed and without question an ACP; it meets all the criteria.

1. The tense of the participle is usually *aorist*. **πορευθέντες** (“going” or “go”) in Matthew 28.19 is an aorist passive-deponent participle.
2. The tense of the main verb is usually *aorist*. **μαθητεύσατε** (“teach!” or “make disciples!”) in Matthew 28.19 is an aorist active imperative.
3. The mood of the main verb is usually *imperative* or *indicative*. **μαθητεύσατε** in Matthew 28.19 is imperative (a command).
4. The participle will precede *the main verb*—both in word order and time of event (though usually there is a very close proximity). This is especially true in the case of Matthew 28.19. The participle (**πορευθέντες**) immediately precedes the main verb (the imperative: **μαθητεύσατε**) in both word order (they are separated by only one word: **οὖν** [“therefore”]) and time of event (one must go in order to teach; he goes to teach—he goes to make disciples).
5. Attendant circumstance participles occur frequently in narrative literature, infrequently elsewhere. Matthew 28.19 occurs in the Gospel According to Matthew, narrative literature about the life and ministry of Jesus. The immediate context is also narrative in that Jesus is speaking.
  - Wallace makes some very helpful observations with regard to this fifth and final point. He says, “In narrative literature, in almost all of the aorist participle + aorist *imperative* constructions, the participle is attendant circumstance...” (Wallace, p. 642, footnote 71).
  - He explains further by saying that “since virtually all the aorist participle + aorist *imperative* constructions involve attendant circumstance participles, this casts the most serious doubt on translations of **πορευθέντες** in Mat 28:19 as 'having gone,' or worse, 'as you are going'” (Wallace, p. 642, footnote 71).

Two more observations about the ACP are important for a sound understanding of the Great Commission in Greek. First, this type of participle is often used to introduce a new action (or something of a shift in the narrative, a new direction). Where before the disciples were instructed to only evangelize the house of Israel (Mat 10.5-7), now there is a new shift in direction and action. At the end of the narrative, they are to evangelize all nations (Mat 28.19-20). Therefore, once again we can clearly see that **πορευθέντες** (going, go) is an ACP and will “piggy-back” off the mood of the main verb **μαθητεύσατε** (imperative/command: teach! make disciples!).

Secondly, it should be noted that the action of the ACP is secondary to that of the main verb—the main verb carries most of the grammatical weight in the sentence. However, the ACP will in some way be prerequisite to the action of the main verb. This is, again, exactly what we see in the Great Commission of Matthew 28.19-20. The main verb is the main action of the Commission: Christ commands His disciples to make more disciples (**μαθητεύσατε**: teach! make disciples!). They are, however, to make those disciples of all nations and not just of the Jews in Judea, therefore they *must* go (**πορευθέντες**: go!) in order to fulfill the Great Commission. The two verbs form a whole with the participle “piggy-backing” on the main verb. One could say that there are not two commands in the Great Commission (i.e. “go!” and “teach/make disciples!”) but rather one command (i.e., “go and teach/make disciples!”). The latter (make disciples of all nations) cannot be accomplished without the former (go). The point being here, though, is that the participle **πορευθέντες** (going, go) should most certainly be translated as an imperative because it is an ACP which is “piggy-backing” off the mood (imperative, command) of the main verb, **μαθητεύσατε** (teach, make disciples!).

**Further support for “Go!”** Further support for the imperative translation of **πορευθέντες** is found in similar grammatical constructions throughout the Gospel According to Matthew. Cleon Rogers, the German director for Greater Europe Mission and the President of the German Bible Institute, provides more insight into this issue in an article he wrote for *Bibliotheca Sacra* (a theological journal published by Dallas Theological Seminary). Most helpful are the examples he provides of this very same grammatical construction elsewhere in the Gospel According to Matthew (it seems to have been a fairly common construct in Matthew's literary style).

Rogers' thesis is that the grammar of Matthew 28.19-20 shows that the imperative idea (go and teach/make disciples!) is to be preferred to the English participle (going teach/make disciples). He says that the imperative character of the grammatical construction “can be readily seen by examining similar constructions where a verb in the imperative is preceded by a participle” (Rogers, p. 260).

1. **Matthew 2.8:** **πορευθέντες ... ἐξετάσετε** (the participle “go/going” is followed by the imperative “search!”).
  - KJV: “...Go and search...”
  - RV60: “...Id allá y averigüad...”
  - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...having gone ... inquire...”
  - Rogers' comments: It could possibly be translated “when you go search out,” but the urgency of Herod certainly demands an imperative “go and search out.”
2. **Matthew 2.13:** **ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον** (the participle “rising up” is followed by the imperative “take with!” and then the noun “the child”).
  - KJV: “...Arise, and take the young child...”
  - RV60: “...Levántate y toma al niño...”
  - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...Rise up; take with (you) the child...”
  - Rogers' comments: The command of the angel is also a specific command of urgency “arise and take the child...” (The command to return from Egypt is presented in the same construction with the same words; Mat 2.20.)
3. **Matthew 5.24:** **ἔλθὼν πρόσφερε** (the participle “coming” is followed by the imperative “offer!”).
  - KJV: “...come and offer...”
  - RV60: “...ven y presenta...”
  - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...coming offer...”
  - Rogers' comments: The aorist participle (**ἔλθων**, coming/come) refers to a specific act and therefore must be translated as an imperative.
4. **Matthew 11.4:** **πορευθέντες ἀπαγγείλατε** (the participle “going/go” is followed by the imperative “announce!”)
  - KJV: “...Go and shew...”
  - RV60: “...Id y haced saber...”

- Green, Interlinear and literal: “...Going relate...”
  - Rogers' comments: The construction is without question in an imperative sense (cf. Luke 7.22). The two aorists [the aorist participle **πορευθέντες** which “piggy-backs” on the aorist imperative **ἀπαγγείλατε**] point to a definite action which Jesus commands. The participle (“going”) should be translated according to the mood of the main verb: imperative (“go!”).
5. **Matthew 21.2:** **λύσαντες ἀγάγετέ** (the participle “loosing” is followed by the imperative “bring!”)
    - KJV: “...loose *them* and bring *them*...”
    - RV60: “...desatadla, y traédmelos...”
    - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...Loosen (and) lead...”
    - Rogers' comments: This is the same construction of the participle followed by the imperative indicating one command consisting of two actions (“go and bring!”). The participle is obviously to be translated as an imperative.
  6. **Matthew 17.27:** **πορευθείς εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν βάλε** (the participle is the first word and the imperative the last; it reads literally thus: “going to the sea cast”)
    - KJV: “...go thou to the sea, and cast...”
    - RV60: “...ve al mar, y echa...”
    - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...having gone to the sea, throw...”
    - Rogers' comments: Jesus gives Peter a very specific task to carry out—“go to the sea and cast.” In order to cast the hook in the sea, he must first go. It is not a continual “going” but rather a single command with two parts: “go and cast!”
  7. **Matthew 28.7:** **πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε** (the participle “going” is followed by the verb “tell!”)
    - KJV: “...go quickly, and tell...”
    - RV60: “...id pronto y decid...”
    - Green, Interlinear and literal: “...going tell...”
    - Rogers' comments: This is not a matter of “when you go” or “as you go” or “having gone” but “go and report!” It is one clear command with two parts, the main part (tell!) depending on obedience to the first (go!).

In summarizing his observations of these examples, Rogers concludes that “the participle is vitally related to the command contained in the imperative. Without the action of the participle having taken place it would not be possible to carry out the command. The participle proposes the way for the fulfilling of the main verb and in this way also has the form of an imperative” (Rogers, p. 261).

When one applies these principles to the grammatical construction of the Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20, it is clearly seen that there is most definitely a *command* to go (!). To quote Rogers: “Without the going, the making disciples is not possible, especially when 'all nations' is the object. The participle is not to be weakened to a secondary option which is not as important. The aorist aspect makes the command definite and urgent” (Rogers, p. 262).

The aorist participle followed by the aorist imperative indicates one single command that has two parts: “Go and make disciples!” To weaken the participle to “going,” “as you go,” “having gone,” etc. is to completely change the sense of the command in its grammatical construction and historical context.

**Implications.** Daniel Wallace has some very keen insights into the implications of a proper exegesis of Matthew 28.19-20 based on the grammar and context of the passage (Wallace, p. 645; bold emphasis is mine, not Wallace's).

Several observations are in order. First, notice that the first participle, **πορευθέντες**, fits the structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle: aorist participle preceding an aorist main verb (in this case, imperative).

Second, there is no good grammatical ground for giving the participle a mere temporal idea. To turn **πορευθέντες** into an adverbial participle is to **turn the Great Commission into the Great Suggestion!** Virtually all instances in narrative literature of aorist participle + aorist *imperative* involve an attendant circumstance participle. In Matthew, in particular, every other instance of the aorist participle of **πορεύομαι** followed by an aorist main verb (either indicative or imperative) is clearly attendant circumstance.

Third, we must first read this commission in its **historical context**, not from the perspective of a late twentieth-century reader. These apostles of the soon-to-be inaugurated church did not move from Jerusalem until after the martyrdom of Stephen. The reason for this reticence was due, in part at least, to their Jewish background. As Jews, they were ethnocentric in their evangelism (bringing prospective proselytes to Jerusalem); now as Christians, they were to be *ektocentric*, bringing the gospel to those who were non-Jews. In many ways, the book of Acts is a detailed account of how these apostles accomplished the command of Matt 28.19-20.

**Two more participles: Baptizing & Teaching.** The other two participles (**βαπτίζοντες**: baptizing; and **διδάσκοντες**: teaching) present far fewer grammatical challenges since their construction and context are not problematic at all. They simply indicate the means by which the disciple making is to take place. Since they are built on the present tense stems of their respective verbs, they refer to continual actions. Wallace states (Wallace, p. 645):

Finally, the other two participles (**βαπτίζοντες**, **διδάσκοντες**) should not be taken as attendant circumstance. First, they do not fit the normal pattern for attendant circumstance participles (they are present tense and follow the main verb). And second, they obviously make good sense as participles of *means*; i.e., the means by which the disciples were to make disciples was to baptize and then to teach.

Rogers concurs with Wallace:

The present of **βαπτίζοντες** would be iterative, that is, every time a convert is made he is to be baptized. The **διδάσκοντες** would be the continual process of teaching. The object of the teaching is found in the present infinitive **τηρεῖν**, “to continually keep.” What is to be kept or observed is “all things which I have commanded you.”

**A concluding thought.** At this point in our study there is a glaring observation that we can make without reservation: all of that was very complicated and technical! Is this how God expects all of us to understand Scripture, by digging around in Greek lexicons, inflections, syntax, and grammatical constructs? I don't believe so. I think there is a much easier way to come to the same conclusion that the participle “going” in Matthew 28.19 is to be understood as the command, “Go!” The Great Commission is one command in two parts (we should understand it as two imperatives: “go and teach!” or “go and make disciples!”). How do we easily arrive at this conclusion? All we have to do is compare Scripture with Scripture and let the Bible in our own language interpret itself.

### **Comparing Scripture with Scripture: An Easier Way to Understand the Great Commission**

Even the most casual reader of the New Testament knows that Matthew 28.19-20 is not the only passage containing what we commonly refer to as the Great Commission. What do the other passages say? Is the command to go (!) in them or is it merely a weak “as you go” participial phrase which some like to use to translate **πορευθέντες** in Matthew 28.19?

#### **Mark 16.15**

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.  
[Mark 16.15, KJV]

Y les dijo: Id por todo el mundo y predicad el evangelio a toda criatura. [Mark 16.15, RV60]

In the modern language translations the imperative is easy to see (go and preach! is a clear and direct command—one command, two parts: two imperatives). In the Greek texts, however, Mark 16.15 contains the same participle + imperative construction is seen: **πορευθέντες ... κηρύξατε** (go/going... preach!).

### **Luke 24.46-47**

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [Luke 24.46-47, KJV]

Y les dijo: Así está escrito, y así fue necesario que el Cristo padeciese, y resucitase de los muertos al tercer día; y que se predicase en su nombre el arrepentimiento y el perdón de pecados en todas las naciones, comenzando desde Jerusalén. [Lucas 24.46-47, RV60]

Rather than using direct commands, the Great Commission in Luke's Gospel expresses the Lord's desire for His disciples during the post-resurrection age. What is that desire? He wants His disciples to systematically work outward from Jerusalem and then into all nations. They *must* go and they *must* preach; there is one command with two parts (go and preach!), exactly as in Matthew 28.19-20.

### **John 20.21**

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. [John 20.21, KJV]

Entonces Jesús les dijo otra vez: Paz a vosotros. Como me envió el Padre, así también yo os envío. [Juan 20.21, RV60]

John, too, states the Great Commission without the use of imperatives, stating rather the will of the Lord for His disciples. As Jesus was sent by the Father, so the disciples are sent by Jesus. He came to seek and to save the lost, and that is the gist of the Commission to preach the Gospel to all peoples and nations (Luke 19.10; 1Tim 1.15).

However, for our purposes here it is important to observe that the Father “sent” the Son. Jesus was sent from His heavenly abode to this world where lost sinners live. The implication is clear: the Father commissioned the Son to “go!” And just as Jesus was sent (go!), so are His disciples (go!). The Great Commission is first a command to go to where lost sinners live in order to save them through the preaching of the Gospel (1Cor 1.18, 21). We must go! It is a command!

### **Acts 1.8**

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. [Acts 1.8, KJV]

Pero recibiréis poder, cuando haya venido sobre vosotros el Espíritu Santo, y me seréis testigos en Jerusalén, en toda Judea, en Samaria, y hasta lo último de la tierra. [Hechos 1.8, RV60]

This another passage in which the Lord clearly expresses His will with regard to the Great Commission. His desire is that His disciples go to the uttermost part of the earth, systematically working outward from their city of origin, witnessing to the lost (i.e., preaching and teaching the Gospel to them). The implication is again clear: God has commanded us to go and evangelize! It is one command with two imperatives (go and make disciples!). We cannot weaken the first imperative to go (!) if we hope to fulfill the Commission given to us.

### **Romans 10.13-17**

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all

obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. [Romans 10.13-17, KJV]

Porque todo aquel que invocare el nombre del Señor, será salvo. ¿Cómo, pues, invocarán a aquel en el cual no han creído? ¿Y cómo creerán en aquel de quien no han oído? ¿Y cómo oirán sin haber quien les predique? ¿Y cómo predicarán si no fueren enviados? Como está escrito: ¡Cuán hermosos son los pies de los que anuncian la paz, de los que anuncian buenas nuevas! Mas no todos obedecieron al evangelio; pues Isaías dice: Señor, ¿quién ha creído a nuestro anuncio? Así que la fe es por el oír, y el oír, por la palabra de Dios. [Romanos 10.13-17, RV60]

God's general method for the salvation of lost sinners during the Church Ages is clearly declared in this passage. Sinners must believe in order to call on the Lord and be saved. In order to believe, they must hear the Gospel. For them to hear the Gospel, someone must be there with them to teach or preach it to them. And in order for the preacher to give them the Gospel, he must be sent. He must go! “Go!” is an implicit command in our life's Mission to evangelize the lost.

Paul clearly understood the command in the Commission to go (!) and evangelize (!) the lost; his life is exemplary of an unwavering obedience to the command to go (!) to where they lost sinners are and speak to them about the salvation that is found only in Jesus Christ. Romans 15.20-21 provides of a good example of his Great Commission lifestyle.

### **Romans 15.20-21**

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand. [Romans 15.20-21, KJV]

Y de esta manera me esforcé a predicar el evangelio, no donde Cristo ya hubiese sido nombrado, para no edificar sobre fundamento ajeno, sino, como está escrito: Aquellos a quienes nunca les fue anunciado acerca de él, verán; Y los que nunca han oído de él, entenderán. [Romanos 15.20-21, RV60]

Notice the words “strive” (to preach the Gospel) and “where” (indicating geographic location). Both imperatives (commands) of the Great Commission are clearly exhibited in Paul's summary statement of his heart for the Lord and for the Lord's work. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples preaching the Gospel to every creature in all nations!” And Paul strove with concerted and strategic effort to physically and intentionally go to places where there were lost sinners who needed to hear the Gospel. Once there, he testified of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20.20-21).

Paul, therefore, provides us a good example and model to follow in order to fulfill the Great Commission ourselves. Just as Paul intentionally went (go!) to where the lost sinners were and then preached the Gospel to them (make disciples!), so we are commissioned to do the same. We are commanded to follow Paul and his example:

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. [1Corinthians 11.1]

Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. [1Corinthians 4.16]

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. [Philippians 3.17]

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. [Philippians 4.9]

The Thessalonians understood the command to go (!) and evangelize (!). They became followers of Paul and thereby became themselves good examples to follow.

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. [1Thessalonians 1.6-8]

## Applying the Knowledge: Why Is All This Important?

Obviously, this is important because it deals with the heart of our life's Mission, the Great Commission that the Lord has entrusted to us and for which we will all be held accountable on the day of our judgment (2Cor 5.10-11). But, I think there is also another very important issue addressed here that has a very personal and individual application for all of us.

**Intentional evangelism.** The command to go(!) implies intentional evangelism. If we reduce the imperative to a simple participle (“going,” “as you go,” “have gone,” etc.), not only do we do violence to Scripture in both modern languages and biblical Greek, but we also remove the command and the commission to intentionally evangelize, reducing the Great Commission to something we do “as we go.”

Returning to Rogers' article, we can see that he understands the implications of a proper grasp of the imperatives in the Great Commission (Rogers, p. 262).

It is not “if you happen to be going” or “wherever you might be” but rather “go and perform an act.” This must not be taken exclusively in the sense of going to a foreign country. The emphasis is on the universal nature of the task—a worldwide undertaking which involves the home country as well as the foreign countries.

He concludes his article saying (Rogers, p. 266):

In examining the structure of the Great Commission it was seen that the main verb is to make disciples. This, however, does not reduce the participle **πορευθέντες** to a mere non-imperative sense, rather the construction indicates that “going” is an integral part of making disciples and is to be translated as an imperative.

## **Conclusion: “Go” Is a Command!**

Each and every one of us that claims to be a Christian has received this same Commission. We will never finish the work God gave us to do if we do not intentionally go (physically) to where there are lost people (geographically) and speak to them about the Gospel. Evangelism cannot be relegated to the casual “as you go” concepts of modern “relationship/friendship evangelism.” We must obey the command to go! We must intentionally seek out the lost where they are and go to them with the Gospel message! If we do not, then we will not finish the work God has given us to do (Mat 28.19-20) and we will fail in our life's purpose of glorifying God on this earth (John 17.4).

Remember what Daniel Wallace said:

***It is the Great Commission not the Great Suggestion!***

God said:

***Go and make disciples preaching the gospel to every creature!***

It is one command (evangelize the world) with two imperatives:

***Go and make disciples!***

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